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[**Opinion**](#)[**Marine Le Pen**](#)

The Observer view on the French presidential election

[Observer editorial](#)

A Marine Le Pen victory would be disastrous for France and the whole of Europe



‘Candidate of chaos’: Marine Le Pen delivers a speech on a campaign visit to Avignon. Photograph: Christophe Simon/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 17 Apr 2022 01.30 EDT

For undecided French voters tempted to back the far-right populist [Marine Le Pen](#) in next Sunday’s presidential election, the situation resembles a midlife crisis. They’re fed up with the same old, same old – the boss is a pain and the bills keep on rising. How great it would be to throw it all up, escape the system, buy a smallholding somewhere and grow veg.

In the end, most people decide against so drastic a break with all that is familiar and secure, however unsatisfactory their present circumstances.

That's what France's friends and neighbours must hope will happen when Le Pen faces the centrist incumbent, Emmanuel Macron, in the [second round run-off](#). Macron, though unpopular, represents continuity. Le Pen is the candidate of chaos.

Just how truly anarchic a Le Pen presidency could be was laid bare last week when the candidate for the National Rally (formerly the National Front) outlined her "vision" of France's place in the world. Like Donald Trump in 2016, Le Pen's stress is on tearing down, not building up. She knows what she doesn't like. But she's recklessly vague about what replaces that she would destroy.

The EU is a particular target. Contradicting past positions, Le Pen no longer wants to leave the EU or the eurozone. But her proposed referendum on a new "France-first" law giving French citizens priority in employment, welfare benefits and public housing, and asserting the primacy of national over European law, [amounts to "Frexit"](#) by any other name.

Franco-German cooperation, the fabled 'motor' that keeps Europe running, would splutter to a halt if Le Pen has her way

Le Pen's plans to curb immigration by re-establishing national border controls, unilaterally cut EU budget contributions and slash taxes on essential goods and fuel also breach France's legal obligations. Such policies risk a deeply existential crisis within the EU, of which France, along with Germany, is a founding member.

Franco-German cooperation, the fabled "motor" that keeps Europe running, would splutter to a halt if [Le Pen has her way](#). Pointing to "irreconcilable strategic differences", she rejected the "discreet and clever hegemony" pursued by Angela Merkel. Germany's former chancellor, she claimed, had tried to subvert French sovereignty, weaken its identity and undercut its defence and nuclear industries.

Attempting a grotesque balancing act, Le Pen said she would seek "[strategic rapprochement](#)" with Russia, her party's former backer, once the Ukraine

war was over and distance France from the US by withdrawing from Nato's military command. At the same time, she scorned Macron's ideas about European defence autonomy. A "non-aligned" France, she said, would go its own way, pursuing the global "grandeur" that was its historical mission.

Were she to gain power, Le Pen's geopolitical wrecking ball would be disastrous for Britain and the west. The democratic majority among UN security council permanent members would be in doubt. With France on board, rightwing nationalist-populists in Italy, Poland, Hungary and elsewhere would be encouraged to press their divisive, xenophobic, pan-European agendas.

The struggle for western values in the teeth of Russian and Chinese authoritarianism, and for the international rules-based order, could be forfeited. Cooperative efforts to combat the climate crisis might founder. At home, intolerance, racism and institutionalised Islamophobia would reign... the nightmare possibilities are endless. Yet now, as Sunday's sudden death showdown looms, they are coming into much-needed, sharper focus.

It is no longer possible to ignore or minimise the truly destructive horror of Le Pen's twisted idea of France. Surely this will concentrate wavering and disaffected voters' minds – and arouse them at last from iconoclastic daydreams. Polls [suggest Macron](#) is eight points ahead. But it's tense. As Wellington said after Waterloo, it could yet be "the nearest-run thing you ever saw".

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

The Observer view on Boris Johnson's untenable leadership

[Observer editorial](#)

Tory MPs must use their power to sack the prime minister for flouting Covid laws



Boris Johnson has made a mockery of the public's sacrifices. Photograph:
Matt Dunham/PA

Sun 17 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 17 Apr 2022 03.14 EDT

Last week brought confirmation that [**Boris Johnson**](#) broke laws intended to protect the public during a national emergency. The prime minister and the chancellor are among the group of people who have been fined by the Metropolitan police for attending illegal gatherings in Downing Street, on this occasion to celebrate his birthday. Johnson is expected to receive more fines in the coming weeks.

It should be untenable for him to remain in office. First, there is the substance of his misdemeanours. Members of the public made huge sacrifices in order to comply with Covid restrictions during the national lockdowns. People were not able to see their sick relatives, to say goodbye in person one last time or to hold normal-size funerals. Yet the prime minister and his colleagues thought it acceptable to attend numerous parties on the government estate. It makes a mockery of those sacrifices, leaving people feeling not just angry but guilty that they, too, did not break the law in order to be with the dying rather than to attend a birthday party.

Then there is the way that the prime minister has handled these revelations in recent months. On numerous occasions, he assured parliament no rules or laws had been broken. The only person to resign in this scandal was his former spokesperson after a video of her [joking about a party](#) was leaked; it is not even clear whether she attended any herself. Meanwhile, Johnson has simply brushed off his wrongdoing, with Downing Street sources insulting the intelligence of the public by comparing the fixed-penalty notice to [speeding fines](#).

It is unprecedented for a prime minister to be fined by the police for such serious breaches of the law. Every week he remains in office is another week that undermines the public's trust not just in the government, but in the whole political class. In our parliamentary democracy, Johnson's immediate fate lies in the hands of MPs in the Conservative party, not in the hands of voters. Only these politicians have the power to eject him from Downing Street through a vote of no confidence, yet it looks highly unlikely they will act.

And so Johnson is left free to undermine the office of prime minister long after he should have resigned and to introduce policies designed to dominate newspaper headlines regardless of their consequences. The latest is the memorandum of understanding with Rwanda. This will pave the way for the government to forcibly deport to Rwanda people fleeing conflict and torture who seek refuge in the UK, in exchange for a significant financial contribution to the Rwandan government.

The archbishop of Canterbury is right to condemn this in the strongest of terms. One of the richest countries in the world is bribing one of the poorest countries in the world – with its own poor track record of human rights abuses – to outsource our ethical and legal [obligations to refugees](#). Britain gets many fewer applications for asylum than France and Germany, and last year granted protection to 13,000 refugees, the equivalent of just 20 per parliamentary constituency. As a country, we should be doing more, not less, to provide a safe sanctuary to people who have experienced dreadful conflict and human rights abuses in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine.

But under the [government's plans](#), it would aim to deport at great expense to those who arrive in the UK via irregular routes – like many asylum seekers do – to Rwanda, where they would be obliged to apply for asylum. The government argues this would minimise loss of life in the Channel by discouraging people from making the crossing to the UK. Yet the Australian policy of processing asylum seekers offshore on the Pacific island of Nauru did not reduce levels of people smuggling. In fact, when [Israel struck a deal](#) to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda between 2014 and 2017, many left Rwanda almost immediately and turned to people smugglers to try and get back to Europe.

The lack of any evidence to support the government's contention this will reduce Channel crossings has resulted in the civil service refusing to sign the policy off on value for money grounds. This has meant that the home secretary, Priti Patel, had to issue [a ministerial direction](#) in order to override them, only the second used by a home secretary in 30 years. It also remains to be seen whether this is a policy that would survive challenge in the courts under international law.

Either way, this forced deportation scheme marks a new low for British refugee policy, already marred by the inhumane policies in the nationality and borders bill, the government's failure to offer refuge to all Afghans who worked with British forces before their withdrawal, and the hopeless delays in processing visas for [Ukrainian refugees](#). It would establish a principle that wealthy countries can shrug off obligations to refugees, undermining the very basis of international law and the 1951 Refugee convention.

Unless Conservative MPs use their power to sack Johnson, this is what the country is consigned to until the next general election: a prime minister who has flouted the law and misled parliament trying to distract from his own lack of probity by pushing out ever-worse policies that will temporarily grab headlines, regardless of the human cost. They should ask themselves whether they are prepared to be complicit in the long-term damage Johnson is wreaking to their party, to the political system and to the country.

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NotebookUkraine

Stirring tale from one for whom coffee is so much more than a bit of froth

Alex Clark

A latte is a powerful symbol of normality for a friend working to help Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland



Women and children pass through Przemyśl train station in Poland after fleeing from Ukraine. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Sat 16 Apr 2022 10.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 23.25 EDT

I pick up the phone to an old friend who, until a few weeks ago, had a working life a bit like mine; one might grandly call it a portfolio career, but in truth it's a matter of turning your hand to all sorts of things to make a buck. In his case, a Starbuck; he's a coffee devotee and, as we chatted, a sad story came to light, which saw him being relieved of his takeaway latte by an officious concierge as he arrived at a swanky office building for a meeting. Honestly, he said, I could have cried, to which you might retort, well, go ahead and cry me a river.

Except that the latte was a little manifestation of creature comfort and normality, a treat to power him through a whistlestop trip to London, where he normally lives, but from which he has been largely absent recently. Nowadays, you can most often find him in Jaroslaw in [Poland](#), where he has gone to volunteer for a newly founded charity called Poland Welcomes, its mission to provide shelter and amenities to Ukrainian women and children who have been forced to leave their homes. At the last count, they had 500 guests across a series of hastily adapted sites; they're trying to scale up to 2,000.

For a while, he seemed to be head of laundry – as he points out, you need a lot of washers and dryers when people arrive with only the clothes on their back – and now he's added banging on the doors of organisations for funds.

Every time he calls, I am newly in awe. He is my ordinary pal, who does ordinary things (plus ice-skating, which is not ordinary but at which he is irritatingly good). I never know quite what to ask him beyond how it's going and what I can send. So I ask about the coffee. He sends a picture of a collapsible, portable filter that accompanies him everywhere but adds rather dolefully that he can't fit a frother in his luggage.

Census consensus



No time to stand and stare at cows when there is the census to collect.
Photograph: Fabiano Strappazzon/Getty Images/EyeEm

I send him a pic of my new blanket in a clumsy attempt at solidarity. It is all beautiful blue-and-yellow stripes and comes from a woollen mill here in Kilkenny. This latest production is the result of a collaboration with a young artist called Ellie Dunne, with all proceeds going to the Irish Red Cross. When I dropped into the mill to pick it up, they told me it had been all hands on deck to get the blankets woven in double-quick time, but that they didn't hesitate for a second.

It's a little detail I might have added to the "time capsule" part of the Irish national census, which we've all just completed. Distribution and collection of the forms is done by hand and we had a jolly chat with the woman who came to get ours, ranging from ethnomusicology to the wisdom of Desiderata. It was sunny, and we were on the doorstep, looking at the cows. Eventually, my husband remarked that at this rate, and in an area so sparsely populated, she'd only manage to get about three forms safely gathered in during the course of a day, so off she went.

Noble by name...



Sam Waley-Cohen rides Noble Yeats on his way to winning the 2022 Randox Grand National Festival at Aintree. Photograph: Peter Powell/EPA

In other local news, the Lord Bagenal Inn in the small town of Leighlinbridge is where my mother-in-law might go for a posh lunch with chums. Last week, though, she might also have seen Noble Yeats, the [Grand National](#) winner who'd done Sam Waley-Cohen so proud on his final ride before retiring; the horse had been brought home to do a lap of honour.

Had I been there, I'd have given him only the finest carrots: piqued by his literary name and his provenance, I backed him at 66-1, the first and almost undoubtedly the last time I've ever been right at Aintree.

Alex Clark is an Observer columnist

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

[Boris Johnson](#)

The Tory party flounders as it rots from both ends – cartoon

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Opinion**Childbirth**

Relentlessly pushing the idea of 'natural' childbirth is an affront to pregnant women

[Catherine Bennett](#)



The Ockenden report revealed fatal myths in maternity care. But their potent allure remains



‘There’s not much you can teach or sell a person who’d prefer to give birth in a nicely lit operating theatre.’ Photograph: JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

Sat 16 Apr 2022 14.00 EDT

For Grantly Dick-Read, the Victorian originator of the UK’s natural childbirth movement, birthing women in Britain should emulate those, as he phrased it, “of more primitive types”. In *Natural Childbirth*, 1933, he pictured one of these individuals disappearing into a “thicket” – it sounded plausible enough from Woking – to await her pain-free labour.

“Natural birth is all that she looks for; there are no fears in her mind; no midwives spoiling the natural process; she has no knowledge of the tragedies of sepsis, infection and haemorrhage.”

The “modern cultured girl” had, he theorised, lost the knack of childbirth. But she might regain it if she delivered according to his own system, excluding “meddlesome” medical intervention.

Even as Dick-Read, an adroit self-publicist, managed to promulgate his fantasy, there were contemporaries who disputed all of it, noting his lack of

evidence. “Meddling”, it was pointed out, had saved countless lives, maternal and infant. Another doctor asked, in 1955: “Does childbearing require special training to be natural?” As for women, the unenlightened were still clamouring for pain relief, like the Queen got for Prince Charles.

There's not much you can teach or sell a person who'd prefer to give birth in a nicely lit operating theatre

But Read's thicket could still sound, as it has continued so advantageously to do, a lot nicer than submission in a scary or unkind hospital. In 1956, it inspired Prunella Briance, a survivor of traumatic deliveries, to create the Natural [Childbirth](#) Association, teaching Dick-Reid methods. Renamed the National Childbirth Trust, or NCT, this organisation remained true to its creators' vision to a point that has inevitably, given the frequent refusal of female biology to comply with thicket-worthy deliveries, attracted attention.

It [has been reported](#), for instance, that days before Donna Ockenden's [final report](#) about avoidable deaths at Shrewsbury and Telford NHS trust detailed its sometimes lethal unwillingness to perform caesareans, the NCT website still featured material telling mothers that “natural” labour would leave them more “satisfied”. In fact, Ockenden had deplored the NHS trust's culture of “normal birth at almost any cost” in 2020, in her interim findings. Hundreds of women had told her they “felt pressure to have a natural birth”.

Responding to Ockenden's final review, the NCT said it had changed since 1956: “We are not here to promote one way over another.” However, recent alumni report continued exaltation of “natural” birth by some instructors and a parallel aversion to the “cascade of interventions” said to await the unwary. Some have been advised to memorise the acronym Brain, to avoid being diverted from planned transcendence by the descendants of Dick-Read's “meddlers”. As in: B. What are the Benefits of this course of action? R. What are the Risks? A. What are the Alternatives? I. (disputed) Intuition/What are the Implications? N. What if we do Nothing? Some people add an S, though not apparently for “What about Shrewsbury and Telford?”.

But it would be unfair, given the scale of the childbirth training industry, the variety of campaigning groups and professional doulas, to single out the NCT for encouraging women to fetishise choices and births that will not, for many, be achievable. With “normal” increasingly redefined, thanks to Ockenden, as a potentially dangerous goal, and the catchy but fatuous “natural” finally recognised – though by no means everywhere – as insensitive to women compelled by nature to accept technological assistance, a range of replacement synonyms testifies to the continued market for minimal intervention. Either that or to continued suspicions about [NHS](#) provision.

If there are any anti-pain or pro-science groups out there for the many women who think nature totally fucked up childbirth, they have yet to compete with programmes described as positive, relaxed, physiology-informed, active, sacred – and still, [pace Ockenden](#), “natural”. There’s not much you can teach or sell a person who’d prefer to give birth in a nicely lit operating theatre. More adventurous participants can be tempted, on the other hand, with everything from birthing balls to, for those who don’t want to make smoothies, placenta jewellery.

So perhaps it’s a bit optimistic to identify, as some are doing, proliferating accounts of the traumatic consequences of ideologically delayed intervention, as natural childbirth’s “MeToo” moment. The history of the movement chronicles a remarkable ability to survive, along with the occasional tragedies, repeated testimony from the mothers it has left, even with healthy infants, feeling like failures. It probably helped that these regrets were the unintended legacy – since we lost Dick-Read – of kindly, idealistic women, as opposed to a technocratic fraternity. Although, when they realised the amazing [savings of low intervention](#), men could also experience the special pleasure of being simultaneously feminist and [authoritarian](#).

Outside hospitals a prosperous industry revolves around the coaching required for truly instinctive birth

If the revised, post-Ockenden lessons eventually get through to the sort of trusts that were [advertising](#) earlier this month for midwives “committed to

the philosophy of normal birth”, the wider culture still promoting this approach may be harder to challenge. Outside hospitals, a prosperous industry revolves around the coaching required, as in the days of Dick-Read, for truly instinctive birth. Within the NHS, where hypnobirthing classes are currently in vogue, a sympathy for the “normal” plainly informs classes, such as [those in Thurrock](#), where women can learn to “relax, breathe and trust their body to know what to do instinctively”.

At the Cambridge Rosie hospital, a £39 [video tutorial](#) offers “significantly less pharmacological pain relief” and “a tool for increasing normal births and reducing operative delivery rates”.

Should women not be that fussed for themselves, the Rosie goes further: “Babies born using hypnobirthing techniques tend to be more alert, calm, feed better and sleep better as they have been brought into the world at their own pace in a more calm and gentle way.” For anyone not keen on a dull yet agitated and wakeful baby with no appetite, there could hardly be a more powerful incentive to internalise that caesarean-defying acronym, Brain, and to understand Ockenden’s findings as an affront to everything the great Grantly Dick-Read once held dear.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Child protection](#)

How can an MP even think of excusing child abuse? Have we learned nothing?

[Sonia Sodha](#)



Crispin Blunt's support of Imran Ahmad Khan shows that power can still disregard victims



The former Conservative MP for Wakefield Imran Ahmad Khan in London during his court case. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 17 Apr 2022 02.30 EDT

‘A British horror story’ is the subtitle of Netflix’s two-part documentary on [Jimmy Savile](#), released a couple of weeks ago. And what a horror story it is, recounting how Savile, one of Britain’s most notorious sex offenders, used his BBC stardom and NHS fundraising to abuse children as young as eight over the course of four decades.

As appalling as the crimes themselves is the number of adults who paid little heed to the rumours of paedophilia that swirled around Savile, and the institutions, from the BBC to the NHS to local councils, that failed to act. At Stoke Mandeville hospital, nurses said they would tell children to pretend they were asleep as Savile [roamed the wards](#) looking for victims. Savile even made a habit of alluding to his crimes in public.

It is never just a tale of the sick people who abuse children, but of those who enable and turn a blind eye

This is the story of every child sexual abuse scandal that has afflicted this country and there are so many that the [independent inquiry into child sexual abuse](#) has been running for seven years and counting. It is never just a tale of the sick people who abuse children, but of those around them who enable them, and the institutions that turn a blind eye. From the church, to football clubs, to residential schools, to the care system, to the heart of [Westminster](#), sex offenders have been able to harm children with impunity because other people choose not to look too hard, or to defend them in the face of damning evidence.

This is hardly a relic of history. Today, we have safeguarding laws and policies designed to protect children that simply didn't exist a few decades ago. Yet none of it is failsafe: they rely on adults in authority being willing to enforce them.

The latest reminder of this came just last week, when the Conservative MP [Crispin Blunt](#) made a public statement defending his fellow parliamentarian [Imran Ahmad Khan](#) after he was convicted of child sexual assault.

A jury found that Khan had plied a 15-year-old boy with gin, took him upstairs to watch pornography and groped him in a bunk bed, leaving him “inconsolable” and “shaking”. Another person alleged that [Khan assaulted them](#) as a young man. Khan has now resigned as an MP.



A protester outside the office of Crispin Blunt MP in Reigate, Surrey.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

No matter to Blunt, who released a statement saying that he was “distraught at the dreadful miscarriage of justice”, calling Khan’s conviction an “international scandal” that relied on “lazy tropes about LGBT+ people”, with implications for “millions of LGBT+ Muslims around the world”. (Blunt claimed to have sat in on some of the trial, but reporters say he was not there to hear the victim or his family give evidence.) He told his Conservative association that the crime of which Khan had been convicted was “minor on any scale”. Blunt has now retracted his statement, offered a mealy-mouthed apology and resigned as chair from the all-party parliamentary group on global LGBT rights.

Blunt’s behaviour is corrosive to preventing child sexual abuse. One of the many reasons it is so hard for children to disclose their abuse is that set against the denials of the powerful men who abuse them – whether their power derives from family structures, a position of authority or celebrity status – they think they will never be believed.

One journalist reveals in the documentary that a woman abused by Savile as a 13-year-old asked him: “Who’d take our word against the word of someone so famous and establishment he’s even close friends with the

royals?” How right she was: the story didn’t run and after the BBC pulled an investigation into Savile a few weeks after his death, he was feted for months. What message does Blunt’s public statement send to the young man Khan has been convicted of assaulting and to other children being abused across the country?

By implying that Khan’s conviction is unsafe because it was powered by “lazy tropes”, Blunt is echoing the cloak of untouchability that the men who abuse children so often try to construct around themselves. It is of course true that false claims of paedophilia have been – and still are – deployed as homophobic slurs against gay men. And that convictions of Muslim men of Asian origin of grooming and sexually abusing young girls in towns such as Rotherham and [Rochdale](#), which show only that men of all colours and faiths are capable of raping children, have wrongly been used to imply that Muslim or Asian men are more likely to abuse children.

Where was the statement from the prime minister, making clear it is never acceptable to minimise child sexual abuse?

But it is also true that some child sexual abuse offenders trade off these forms of bigotry as a cover for their crimes. White or black, gay or straight, rich or poor: abusers come in all shapes and sizes. The only thing they have [in common](#) is that they are almost always male. And they often excel at dismissing any allegations that surface against them – Savile referred to “weirdo letters”. Sometimes, they hide behind institutions that lend them a veneer of morality – church or charity. Sometimes, they say that people are out to get them because of their skin colour or their sexuality. Either way, the implicit warning is: to mess with us is to mess with the greater good.

Blunt was condemned by some of the other MPs on the parliamentary group, who resigned in protest at his statement. Where, though, was the statement from the prime minister, condemning Blunt’s words and making clear that it is never, ever acceptable for someone in a position of authority to minimise child sexual abuse? Where was the sanction from the Conservative party? Where is the investigation into why it has no record of the call Khan’s victim

made to alert them that he had a decade earlier reported his sexual assault to the police?

I hate the notion that Savile “[groomed a nation](#)”, a phrase coined by the Met commander who led the Savile investigation. It lets off the hook too many adults who should have protected those children. That an MP can today engage in paedophile apologia with only the mildest consequences shows how very far Britain still is from learning the lessons of Jimmy Savile.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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Names in the news
Soccer

I should have a little lady-cry, but the Kenny Shiels furore is oddly cheering

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The reaction to the Northern Ireland manager blaming a 5-0 defeat on women being ‘emotional’ shows progress of sorts



‘I shouldn’t have told you that’: Northern Ireland manager Kenny Shiels has since apologised for remarks following his team being knocked out of the running for the 2023 Women’s World Cup. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

Sat 16 Apr 2022 12.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 17 Apr 2022 00.08 EDT

It was a bad day at the office for Northern Ireland manager, Kenny Shiels. Discussing his team’s 5-0 defeat to England on Tuesday, a loss that ended their hopes for the 2023 Women’s World Cup, [he explained](#) that “girls and women are more emotional than men, so they take a goal and then they don’t take that very well”. It wasn’t a slip of the tongue.

He went on to explain his theory, using statistics about how often a second goal is conceded quickly after the first. “That’s an emotional goal,” he suggested. After a minute or so of chat about the subject, there was a telltale pause. “I shouldn’t have told you that,” he said.

Perhaps the emotion of the occasion got the better of him. It wouldn’t be the first time Shiels had put his foot in it and he proved to have impeccable analytical skills regarding his own post-match press conference, at least, because he really shouldn’t have told us that. His remarks quickly drew condemnation and it was hard to know which eyeroll should come first. Was it for the casual sexism, the stereotypes, for a man becoming the centre of

attention during a big night for women, or for the implication that emotions in sport are inherently negative, a view that damages both men and women?

And you do have to wonder when Shiels last watched men play any sport. There's more drama in a Sunday league match than in the Christmas episode of *EastEnders*. "Kenny Shiels talking foolishness," said Ian Wright, [posting pictures of himself in tears](#) on the pitch. This was the same week that the [two-part documentary *Gazza*](#) began on BBC2, a story stuffed with players' emotions and emotional havoc, in the same week that [Ronaldo hit a phone](#) out of a 14-year-old's hand after Manchester United lost to Everton. Still, women, eh? With their special lady emotions, getting all lady-upset about the goals!

By the end of the week, Shiels emerged from the furore a little bruised, but after a [sincere-sounding apology](#), his job was intact and he had the support of his team. I found the whole fiasco quite heartening in the end, which is weird, because I probably should have had a meltdown and cried about it. What stood out most is that 10 years ago, comments like this probably wouldn't have caused much of a fuss. Instead, the near-unified reaction to it offered a clear indication of where the women's game is going and what it is leaving behind.

Liz Carr: maskless crowds add to Covid stage fright



Liz Carr: an uncomfortable night at the theatre. Photograph: May James/Reuters

Backstage at the Olivier awards last Sunday, Liz Carr, who had just won best supporting actress for her role in *The Normal Heart* at the National, [told the BBC](#) that she had not been to a theatre in over two years. “This is a frightening night for me,” she said, explaining that, while she had appeared on stage in front of an audience during that time, she was surrounded by a cast and crew who were testing for Covid every day.

Now that face covering rules have been lifted, audiences are no longer legally obliged to wear masks and in my experience of live performances recently, it seems that more choose not to than choose to.

That’s the law. But Carr suggested a solution for those who do not feel comfortable, or able, to put their health at the mercy of other people’s choice to wear a mask or not. She suggested special performances, with mandatory mask-wearing and less capacity, so that those with health conditions aren’t excluded from going to the theatre. The Royal Shakespeare Company put on a reduced capacity performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* last month, asking audience members to wear masks, for this exact reason. It makes absolute sense and should be more widespread.

Dan Stevens: watch your chatshow ratings, Boris



Dan Stevens: both barrels for Boris. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

On *The One Show* last Wednesday, the actor Dan Stevens took a run up to his punchline as if he were doing the long jump. Asked about *Gaslit*, his new series about Richard Nixon, he talked of “a criminal for a leader who is wrapped in a messy war, embroiled in a stupid scandal and surrounded by ambitious idiots and really should resign”.

You could see what was coming, though the presenters seemed shocked when he stuck the landing and revealed he was talking about Boris Johnson instead. They didn’t know where to look or what to say. Obviously, the clip went viral.

It was a spiky interlude for the BBC show, which is usually so cosy you could wear it as a dressing gown. I know it was Stevens going rogue, but the government’s rule-breaking is cutting through to the sofas on an early evening chatshow.

On Twitter, the amiable TV host Rylan Clarke-Neal found himself arguing with, and gaining the upper hand over, Edwina Currie, who tried the “move on” defence, to weaker and weaker effect. This is Matt Lucas [spoofing](#)

[Johnson's ineptitude](#) on *Bake Off*. It's Ant & Dec's "good evening, prime minister... for now" on *I'm a Celebrity*. These are not BBC4 documentaries watched by 700 people on a good night. These are at the heart of mainstream TV.

For all the right-leaning front pages urging the public to move on from partygate – some people break the law in office, get over it! – it's the light entertainment test that may prove telling in the end.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 17 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

We said Eric Pickles, the former secretary for communities and local government, told the Grenfell inquiry “that even if he had accepted [the Lakanal House coroner’s March 2013 recommendations] he did not believe it would have made any difference”. To clarify: Pickles’s evidence was that he accepted the key recommendations but believed that, even if he had expressly written to the coroner saying: “I accept the recommendations”, it would not have changed things (“[Ministers admit ignoring repeated warnings in the years before Grenfell](#)”, 10 April, p27).

Next month’s local elections will be Anas Sarwar’s second electoral test as Scottish Labour leader, not his first. He was already in office for last May’s Holyrood elections (“[Will Scottish Labour’s revival help it to reclaim first ‘red wall’?](#)”, 10 April, p14).

An article about the film *Operation Mincemeat* said the plot to deceive Germany in the Second World War involved a corpse dressed as a pilot; in fact the body was dressed as a Royal Marines major (“[War legend takes on a new identity for our times](#)”, 10 April, p38).

The chocolate-maker Coco Chocolatier is based in the village of Queensferry, near Edinburgh, not “Queensberry” (“[Chocs away](#)”, 10 April, Magazine, p46).

A photo of a painting depicting the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo showed a British army colonel riding alongside him, not “Prussian Field Marshal Blücher” as our caption said (“[He led men into battle... but Wellington chose clever women as his friends](#)”, 3 April, p21)

Darfur war crimes trial opens as army cracks down in Sudan

To Paradise by Hanya Yanagihara – a masterpiece for our times

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736*

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Observer lettersRishi Sunak

Letters: the deceitful and entitled rule politics

Rishi Sunak is merely the latest member of the government to display disdainful indifference to criticism



Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak on a placard during a protest at Downing Street on 13 April. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 17 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

If, as your editorial suggests, we feel “we are governed by ministers who regard the rules as being for other people” (“[Chancellor has damaged faith in democracy](#)”, Comment), it is because they operate with the complacent condescension of Roman patricians, a group that governed by birthright and among whom Boris Johnson behaves like Caesar.

It helps to explain what Andrew Rawnsley calls “[The stench of entitlement now oozing from Rishi Sunak’s home as well as Mr Johnson’s](#)” (Comment). Rawnsley wonders whether Sunak was “naive, idiotic, complacent, cavalier

or arrogant” over his wife’s tax affairs, but once we recognise that Tory ministers think of themselves not as a class but a political caste all becomes clear.

Only those who believe that governing is their inherited prerogative could display the indifference, deceit and hypocrisy shown by cabinet ministers over the last two years, to which Mr Sunak has added his sense of outraged privilege. They see no wrong in ringfencing wealth in the midst of massive economic inequality. They are indifferent to criticism unless it might register in a ballot box uncomfortably close to home. They recognise no allegiance to the public they belittle, until it gathers periodically as an electorate.

Paul McGilchrist

Colchester, Essex

Your view that people in Rishi Sunak’s seat (Richmond, Yorkshire) may forgive his latest errors is interesting but decidedly partial (“Sunak’s stunts and mistakes expose lack of political savvy”, News). Many of his constituents have long noted that our local MP rarely misses an opportunity for self-publicity or situations that lend themselves to his seemingly insatiable need to hone the Rishi brand.

Our local weekly paper invariably contains two to three “news” items with photos of the MP. These are reinforced with his occasional personally financed glossy pamphlet. This latter publication has a rare and idiosyncratic style (no doubt concocted by his private publicist) of using 30-40 self references to “Rishi” over a couple of sides. Local people are not daft; they recognise spin masquerading as “news”. The burgers of Northallerton may well wish to stay calm but many of us in the wider constituency are tiring of our MP’s incessant thirst for publicity. Indeed, many of us believe he’d do well to adopt the Kingsley Amis posture of believing less equals more.

Gus Pennington

Stokesley, North Yorkshire

The silence of solar power

Your claim (“[Three-quarters of Britons back expansion of wind power](#)”, News) has raised howls of protest in North Devon, where many hills are

blighted by the noise and flicker of these giant protrusions.

The countryside should not be industrialised in this hideous way. If, instead, every new-build, supermarket, car park, barn, shed and factory were to be compulsorily fitted with solar panels – silent, unobtrusive and comparatively cheap – it would be far better, alongside expanding offshore wind power that, as an island, we have in abundance. We must get to net zero fast, but not by destroying our land and skies.

Amanda Craig

Lifton, Devon

Preventing more Grenfells

You report (“[Ministers admit ignoring repeated warnings in the years before Grenfell](#)”, News) that Eric Pickles, Gavin Barwell and Stephen Williams, then government ministers, failed to consider the recommendations of the inquest into the Lakanal House fire.

I was the solicitor for the families of the three women and three children who died in that fire. Will the Grenfell Tower inquiry consider stating that an obligation should be placed on government to at least make a reasoned response to recommendations made by coroners on safety to prevent future deaths?

Louise Christian

London N16

Flexible hours in the stone age

Reading Sonia Sodha on working hours and the value of leisure time (“[Covid has shown flexible working is a benefit only for the privileged few](#)”, Comment) had me thinking of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins’s essay, The Original Affluent Society, published more than 50 years ago, in which he demonstrated that for most of history our hunter-gatherer ancestors devoted three hours a day to fulfilling their basic needs, leaving the rest of the time free for social and cultural activities. Other studies indicate that medieval peasants probably enjoyed more leisure time than those of us living in modern industrial societies.

Will Douglas-Mann
Petrockstowe, Devon

Operation Mincemeat's hero

Given the resurgence of interest in Operation Mincemeat, now both a film and comedy musical (“[War legend takes on a new identity for our times](#)”, Focus), it feels important to be precise about the nature of the enterprise and its cultural representation.

One of the most remarkable theatre works I have experienced was the 2009 production *Mincemeat*, by Cardboard Citizens’ Adrian Jackson and Farhana Sheikh. It focused notably on the homeless man – Glyndwr Michael – whose corpse made the venture possible. Despite his pivotal role, he was described by Ewen Montagu, who cooked up the plan, as “a bit of a ne’er-do-well”.

History might be written by the victors but it’s important not to forget those whose bodies – literally – made that possible. Fully acknowledging those who came before us would surely make our “finest hour” something to revisit.

Gareth Evans, Whitechapel Gallery
London E8

Rethink Thought for the Day

On behalf of what I suspect are a number of your readers who profess a faith, I welcome Catherine Bennett’s justified criticisms of recent contributions to Thought for the Day Radio 4’s *Today* programme (“[I pray in vain for wisdom amid the platitudes of Thought for the Day](#)”, Comment). A number have been frankly embarrassing and serve only to discredit a faith-based view of the world.

Assuming that it has to continue to be broadcast, it is time that it was opened up to contributions from those who espouse a non-religious approach. This would more truly reflect the society in which we live, give voice to currently unrecognised insights and refresh a tired formula.

The Revd Stephen John Terry

Hassocks, West Sussex

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OpinionReligion

Let's be honest - faiths divide us. It can be hard to see the ties that bind

[Emma John](#)



As Easter, Ramadan and Passover festivals converge, it was a week in which I got to test my convictions



Francis Bacon's Study for a Portrait of Pope Innocent at the Royal Academy.
Photograph: David Parry/Royal Academy of Arts

Sun 17 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

Religion: so awkward, right? One of the most uncomfortable topics that exists, probably, up there with Brexit and the Will Smith slap. The fact that 85% of the human population identify with some kind of faith group doesn't make it any easier to discuss.

If you have a set of beliefs, however well-meaning and humane, they're bound to set you on a course of divergence from those who hold alternate ones, or none at all, as our world has found to its repeated and tragic cost. Small wonder that some in the remaining 15% feel outright hostility to the very concept of faith.

It's this anomaly that the evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar tackles in his newly published book *How Religion Evolved: And Why It Endures*. The desire to reach out and feel part of something transcendent, beyond human cognition, can be observed in every culture known to history and Dunbar notes the evolutionary and societal advantages of our religious impulse, while capturing its flipside too. The very thing that creates such positive

bonds between humans with shared beliefs is also responsible for the division and conflict they cause.

And yet, says Dunbar, “it is difficult to see any convincing evidence for anything that will replace [religion] in human affairs”. That’s certainly worth pondering at the end of a week that has seen the unusual confluence of three of the world’s major religious holidays: Ramadan, Passover and Easter. Such a convergence only occurs three times a century and results in a rare opportunity for believers to observe the similarities of their rituals and beliefs, as opposed to their differences.

Last week, I was invited to an iftar meal at which a number of the guests spoke of their practices during Ramadan and the inspiration behind them. As a Christian whose approach to the supposed self-denial of Lent has been pretty lackadaisical down the years, it was a challenge as well as an inspiration to witness how the people surrounding me engaged with their own fasting season. It was, too, the first time I’d experienced such resonance with Islam’s daily rhythm of prayer in the church’s Holy Week offerings of morning prayer, lunchtime Eucharist, evensong and compline.

One woman at dinner was asked what her faith meant to her. Everything, she said: it determined how she saw her place in the world, the values she held and the choices she made, the way she conducted her relationships. I recognised not just the response but the ease and enthusiasm with which she spoke. My own faith has waxed, waned and wobbled over the years, but I have known the times when it brings joy and confidence and meaning to life and something in me vibrated with a sympathetic delight.

I’ve also, of course, watched plenty of friends lose their faith, always for the same reasons I could imagine one day losing mine, be it the suffering of others or the disappointments of life or the irrationality of religion. The big one, perhaps, is the impossibility of belief in some unseen being with human interests at heart when the world can be so cruel and unjust.

Five millennia don’t take you as far as you’d think. We’re still the same human race that has sought the spiritual

And a Maundy Thursday encounter with Francis Bacon's paintings [at the Royal Academy](#) was a sharp reminder to me that humans are fleshly creatures with animalistic impulses. The popes and crucifixions that recur so frequently in Bacon's imagery don't speak of redemption or eternity but of futility, mortality and horror. Some of the canvases are so confronting that I wondered whether the gallery should run special late-night viewings at which visitors are permitted to howl.

But a different exhibition offered another perspective, one that will stay with me for an equally long time. For anyone who hasn't spent much time thinking about our prehistoric forebears, the British Museum's [current show about Stonehenge](#) is a revelation. Last summer, on visiting the monument itself, I was confronted by my ignorance of the cultures responsible for it, but the World of Stonehenge is the perfect corrective. It immerses you in the humanity of 5,000 years ago, the people who lived and worked together not just to survive but to increase their knowledge of the universe and to create extraordinary things.

Transporting displays of finds from both Salisbury Plain and all over bronze age Britain helps us see these seemingly remote people as men and women just like us: smart and competent and resourceful and inquisitive. One discovery shows two separate cultures communing with each other, the last of the hunter-gatherers joining the first of the farmers for a remarkable shared feast that couldn't help but prompt memories of an Oklahoma song: "Oh! The farmer and the cowman should be friends..."

And, yes, humans back then were working out their own power dynamics too, discovering ways to accumulate wealth and prestige, to wield authority. We're made of the same stuff, with the same needs and wants and drives. Five millennia don't take you as far as you'd think. We're still the same human race that has leant on faith and sought the spiritual throughout our entire existence.

That sense of commonality with the past has merged, in my mind, with the communalism of the religious rituals that have taken place all over the globe last week. Millions of people have devoted time, thought and self-discipline to honour something outside themselves, to seek a more universal good than their own. In an individualistic age that encourages narcissistic ways of

thinking, in a geopolitical climate where leaders serve their own egos, that's not nothing.

It's easy to perceive religion as a hangover from our collective, pre-scientific past, to write it off as the thing humans did before we understood the world we lived in. But perhaps today, overloaded with information as we are, its offer is as relevant as ever – a sense of perspective, a turning of focus away from ourselves, a way to make peace with the things we still cannot make sense of or will not see changed in our lifetime. If faith can unify us at all, it is in our mutual humility.

Emma John's book, *Self Contained: Scenes From a Single Life*, is out now

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OpinionEmmanuel Macron

Even if Macron wins, he will struggle to realise his vision for France and Europe

Hans Kundnani

The president remains favourite to carry the election, but his task will become no easier



Emmanuel Macron blows a kiss to the crowd on a campaign visit to Le Havre, on 14 April 2022. Photograph: Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 17 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 17 Apr 2022 03.25 EDT

Although [Emmanuel Macron](#) did a little better than expected in the first round of the French presidential election last Sunday, the results were not a huge surprise. The second round next Sunday will be between Macron and the far-right leader Marine Le Pen, exactly as it was five years ago. But the results confirmed two worrying trends in French politics that were already apparent – and which are also evident to some extent across much of the rest of continental Europe.

The first is the realignment of politics away from a fault line between left and right, to one between “radical” centrism and populism. The centre-left Socialist and centre-right Les Républicains candidates both received less than 5% of the vote, a lower share of the vote than either of these parties had ever received before. Both Macron and Le Pen see themselves as being “beyond left and right” – that is, though they both want us to think of them as being opposites, they actually mirror each other. From a democratic point of view, this realignment is disastrous.

The second trend is the apparently inexorable rise of the far right in [France](#). It is not just that between them Le Pen and her far-right rival Éric Zemmour got 30% of the vote – more than Macron. It is also the way that the far right has set the agenda in French politics more generally during the past five years, as illustrated by the way that, during the campaign, even centre-right candidates such as Valérie Pécresse adopted far-right tropes such as the idea of a “great replacement”.

Macron’s bid for a second term can be seen as the last gasp of French centre-left pro-Europeanism

Perhaps the only surprise in the first round was that [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#), the far-left Eurosceptic leader of La France Insoumise, got 22% of the vote, up from 20% in 2017 and only 1% less than Le Pen. His success shows that, despite the rise of the far right, the left is also still quite strong in France, though it has drifted away from the Socialist party, whose candidate, Paris mayor [Anne Hidalgo](#), got less than 2%. In other words, the left in France is now basically Eurosceptic.

In fact, Macron’s bid for a second term can be seen as the last gasp of French centre-left pro-Europeanism. It may be a surprise to hear Macron, who has been derided as the “president of the rich”, described as centre-left. But he was once a minister in the government of [François Hollande](#), the last Socialist president. By looking at the longer trajectory of the French centre left and its relationship with the European Union, we can see how Macron represents the end of an era.

When François Mitterrand was elected as French president in 1981 amid rising inflation and unemployment, he promised state-led growth as a way out of France's economic problems. But two years later he was forced to do a U-turn as financial markets put pressure on the French franc. The centre left in France drew the conclusion that social democratic economic policies were no longer possible at the national level. As his finance minister, [Jacques Delors](#), put it, France had a choice between Europe and decline.

The problem with this pro-European strategy was always Germany or, rather, the inability of France to persuade Germany to pursue a centre-left economic policy, especially after the creation of the European single currency, which constitutionalised German preferences by limiting the ability of governments to borrow and spend. After the euro crisis began in 2010, first [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) and then Hollande tried – and failed – to persuade Germany to loosen the eurozone's fiscal rules.

When Macron became president in 2017, he made one last attempt to cajole Germany into making concessions. He proposed “a [Europe](#) that protects”, in which the eurozone would be reformed to protect citizens from the market. He undertook difficult labour market reforms in order to gain credibility in Berlin. But though many there had been spooked by how well Le Pen had done in the 2017 election and realised that Germany needed Macron to succeed, chancellor Angela Merkel ignored his proposals for a more redistributive EU.

Only 32% of French people trust the EU – a lower figure than in any other member state

“Pro-Europeans” argue that the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has been a game-changer. In particular, they see a breakthrough in the creation of a €750bn [recovery fund](#), which some, like the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, then the finance minister in the Merkel government, even called the EU's “Hamiltonian moment”. But although the recovery fund limited the economic impact of the pandemic itself, it did nothing to reduce the macroeconomic imbalances that already existed within the eurozone.

In any case, these developments do not appear to have stopped the rise of Euroscepticism in France. According to new [Eurobarometer](#) data published last week, only 32% of French people trust the EU, a lower figure than in any other member state. Meanwhile, under pressure from the far right, Macron has reinvented the idea of “a Europe that protects” in terms of cultural rather than economic protection, completing his journey from the centre left to the centre right.

Unlike in 2017, many in France worry that Le Pen could actually win this time, especially if a substantial number of Mélenchon’s voters abstain in the second round. (He has carefully told them that they should not give Le Pen a “single vote” without telling them to vote for Macron.) But even if Macron wins, he will face the same problems as before. In particular, unless the EU’s fiscal rules are reformed, it is difficult to see how he will be able to deliver much on the economic issues that matter to French voters.

Like Le Pen, Mélenchon has somewhat toned down his Euroscepticism – they both now talk about changing the EU from within rather than leaving it, though some worry that this could make the EU even more dysfunctional. But whether or not Macron hangs on for another five years, future French presidents from the left are likely to be less pro-European – and more confrontational towards Germany – than their predecessors.

Hans Kundnani is a senior research fellow at Chatham House and the author of *The Paradox of German Power*

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- [From Afghan war zone to West Yorkshire The rise and fall of Imran Ahmad Khan](#)
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- [Migration UK Rwanda plan for asylum seekers decried as inhumane, expensive and deadly](#)
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[UK news](#)

Man accuses Imran Ahmad Khan of propositioning him when he was 16

Exclusive: Disgraced former MP hit by fresh allegations after conviction for sexual assault of 15-year-old

- [The rise and fall of Imran Ahmad Khan](#)



Imran Ahmad Khan at a party in 2015 when he allegedly propositioned a 16-year-old.

[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Fri 15 Apr 2022 04.36 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 12.00 EDT

A man has accused Imran Ahmad Khan, the disgraced former Conservative MP, of propositioning him when he was 16.

The man, who the Guardian is calling Andrew (not his real name), says he met Ahmad Khan at a birthday party in Suffolk in August 2015. He claims Ahmad Khan, then in his early 40s, offered to give him oral sex and to take him to a hotel room to take cocaine and hire a sex worker.

Andrew came forward with his story after Ahmad Khan's conviction on Monday for sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy after plying him with gin at a party in 2008. [Ahmad Khan announced on Thursday that he would resign](#), triggering a by-election in the Yorkshire seat of Wakefield.

Andrew's mother, who was also at the party with her partner, told the Guardian that she told Ahmad Khan to stay away from her son after he told her about the oral sex proposition.

The mother's partner said he too told Ahmad Khan to back off and that it was "inappropriate" to talk to Andrew in that way. Another adult party guest told the Guardian he also admonished Ahmad Khan in a similar vein.

Another person who was working at the event said he remembered being told about the incident in the aftermath and that it was "talk of the party".

The event took place in marquees and tents in a field in Suffolk. Andrew says he first spotted Ahmad Khan sitting by a campfire looking "off his face". He claims he asked Ahmad Khan if he was OK, and that Khan said his friends had given him "far too many pills".

The next day Andrew joined a group of people who were listening to Ahmad Khan tell a story about working as a mediator between the UK government and the Taliban. "He said he'd been shot at and blown up while travelling in a vehicle which was hit by an IED [improvised explosive device] and then he lifted his shirt up to show us some scars," said Andrew. "He asked me to touch them and I put my finger in one of the divots."

He claims Ahmad Khan then asked him about his sexuality. Andrew said that he was straight, only for Ahmad Khan to reply that he thought sexuality was "on a spectrum".

He claims Ahmad Khan later offered to give him “the best blowjob of your life”. The teenager then told his mother what happened, prompting interventions from her and her partner.

Ahmad Khan later complained to Andrew about being “told off”, and asked why he had told his mother. “I told him that he had made me feel uncomfortable and that it was a bit weird. He asked why weird, and I said, well, I’m only 16,” said Andrew. “He replied: ‘that’s OK, you’re legal’.”

Andrew claims Ahmad Khan then asked him if he had ever done “DP” (double penetration). He said no. He alleges Ahmad Khan then said something like “why don’t we hang out and have some fun?” before offering to book them a hotel in Henley, “buy lots of cocaine and a prostitute and ‘fuck all weekend’”.

At the time, Andrew said he felt “really uncomfortable. I didn’t know how to take it. I was only 16.”

Afterwards, he said he made light of it with friends and did not think much about it, until this week when he saw Ahmad Khan had been convicted of sexually abusing a 15-year-old.

Andrew said: “The story popped up on the BBC app and I saw a picture of him and thought ‘fuck’, it’s him. And Christ, this guy is an MP. He’s probably the furthest thing away from the sort of person anyone wants to represent them, a paedophile who offers a 16-year-old drugs and tries to get them to shag a prostitute.”

He said he had been motivated to come forward after learning that Ahmad Khan planned to appeal against his conviction, and reading Ahmad Khan’s defence in the trial, when he was trying to explain why he discussed pornography with his 15-year-old victim.

Ahmad Khan’s barrister said he had asked the boy what pornography he watched to find out where his “true sexual proclivities lay”, after the youngster told him he was confused about his sexuality.

“When I read his defence, him saying he was just trying to help the boy come to terms with his sexuality, acting like his intention was to offer support and solace to him, I just thought: that’s the same pattern of behaviour he instigated with me,” said Andrew. “It could quite easily have been me. It would have been very easily me if I wasn’t surrounded by adults.”

Lawyers for Ahmad Khan said on Thursday afternoon that they had advised him not to comment on Andrew’s allegations, “bearing in mind the ongoing criminal proceedings against our client”. Half an hour later, he quit as an MP, saying he would now focus solely on clearing his name.

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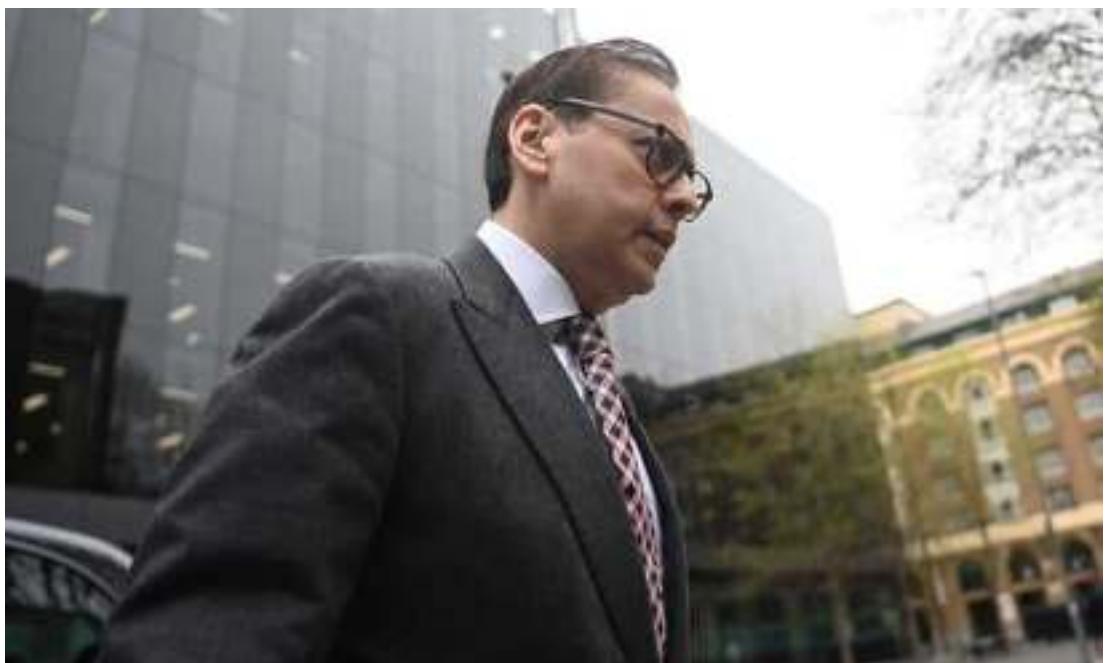
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From Afghan war zone to West Yorkshire: the rise and fall of Imran Ahmad Khan

Questions raised about how little-known ‘local lad’ with a colourful past came to be selected as Wakefield’s Tory candidate



Imran Ahmad Khan had a reputation for telling wild tales about his previous life as a counter-terror consultant in some of the most dangerous parts of the world. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Fri 15 Apr 2022 04.36 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 11.57 EDT

When Imran Ahmad Khan was selected as the last-minute Conservative candidate for Wakefield in the 2019 general election, he sold himself as a “local lad”. He made a big deal of being born at the local hospital, where his

late father was a doctor and his mum a nurse, and educated at Silcoates, the town's lesser private school.

It was perhaps odd, then, that none of the local Tories seemed to have any idea who he was, with claims he had been "pushed" on to the constituency. He was a stranger even to Nadeem Ahmed, who had been the leader of the Conservative group of Wakefield council since 2014: "Wakefield is a close-knit place. I didn't know anybody who knew him."

He didn't even pretend to live locally, giving his address as a Lake District mansion where his mother lived. The Labour party liked to call him "the Windermere candidate".

Ahmad Khan quickly established a reputation as an eccentric character with a penchant for telling wild tales about his previous life as a counter-terrorism consultant in some of the most dangerous parts of the world.

In his booming voice, his accent more Duke of York than West Yorkshire, he would tell war stories about getting blown up by an IED in Afghanistan – some people were shown the scars he said came from burning shrapnel – and negotiating with the Taliban.

He talked proudly of his brothers, Karim and Khalid, who are both high-flying lawyers – Karim is the chief prosecutor of the international criminal court in The Hague and has been in Ukraine this week investigating war crimes.

To some, he appeared sometimes to be playing a part, growing an extravagant Kitchener-style moustache and wearing red trousers with rainbow-striped shirts. "On Remembrance Sunday I remember him turning up to the Cenotaph hobbling with a cane, almost as if he himself had been wounded in battle," said one local politician. "Then the next day you'd see him twirling the cane around and walking normally."

Ahmad Khan was selected as the Tory candidate a month from polling day after the original choice had to step down because of offensive Facebook posts. Much of what the Guardian has learned about his past casts doubts on

whether the Conservative party did proper background checks to establish if he was a fit and proper person to represent them in parliament.

The party says it has no record of anyone complaining to it before the election that Ahmad Khan was a paedophile – the victim in his sex offence trial claimed that he had done so. But it did not respond when asked by the Guardian if he had been vetted.

Tony Homewood, a Conservative councillor in Wakefield who acted as Ahmad Khan's election agent in 2019 and previously worked as an “execution consultant” in the US to teach prison staff how to hang inmates, said on Twitter that Ahmad Khan had been “pushed” on the constituency. He claimed that Ahmad Khan had “applied for the seat originally and was in fact not selected for interview”.

He added: “What we might all ask is how candidates are selected and how can the situation come about where someone as wholly inappropriate as Ahmad Khan can get approved?” Homewood did not respond to a request for an interview.

During his two-and-a-half-year spell as Wakefield's MP, Ahmad Khan has given differing versions of his CV. He no longer mentions his work for the private intelligence company SCL, parent company of controversial data consultants Cambridge Analytica.

But he has made no attempt to hide his job setting up the Syrian Media Centre, the UK propaganda arm of the Syrian government, where he was director of communications and strategy from 2004 to 2005. On his LinkedIn page, he says he “successfully organised the official launch party drawing on my own contacts to ensure that the guests included over 200 leaders drawn from the worlds of media, politics, diplomacy, industry, academia and art (eg. Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo, Sir David Frost).”

His now-deleted profile page for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on foreign affairs claimed that he “worked with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and M&C Saatchi from 2015 to 2018, where he advocated a novel approach to achieve greater political and popular support that might provide solutions to issues affecting the eradication campaign”.

But M&C Saatchi insists he worked for them as an external consultant for only one month in 2019. Ahmad Khan disputes this.

In a [piece for the Times this week](#), one of his former parliamentary interns, Felix Mohaupt, claimed Ahmad Khan told him he had done a postgraduate degree at Georgetown, one of the most prestigious universities in the US.

Asked why there is no record of this, Ahmad Khan said he was due to attend Georgetown but couldn't because his father died. His lawyers told the Guardian: "We are unable to speculate as to whether Felix misunderstood our client or what was stated, and our client has no recollection of the conversation with him, or indeed of Mr Mohaupt."

One thing missing from his LinkedIn profile is a brief spell at Leeds University, where he started a degree in politics, Russian and parliamentary studies in 1992.

Julian Watson, who was on the same course, said of Ahmad Khan: "He was very full of himself and prone, I think, to exaggerating his achievements. One of the things he used to boast about was having been a special adviser to a president of a former Soviet country. Hardly likely given he was 18 at the time. He dropped out/was pushed out after a few weeks or months. The next time I was aware of him he had just been elected Wakefield MP. I was gobsmacked."

The Guardian has been unable to verify a claim made on his deleted APPG profile that "in the early 1990s [when Ahmad Khan was in his late teens or early twenties] Imran served as Special Advisor to President Stanislav S. Shushkevich of Belarus".

But some of Ahmad Khan's wilder claims do appear to have at least some basis in reality.

Alex Ulster, the son of the Earl of Gloucester and a former British army officer, said he worked with Ahmad Khan on counter-extremism projects for the UK Foreign Office between 2008 and 2014, before Ahmad Khan left to work for the United Nations.

Having met in the 1990s when doing a degree in war studies at King's College in London, in 2010 the pair set up a consultancy called Xain Research and Communication, which had contracts with the British government.

Ulster was a little vague about what exactly they did – “you'll have to ask the Foreign Office”, he said. (The Foreign Office had not responded by the time of publication.)

But he said Ahmad Khan used to do what he called “atmospherics”, walking around villages in Pakistan and Afghanistan, finding out what was going on and reporting back to the Foreign Office.

“He did a lot of stuff in Afghanistan. It wasn't for very long, but we did a project where he was meeting people who were Taliban,” he said. “These were village-level people, not the leadership of the organisation or senior leaders ... He was not negotiating on behalf of a government or anything of that level. We were doing what was called atmospherics.”

Asked to explain, he compared it to a reporter wandering around Wakefield asking about the byelection: “Vox populi. We would feed that back.”

He denied they were essentially evidence-gathering. “We would absolutely not call it intelligence, but it's, you know, the flavour on the streets,” said Ulster. He laughed when asked if Ahmad Khan was a spy – a persistent rumour in Wakefield. “No, he is not a spy,” he said. “I think I would know if he was a spy.”

But he said Ahmad Khan was “quite ballsy – he went to places I wouldn't ... He was quite committed, you know, to the cause.” The cause being? “Anti-terrorism. And, you know, trying to stop the Pakistanis and Afghans from blowing each other up.”

Constituents in Wakefield were less enamoured of their MP, with some complaining that when they went to ask for help they had to sit under a huge portrait of Margaret Thatcher. After his conviction this week, many were outraged when he initially refused calls to stand down.

But by Thursday evening the pressure had become too much and he quit, saying he would focus entirely on clearing his name.

“As I intend for this to be my only statement, I would like to apologise to my family and community for the humiliation this has caused them,” he wrote.

“Questions surrounding sexuality in my community are not trivial, and learning from the press about my orientation, drinking, and past behaviour before I became an MP has not been easy.”

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[Middle East and north Africa](#)

More than 150 Palestinians injured in Jerusalem clash, say medics

Palestine Red Crescent says people injured by rubber bullets, Israeli police batons and stun grenades at al-Aqsa mosque

Scores injured as Palestinians and Israeli security forces clash at al-Aqsa mosque – video

Ben Lynfield in Jerusalem, and [Oliver Holmes](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 10.10 EDTFirst published on Fri 15 Apr 2022 02.06 EDT

Medics say more than 150 Palestinians have been injured in clashes that erupted when Israeli riot police entered Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque compound, in the most significant violence at the holy site since similar scenes sparked a war last year.

Most of the Palestinian injuries on Friday were incurred by rubber bullets, stun grenades and beatings with police batons, the Palestine Red Crescent said.

Israel said its forces entered before dawn prayers on Friday to remove rocks and stones that it said had been collected in anticipation of violence. The holy site, which is sacred to Jews and Muslims, has often been the scene of Israeli-Palestinian unrest, and tensions were already heightened amid a recent surge in bloodshed. Repeated [clashes at the site last year](#) led to an 11-day war with Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

The violence comes at a particularly sensitive time. Ramadan this year coincides with Passover, a major week-long Jewish holiday beginning on Friday at sundown, and Christian Holy Week, which culminates on Easter Sunday. The holidays are expected to bring tens of thousands of people into Jerusalem's Old City, home to major sites sacred to all three religions.



Palestinians and Israeli security forces clash on Friday morning. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

Videos circulating online showed Palestinians hurling rocks and fireworks, and police firing teargas and stun grenades on the sprawling esplanade surrounding the mosque. Others showed worshippers barricading themselves inside the mosque itself amid what appeared to be clouds of teargas.

The Palestine Red Crescent said one of the Palestinian guards at the site was shot in the eye with a rubber bullet. Israeli police said three officers were wounded from “massive stone-throwing”, with two evacuated from the scene for treatment.

The Israeli foreign ministry said dozens of masked men carrying Palestinian and Hamas flags marched to the compound early on Friday and gathered stones. “Police were forced to enter the grounds to disperse the crowd and remove the stones and rocks, in order to prevent further violence,” it tweeted.

Police said they waited until prayers were over and the crowds started to disperse. In a statement, they said crowds started hurling rocks in the direction of the Western Wall, a Jewish holy site, forcing them to act.

Palestinians view any large deployment of police at al-Aqsa as a major provocation.

Israel's national security minister, Omer Barlev, who oversees the police force, said Israel had "no interest" in violence at the holy site but that officers were forced to confront "violent elements" that confronted them with stones and metal bars.

He said Israel was committed to freedom of worship for Jews and Muslims alike.

The mosque is the third-holiest site in Islam. It is built on a hilltop in Jerusalem's Old City that is the most sacred site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the site of the Jewish temples in antiquity. It has been a major flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence for decades and was the centre of the 2000-05 Palestinian intifada.

Tensions have risen in recent weeks after a [series of attacks](#) by Palestinians that killed 14 people inside Israel. In response, [Israel has carried out a wave of arrests and military operations](#) across the occupied West Bank, setting off clashes.

At least 25 Palestinians have been killed, many of whom had carried out attacks or were involved in the clashes, but also others, including an unarmed woman and a lawyer.

The Palestinian health ministry said a 17-year-old died early on Friday from wounds suffered during clashes with Israeli forces in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, the day before.



Rescuers evacuate an injured man during the clashes. Photograph: Hazem Bader/AFP/Getty Images

On Friday, the Hamas Islamic militant group condemned what it said were “brutal attacks” on worshippers at al-Aqsa by Israeli forces, saying Israel would bear “all the consequences”. It called on all Palestinians to “stand by our people in Jerusalem”.

The UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, Tor Wennesland, said the “provocations on the Holy Esplanade must stop now”.

He called on “political, religious and community leaders on all sides to help calm the situation, avoid spreading inflammatory rhetoric and speak up against those seeking to escalate the situation”, adding: “Allowing tensions to spiral further only risks another escalation.”

Earlier this week, Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza had called on Palestinians to camp out at the al-Aqsa mosque over the weekend. Palestinians have long feared that Israel plans to take over the site or partition it.

Authorities in Israel say they are committed to maintaining the status quo, but in recent years nationalist and religious Jews have visited the site in large

numbers with police escorts.

Israel captured East Jerusalem, home to al-Aqsa and other major holy sites, in the 1967 war and annexed it in a move not recognised internationally. Palestinians want the eastern part of the city to be the capital of a future independent state including the West Bank and Gaza, which Israel also captured during the war nearly 55 years ago.

By midday on Friday, the clashes had ended and Israeli police reopened the entrance. Tens of thousands of Muslims arrived at the compound and prayed without further reports of incidents.

There was a sense on both sides that Friday's flare-up would not ignite a broader escalation but that this could still change in the days ahead. "We need to wait and see," said Mahmoud Muna, whose family owns a bookshop near the Old City walls. "Israel's reopening of the mosque was intentional to avoid escalation but they will have to see that there are no Passover incursions that would escalate things to a new line."

Daniel Seidemann, the director of the Israeli NGO Terrestrial Jerusalem, which focuses on conflict resolution, said the situation was contained for now. Hani Masri, the director of the Ramallah-based Masarat thinktank, said: "Until now it's been a limited escalation but it could become a complete escalation if there are [more] Palestinian martyrs or another attack in Israel."

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report

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Immigration and asylum

UK Rwanda plan for asylum seekers decried as inhumane, expensive and deadly

Politicians, legal experts and refugee groups condemn Johnson's plan to 'offshore' Channel crossing crisis

Boris Johnson says thousands of asylum seekers could be sent to Rwanda – video

Rajeev Syal Home affairs editor

Thu 14 Apr 2022 14.48 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 00.30 EDT

Boris Johnson's plans to send unauthorised asylum seekers on a one-way ticket to Rwanda have been roundly condemned amid warnings that it will be challenged in the courts and could result in further deaths in the Channel.

After the prime minister outlined plans to hand an initial down-payment of £120m to the Rwandan government in the hope that it will accept "tens of thousands" of people, [politicians](#) and refugee groups condemned the move as inhumane, unworkable and a waste of public money.

The Rwanda proposal was one of a series of measures announced by the prime minister and [Priti Patel](#), the home secretary, as they seek to get to grips with a febrile political row over Channel crossings. The number of people crossing has already passed 5,000 this year, more than double the 2021 total at the same point.

Amid calls for the government to disclose the overall costs of the plans, which have not been released, it emerged that:

Men and women could be flown 4,500 miles to [Rwanda](#), where they will be encouraged to apply for refugee status. However, children and their parents would not be sent.

The Royal Navy has been given powers to control the Channel after another day of hundreds of people arriving in small boats to seek refuge in the UK.

Tobias Ellwood, the Conservative chair of the defence select committee, accused Johnson of unveiling the plans as part of a “massive distraction” from becoming the first prime minister to be found guilty of a criminal charge while in office.

A Border Force union official has warned that the announcement will result in a short-term spike in refugees trying to cross the Channel, with an elevated risk of travelling in poor conditions, putting lives at risk.

A snap poll by YouGov of almost 3,000 voters on Thursday found that only 35% of people support the measures, with 43% opposed.

Speaking at a press conference in Kent, Johnson said the scheme was needed to “save countless lives” from human trafficking by breaking the business model of people smugglers.

“The deal we have done [with Rwanda] is uncapped, and Rwanda will have the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people in the years ahead. And let’s be clear, Rwanda is one of the safest countries in the world, globally recognised for its record of welcoming and integrating migrants,” he said.

Asked about the [poor human rights record in Rwanda](#), where some groups have logged the torture of detainees, he said: “Rwanda has totally transformed. Over the last few decades it has totally transformed from what it was.”

Refusing to engage with questions about his breaking of lockdown rules, Johnson said the Royal Navy would from Thursday take over “operational command” in the Channel from the Border Force to ensure “no boat makes it to the UK undetected”.

Measures will be introduced to intercept more small boats and the navy will be given “primacy” to track and intercept them – with £50m of new funding to pay for Wildcat helicopters, search and rescue aircraft, and drones.

Under the plans, those sent to Rwanda will be offered asylum there, with claims processed within three months. Those who are successful will be able to stay for at least five years with a training and support package.

As Johnson addressed reporters, new arrivals reached the shore in Dover on what officials acknowledged was a busy day for crossings.

In a visit to the Rwandan capital, Kigali, Patel was shown pristine accommodation that will be used to house people flown from the UK. The guest house has 50 rooms over four floors that can accommodate a maximum of 100 people. Two more blocks will be built that will provide a maximum capacity of 300.

In a press conference with Rwanda’s foreign minister, Vincent Biruta, Patel said on Thursday: “Our world-leading migration and economic development partnership is a global first and will change the way we collectively tackle illegal migration through new, innovative and world-leading solutions.”

Patel: 'Everyone who enters UK illegally' will be considered for relocation to Rwanda – video

However, the UN refugee agency has opposed the plans and said they could be challenged under the Refugee Convention.

“[The UN High Commissioner for Refugees] remains firmly opposed to arrangements that seek to transfer refugees and asylum seekers to third countries in the absence of sufficient safeguards and standards. Such arrangements simply shift asylum responsibilities, evade international obligations, and are contrary to the letter and spirit of the Refugee Convention,” said UNHCR’s assistant high commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs. “People fleeing war, conflict and persecution deserve compassion and empathy. They should not be traded like commodities and transferred abroad for processing.”

The Tory peer Sayeeda Warsi called the scheme inhumane and cynical. “This proposal of offshoring asylum seekers to Rwanda is ineffective and costly,” she said. “It’s also inhumane and shames our proud history as advocates of human rights and the refugee convention.

She said the plan was inconsistent with the UK’s “generous response” to the Ukraine crisis and described the timing of it as cynical and political.

The British Red Cross executive director, Zoe Abrams, said the humanitarian network was “profoundly concerned” about the plans to “send traumatised people halfway round the world to Rwanda”.

“We are not convinced this drastic measure will deter desperate people from attempting to cross the Channel either. People come here for reasons we can all understand, like wanting to be reunited with loved ones, or because they speak the language. Making it harsher may do little to stop them risking their lives,” she said.

Lucy Moreton, the professional officer of the ISU immigration and border union, warned that the announcement could lead to further loss of life in the Channel as people become desperate to reach the UK before any plans to send them Rwanda are implemented.

She said: “What has been announced today is likely to push the immediate numbers up. And that will mean people crossing in less than ideal conditions, putting lives at risk.

“We are worried that they will simply panic and hurt themselves, or inadvertently hurt us, or deliberately hurt us to stay in the UK to be prosecuted rather than be sent to Rwanda. This is not going to happen quickly, possibly for months, and you are frightening everybody until then.”

The president of the Law Society of England and Wales, I. Stephanie Boyce, said there were serious questions over whether the plans complied with international law. “The government is announcing this scheme before parliament has approved the necessary powers,” she said. “There are serious questions about whether these plans would or could comply with the UK’s promises under international treaty.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/14/uk-rwanda-plan-for-asylum-seekers-decried-as-inhumane-deadly-and-expensive>

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Immigration and asylum

UK asylum seekers to be housed in no-frills hostel in Rwandan capital

People fleeing persecution to be taken to stripped-back Hope guest house in Kigali, which has only 50 rooms



Hope guest house in the Gasabo district of Kigali, Rwanda, is currently being used for tourist accommodation. Photograph: Flora Thompson/PA

[Tom Ambrose](#) and agency

Thu 14 Apr 2022 15.02 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 16.50 EDT

Asylum seekers flown to [Rwanda](#) by the British government will be put up in a no-frills hostel a mile away from Kigali city centre.

People fleeing war and persecution will be taken to a guest house, built in 2014, which only has 50 rooms available, although there are plans to expand the facility.

Hope guest house, a privately owned hostel in the Gasabo district of the capital, is currently being used for tourist accommodation, according to Rwandan government officials.

However, it is understood that Rwandan authorities are in negotiation to lease the basic and stripped-back property to be used to house UK asylum seekers while their claims are being processed.

However, given Britain's growing asylum backlog, a hostel that can only accommodate 100 people – if there are two people to a room and guests share communal bathrooms – falls well short of what is required as part of the Home Office's immigration strategy.

There are just 12 toilets and five showers for about 100 people and small 12ft by 12ft (3.6 x 3.6-metre) bedrooms, with two beds in each.

There are plans to expand the facility by building more accommodation blocks, eventually offering 150 rooms and able to sleep up to 300 people, but the government has not said how long this will take.

Asylum seekers are expected to be given three meals a day to eat in a communal dining room, with some kitchen facilities also available for those with special dietary requirements.

The plans, announced by Boris Johnson at a time when his premiership hangs by a thread after his Partygate fixed-penalty notice, have been criticised across the political spectrum.

The Tory peer Lady Warsi wrote on Twitter on Thursday that they were “ineffective and costly”, adding: “It’s also inhumane and shames our proud history as advocates of human rights and the refugee convention. It’s inconsistent with our generous response to the Ukrainian crisis. Its timing is cynical and political.”

Meanwhile, Priti Patel made a private visit to the site on Thursday to see an example of what accommodation may be on offer.

It was understood to be the home secretary's first visit to Rwanda since the deal was agreed, after being briefed by Home Office and Foreign Office

officials who have been researching the plan.

The PA Media news agency contributed to this report.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/14/uk-asylum-seekers-to-be-housed-in-no-frills-hostel-in-rwandan-capital>

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Good, bad and the ugly: how Boris Johnson's future may play out



Boris Johnson could yet wriggle out of claims he misled parliament.
Composite: Getty ; AP

The prime minister's Lazarus-like ability to survive scandals faces its sternest test yet



[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent
[@jessicaelgot](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 05.19 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 17.49 EDT

Boris Johnson is reputedly a politician with a Lazarus-like ability to overcome perpetual scandal, charm his critics and survive bruising stories that would sink his rivals. But how may this most serious misdeed of his political career ultimately play out?

1

Johnson's escape route

The most perfect scenario for Johnson is that the only fixed-penalty notice he receives for Partygate is the [one for a short birthday gathering](#) – one that Tory whips and spinners have tried to portray as an overly punitive approach by the Met police.

Even for a politician with as much luck as Johnson, that would seem far-fetched, given at least three of the most overt apparent breaches are yet to be investigated. But once MPs have accepted a law-breaking PM once, it is

easier to do it again, a fact the Welsh secretary, Simon Hart, made explicit on Thursday morning.

If Johnson can get through a week of parliamentary outrage and convince MPs he was unclear about the nature of the gatherings because they took place in the workplace that is also his home, he may wriggle out of claims he misled parliament. He could also dodge damage from Sue Gray's final report if it does not reveal substantially more than the media coverage – MPs will see it as old news.

Tory MPs are already uneasy about deposing a prime minister in the midst of the barbaric scenes in Ukraine and a further escalatory attack by Russia would also make them more nervous about moving against Johnson.

“If Russia uses chemical weapons when we are in the midst of a contest, who will provide the leadership to make some incredibly important choices?” one MP said. “That’s what keeps me awake at night over this.”

The [Conservatives](#) may also do better in the local elections than expected because the bar is low. Labour already holds a great deal of the seats up for grabs this time and may not be able to hail masses of gains. There are some councils too where the Tories say they are optimistic they can make gains – notably Sunderland, which would have symbolic “red wall” significance. A huge boost would be a win for the Tories in the Wakefield byelection, which Labour are widely expected to win.

Should Johnson survive beyond those polls, it is easy to see him cruising to Tory conference and on to the next election.

2

A painful impasse

It is widely expected in Downing Street that the prime minister will receive [at least three more fines](#) – perhaps as many as six in total. With each disclosure, increasing numbers of Conservative MPs could reach their limit and call for the prime minister to go.

But even the most hardened rebel MPs admit there is some way to go before 54 letters are reached – the threshold for Sir Graham Brady to call a vote of no confidence in the PM in his capacity as chair of the backbench 1922 Committee.

With a slow pace of disclosures from the Met police, those letters could remain a trickle rather than a flood. Just two MPs – Nigel Mills and Craig Whittaker – added their names to those calling for Johnson’s resignation after he was fined and only Mills said he would submit a letter. And at least two have been withdrawn, from Andrew Bridgen and Douglas Ross.

At the local elections, with still no sign of the Gray report, the Tories may still suffer losses but do just enough to be able to spin the story of the night as Labour’s failure to make enough gains. Equally, Labour could win Wakefield but only with a small swing on a low turnout.

Though that might be frustrating for Labour in the short term, this kind of scenario – described by one Tory official as a “long slow death march” – may arguably most benefit Labour in the longer term – a prime minister dogged by scandal but with internal opponents too weak to replace him.

3

The PM runs out of luck

One of the people who held Johnson’s fate in his hands this week was Rishi Sunak – who [could have resigned](#) after receiving his own fixed-penalty notice and denounced the chaos of Johnson’s administration.

After his own month of difficult headlines, the chancellor opted to stay put. But any further pressure on Sunak could push him to his limit – especially amid rumours Johnson intends to demote him on the advice of the strategist Lynton Crosby. His departure could trigger further resignations from other uneasy junior ministers.

No 10 sources believe Johnson could be hit with fines for six separate events, with an embarrassing racking up of costs.

The final release of the Gray report may also mean egregious personal lockdown breaches by the PM come to light for the first time – or evidence that he agreed to events being held in advance, which would suggest he lied about perceiving them as work events. It could also potentially force the resignation of senior officials – perhaps his cabinet secretary, Simon Case.

Johnson may also face a bruising time in parliament in the coming weeks. The Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, is expected to allow a vote of MPs on an investigation into whether Johnson misled the House of Commons – and they could vote to hand an investigation to the privileges committee. Any significant rebellion by Tories could be hugely damaging – and prompt more letters of no confidence.

The Conservatives could then suffer a set of shock local election results, perhaps losing totemic London councils such as Wandsworth or Westminster. Coupled with a sharp drop in the national polls, that could be enough to force a larger contingent of MPs from the party's One Nation group to move against Johnson, enough to trigger a vote of no confidence. Labour could win Wakefield with a big swing, enough to unnerve “red wall” backbenchers to help depose him.

Ultimately the decider in a vote will be how safe Tories believe their seats will be under Johnson. If they conclude a successor would have a better chance of retaining them, some MPs have suggested more than half of backbenchers and even a third of the ministerial payroll could vote against Johnson.

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Energy bills

‘I’m frightened’: prepaid meter users feel early impact of price hike

Four people on struggling today and their anxiety over the prospect of another huge rise later this year



A plug socket is switched off to save electricity. One reader says he worried he will have to sit the dark. Photograph: Matthew Stone/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Jem Bartholomew](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

Amid [the highest UK inflation for 30 years](#) and a cost of living crisis, some people who pay for their energy usage by direct debit may not feel the 54% rise of the price cap until their next bill lands.

However, for the 4.5 million people using prepayment meters the impact of the 1 April hike is already being felt. They also face a higher annual price cap for average use of £2,017 rather than £1,971 for those who pay by monthly direct debit.

Prepayment meters “trap people in fuel poverty” by charging above-average rates, according to [research](#) by the charity Church Action on Poverty. Low-income households make up the majority of users and the huge hike has prompted fears that more people will be forced to choose between food and fuel as poorer families spend a higher proportion of their income on energy.

The government has [come under fire](#) in recent weeks for failing to do enough to support households about to be hammered by the increase. Analysis from the consultancy firm Cornwall Insight estimates the cap could be raised again [later this year to £2,600](#).

The Guardian spoke to four people with prepayment meters on what the price rise means for them.

‘When the meter runs out, you try and live when the sun’s up’



Tim Hooper, 50, said he's worried about running out of energy from his prepaid meter after the price rise and facing having no electricity or gas. Photograph: Tim Hooper

Tim Hooper, 50, Norfolk

When Tim Hooper moved into a housing association property in Norfolk in 2019, it seemed like a new chapter after two years living in hostels. However, because he agreed a debt relief order while homeless, he was unable to secure an energy contract and must use a prepayment meter.

After [the energy price cap hike](#), the 50-year-old says he now expects to spend roughly £32 a week of his monthly £325 universal credit on energy costs – almost 40% of his income after housing costs. Until this month he paid about £22 a week.

“I’m really quite frightened,” he says. “There are times previously when I’ve run out of credit on my meter and just had to sit in the dark and I’m worried that might be more frequent … You try to live when the sun’s up.”



Tim Hooper's prepaid energy meter. Photograph: Tim Hooper

It was “a real kick in the teeth” when the government [removed the £20 \[universal credit\] uplift](#), says Hooper. “With the likes of the prime minister

and the chancellor, they are so out of touch. It can't be that they're ignorant of what people on low incomes experience – it must be that they just don't care."

'I thought I'd leave behind worrying about heating when I stopped being a student'

Emma Rehling, 32, Tower Hamlets

For Emma Rehling, who part-owns and part-rents a flat in Tower Hamlets, east London, gas prices have more than doubled. The 32-year-old, who lives alone and works in communications, says the amount she tops up her meter has surged from about £30 a month to £70, even after she has slightly reduced usage.

Because her block of flats has a communal boiler – which also services a local school and mosque – occupants are charged a commercial rate for their prepaid meter, making Rehling [one of up to 500,000 people losing out on consumer protections](#) like the price cap.



Emma Rehling's prepaid energy meter for her Tower Hamlets flat.
Photograph: Emma Rehling

Her communal boiler rate rocketed in February by almost 250%, from 4.05p to 13.94 a kilowatt hour, documents seen by the Guardian show. Electricity for each flat is non-communal.

“It’s the little things, I thought I would leave behind worries about putting the heating on as a student, but I’m in my 30s still worrying,” she says. “I’m lucky as I live on my own, and it’s far worse for families. But also I don’t have anyone to fall back on.”

Rehling says the situation has led to anxiety about the future as it’s impossible to save for emergencies. “My whole salary is gone at the end of each month. It’s really depressing.”

‘I try and live on £1 for food a day, but there’s nothing left to cut back’

Ben, 47, Birmingham

Ben, a 47-year-old in Birmingham, has seen his electricity and gas rise by an estimated £250 a year, according to estimates from his energy supplier seen by the Guardian. His standing charge also increased to about 90p a day. “So I’m paying over £300 a year before I’ve even turned on the light,” he says.

The rises pile yet another cost of living expense on to his shoulders, which he says he will struggle to cover with his employment and support allowance disability benefit. “I’m trying to spend £1 for food a day,” he says, relying on [anti-food waste apps](#) and buying yellow-sticker reduced items.

Ben, who asked for his full name not to be disclosed because he does not want friends “to know how bad it is”, says the threat of further energy price cap rises later this year loom ominously.

“Once you’ve cut back everything you can – when you’re spending £1 on food a day and you’re no longer even taking the bus – how are you going to cut back again? There’s nothing left to cut.”

‘Everything’s going up, it feels like the walls are closing in’



Zoe Woodward’s electricity rate is set to climb 44%. Photograph: Zoe Woodward

Zoe Woodward, 30, south-east London

Anticipating the price rises to come, Zoe Woodward, a 30-year-old in south-east London working at a university, splashed out to savour her old rate. Her electricity rate is climbing 44% from 20.4p to 29.4p a kWh, documents show, and her gas rate is jumping 82% from 4.1p to 7.5p a kWh.

“We bought a bit of a reserve while the rates were still lower,” she says. Typically Woodward would top up £40 total for her electricity and gas meters – to cover up to two weeks of costs at the one-bedroom flat she rents with her partner – but she plugged in £120 before the rise to save money.



Zoe Woodward's prepaid gas meter. 'It's a scary time,' she said. Photograph: Zoe Woodward

"We're lucky we're in a position to suddenly buy a load more energy," she says. "But it's a scary time, everywhere you look there are headlines about housing, bills, food and travel costs all going up, it can feel overwhelming."

Woodward's landlord is also increasing rent by £75 next month. "It feels like the walls are closing in. I'm not sure that you could print what I'd say to the prime minister or the chancellor. They could be doing so much more."

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Interview

Belfast's Jude Hill: 'All the celebrities at the Oscars, they were shaking with nerves!'

[Rory Carroll](#)



Star quality ... Jude Hill accepts the award for best young actor at the 27th Annual Critics Choice Awards in Los Angeles, in March 2022. Photograph: Alberto E Rodríguez/Getty Images for Critics Choice Association

Jude Hill beat 300 other hopefuls to play Buddy, the boy in Kenneth Branagh's film. The film is a glittering success – and so is the young actor whose career it launched



[@rorycarroll72](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

Amid all the scandals and controversies dogging Hollywood and the Oscars, a seemingly endless din of accusation and recrimination, talking to Jude Hill feels like a restorative balm. Instead of solemn critique, he reminds you the film industry can be about joy, fun, adventure and talented people doing something they love. He makes an encounter with Anthony Hopkins sound like a hug from a soft, giant teddy bear. This actor is a credible emissary of such outlandish tales because he has just spent a year working the Hollywood machine and emerged untouched by cynicism. It may help that he is 11 years old.

“This has been such a fun ride. I have met a bunch of really, really nice people along the way and I really hope I get to do more acting in the future. I

can't wait for it," he says. Jude probably won't have to wait long, given the plaudits for his star turn in [Belfast](#), Kenneth Branagh's semi-autobiographical homage to his home city.

Jude is speaking via Zoom from his home in a village in County Armagh, [Northern Ireland](#). Framed by an artfully hung white sheet, he is composed and articulate and appears ever so slightly older than Buddy, the character he inhabited, but the twinkly exuberance is the same.

"I think it's starting to sort of calm down around now," says Jude. "It feels good to just go to school with my friends and play with them in the playgrounds. I always was and will be Jude Hill. But yeah, going back to normality has been a relief." There is a gleam in the eye, however, lest it be thought Jude Hill is done with fame. "I don't think I'll ever go back to normal after this."



Hey Jude ... Director Kenneth Branagh and Jude Hill on the set of Belfast.
Photograph: Rob Youngson/AP

By this he means a whirlwind that started in 2020 when he beat 300 hopefuls to play Buddy, the son of working-class parents played by Jamie Dornan and Caitríona Balfe, who agonise over whether to leave Northern Ireland at the dawn of the Troubles; Ciarán Hinds and Judi Dench play Buddy's

grandparents. The riots form a backdrop to a lyrical coming-of-age story that [won Branagh an Oscar](#) for best original screenplay. Jude won gongs, too, including the Hollywood Critics Association's award for best newcomer.

The Oscars have in recent years been tainted by rows over the film industry's treatment of women, ethnic minorities and whistleblowers, but its newly minted star adored pretty much everything about Tinseltown except the heat. "The people in Los Angeles are really, really nice – they are overly nice, actually, and super funny. You could sit down and be friends with them immediately." Nobody remarked on his accent despite some US film critics [grumbling that Belfast should have had subtitles](#), a suggestion Jude skewers eloquently. "I don't think there's a need for subtitles, to be honest, just paying attention will probably work."

Accompanied by his parents, Jude found himself on the red carpet somewhat sweaty and completely enthralled. The cast of [Belfast](#) surreptitiously shared Twizzlers, American sweets, to sustain them through the evening. "I think it was my first one. It was very nice."

Jude was astonished to see that veteran A-listers seemed as edgy as he was. "All the big stars looked a bit nervous. I was literally shaking because of the adrenaline and nervousness. I was just like, oh my God, I can't believe I'm here. I kept pinching myself just to make sure that I'm not dreaming. I think if anyone goes to the Oscars they will be quite nervous because I would say it's one of the biggest events in the world. All those celebrities ... they were like me – they were shaking, they were jumping around."

During the ad breaks he wandered around the Dolby theatre exchanging greetings with celebrities. "It was just a perfect night. That's the only three words to describe it: a perfect night. All of those famous people there laughing, having fun. It was just so cool to be part of it."

Which brings us to [Will Smith](#). Asked about the actor's assault on the presenter, Chris Rock, there is a pause. "Well, I love Will Smith myself because I met him at a few of the other award ceremonies and he was probably one of the nicest people I could ever meet," says Jude. "He complimented my suit and said: 'That's fire.' And I'll always remember that compliment." There is another pause. "The incident that night, it was ...

yaaakh.” The face scrunches, the voice trails off. Briefly, Jude is lost for words. It’s a melancholic moment, a hairline crack in innocence.

Anthony Hopkins was walking past and he gave me a hug. Wow, that was such a highlight. What an aura he gives off

“Some of the audience thought it was staged. It was 10 seconds of awkward silence because none of us were sure if it was a joke or not. Everybody was on their phones texting one another to see if it was true. Nobody really knew that night until we all went home.” Jude visibly agonises over how someone apparently good could do something bad. “Personally, I love Will Smith. He’s one of the most fun and exciting and nice people that I ever met.” He is unsure what to make of Smith’s [10-year ban from the Oscars](#). “I’m just an 11-year-old kid, I don’t really pay attention to social media that much but I did hear that. I’m not so sure what I feel about that. It’s very mixed at the moment, I have to say.”

The smile returns when Jude recalls meeting [Anthony Hopkins](#) at the Governor’s Ball after the Oscars. “He was walking past and he gave me a hug. He said: ‘I loved your film, oh my God, what a masterpiece.’” I was frozen in shock, I was saying to myself: ‘Jude, this is Anthony Hopkins, say something, just say something to him.’” Jude collected himself to thank Hopkins and praise his work. “Wow, that was such a highlight. What an aura he gives off. Talking to him I just felt so safe and relaxed.”

Safe and relaxed with the actor who chilled a generation with his [depiction of Hannibal Lecter](#), and for ever transformed how we think of chianti and fava beans? But then The Silence of the Lambs came out in 1991, two decades before Jude was born. He knows Hopkins as Odin, the father of Thor in the Marvel franchise. “In Thor: Ragnarok he was very emotional. It made me cry a lot while watching that film. That man is an actor.”



Film family ... the cast of Belfast (from left) Lewis McAskie (Will), Caitríona Balfe (Ma), Judi Dench (Granny), Jamie Dornan (Pa) and Jude Hill (Buddy). Photograph: Rob Youngson/Focus Features, LLC

Four months shy of 12, Jude can sound like an old pro. He is no longer fazed when he is buttonholed by strangers. “I’m asked: ‘Are you that boy from Belfast?’ The idea of someone approaching me on the street or airport saying: ‘Oh, I know you’, it’s kind of crazy but I like it. It’s pretty cool.”

Jude’s poise is remarkable. After landing the role of Buddy, he researched Northern Ireland’s history. “Before Belfast I didn’t know what the Troubles were. I don’t think a kid my age would know what the Troubles were unless their parents or grandparents were affected.” Books, films and documentaries filled in the blanks. “That really helped to get into the heads of people from that time. I think Northern Ireland is a lot more peaceful now than it was back then and I’m grateful for that.”

There is a scene in Belfast when Buddy, in essence a young Branagh, is in a cinema mesmerised by the flickering screen. The actor who plays him eyes an acting career in the same way, despite the obstacles. “I know this is a very, very hard path to go down. You don’t get a part every second,” says Jude. He shrugs, smiles. The future is a blank, creamy page. “I’ll keep on doing my auditions and my call backs, and hopefully I’ll get one of them.”

- Belfast is released on DVD and Blu-ray on 25 April
-

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Interview

‘I prefer to live life with danger and darkness’: Jessie Buckley and Bernard Butler on breakdowns, Oscars and their album

[Sylvia Patterson](#)



‘I believe in humanity’ ... Jessie Buckley and Bernard Butler. Photograph: Eva Vermandel

Flush with awards after *The Lost Daughter* and *Cabaret* made her a star, Buckley has made musical alchemy with guitarist Butler. They discuss why being raw and unguarded is essential for great art

Fri 15 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

In a crowded recording studio in London, a woman’s voice unfurls from speakers, filling every atom in the air. Beyond a glass wall she’s barely visible in semi-darkness, surrounded by three musicians on piano, trumpet and viola. The song, *Seven Red Rose Tattoos*, is plaintive and stained with regret in the manner of vintage jazz; her voice is colossal and intimate, deep and soaring. We just don’t hear voices like this any more, somehow echoing the liquid vibrato of Scott Walker with the fathomless richness of what Karen Carpenter called her “basement”. Studio crew and colleagues are transfixed. “It set our homes on fire, watch my memories fall away,” [Jessie Buckley](#) sings. “I have seven red rose tattoos, for each of us that’s left / there’s no longer a native country, I’m on a quest to find love again.”

She and [Bernard Butler](#) – her recent musical collaborator and the man playing today’s spectral piano – are recording a moody black-and-white performance video. After they finish, collective voices declare: “So beautiful; smashed it!” Buckley, 32, could be a 90s indie or grunge kid, with her new short bob, clasps arranged on top. She dives in for a post-Covid crusher-hug, a vibrant, relaxed, unselfconscious personality given to loud honks of laughter. “I missed a hug!” she hoots as our bosoms squash together. Butler, 51 this May Day but still with the extravagantly floppy fringe he had in the 90s, offers a sturdy handshake, welcoming and intense.

It’s the day Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy addresses UN leaders, days after evidence of civilian massacres in Bucha. The words to *Seven Red Rose Tattoos*, written in 2021 before all this horror began, are now unbearably poignant but also bring – as a song so often can – a sense of solace. “Oh, totally,” nods Buckley, better known as [an Oscar-nominated](#)

actor than a profoundly emotive vocalist. “I hadn’t sung this song for a year until today, and those lines … it made me cry. That’s what is magical about music, it can mean so many things over time.”

She is sitting on the studio sofa alongside Butler, once of Suede, then a brief solo star at the tail-end of the Britpop scene, and a collaborator with dozens of star musicians since. Seven Red Rose Tattoos is taken from a stunning album they have made together, *For All Our Days That Tear the Heart*. “As artists,” he despairs of the ongoing slaughter, “all we can do is express emotion.” Buckley bolts back upright.

“*I believe* in humanity,” she declares, defiantly – her conversation is full of this firm emphasis. “*I believe* in people. None of us would be standing if someone hadn’t picked us up off the ground, in the most abstract way and also physical way, at certain times in our life. *I have* to believe in that. And I guess when you can affect a human with music or art or a hug, we’ve got to hold on to those things. They’re the things that will keep us sane. They do for me anyway.”



Award-winning … Buckley with Eddie Redmayne in the West End revival of *Cabaret*. Photograph: Marc Brenner

Two years ago they were strangers, paired together by Buckley's manager who sensed they were kindred spirits. They barely knew each other's work: Buckley had loved the Butler-produced album [Old Wow](#) by the folk singer Sam Lee, Butler had loved Buckley's mesmerising performance, on an American chatshow, of the song Glasgow from [Wild Rose](#), Buckley's Bafta-nominated starring role as a Glaswegian ex-con country singer with fierce dreams of Nashville glory.

Since then, she has been a galactically soaring star, an unconventional presence in often-disturbing dramas: traumatised wife in [Chernobyl](#), confused student in [I'm Thinking of Ending Things](#), murderous nurse in *Fargo*. In 2021, she thrilled as Sally Bowles in the London West End revival of *Cabaret* (alongside Eddie Redmayne as Emcee, the pair [winning best actor and actress](#) at Sunday's Olivier awards), and a sexually charged Juliet in Sky Arts' *Romeo and Juliet* alongside good pal Josh O'Connor. [The Lost Daughter](#) then brought this year's Oscar nod, with Buckley stunningly authentic as a suffocated and sensual young mother, playing the younger version of Olivia Colman's character.

The spotlight threatens to eclipse even as luminous a collaboration as Buckley and Butler's, and when we are finally alone, we are off to a shaky start. Earlier, among her colleagues, Buckley had openly discussed this year's Will Smith Oscars incident (consensus: a sad night for all concerned) but now, on the record, she won't go there. "I don't want to give it any more weight," she says, warmly but firmly, loth to create music-obliterating headlines: "It's sensationalist."

She had a great night anyway in her pink satin frock, predominantly spent "in the bar"; she was so star-struck when Colman introduced her to Bill Murray, "who I love", that she couldn't speak. "I totally bottled it!" She would prefer an Oscars night where "we could all just wear tracksuits, have pizza and beer, that would be a great party".

Sitting alongside her, sliding ever-downwards, Butler's silent demeanour is set to thunderingly bored, tolerating what he clearly thinks is irrelevant showbiz nonsense. I invite him in, and ask if he's ever worked with an Oscar nominee before. This isn't the right question either. "I don't usually ask," he scoffs. I wonder if he finds the multi-talents of his latest, exceptionally

gifted collaborator, verging on the outrageous? This jovial notion is, it seems, even worse.

“Honestly?” he considers. “We meet, we write songs, we judge each other on what we can create, in the purest way. We don’t sit writing lists of talents and ticking them off thinking: great, I think we’re there now, shall we write a song? We never talk about any of this stuff. We just didn’t. Don’t.” Jessie: “And it’s great!”

I wonder if they, too, think no one sings like Buckley does any more. They are both bewildered. “I have no idea,” says Buckley, while Butler says: “We just didn’t discuss it: again, it’s about the magic in the moment. I’m not thinking: is Jessie’s voice up to the standard of Ella Fitzgerald?”



Bernard Butler and Jessie Buckley. Photograph: Eva Vermandel

To my ears, *For All Our Days That Tear the Heart* might be the most affecting musical collaboration of Butler’s life, sumptuously orchestral but so intimate you can hear the very fingerprints on acoustic guitar. This brooding soundscape is both haunting and joyous, from its opening echoes of Joni Mitchell on *The Eagle and the Dove*, to the rousing male choir in *Footnotes on the Map*, to the closing, delicately yearning *Catch the Dust*. Buckley’s lyrics tell human stories through visions of birds, beasts and

water, stories of loneliness, regret and resolution, of skins shed, buttons undone and the madness of being alive.

Their connection was instantaneous. Buckley, from Killarney, south-west Ireland, the eldest of five in a boisterous and creative household (dad a part-time poet, mum a vocal coach/harpist), had no idea that Butler's parents are Irish, from Dún Laoghaire. Inspiration ignited not only through music (notes swapped on Nina Simone, Beth Gibbons, Talk Talk, Patti Smith, Gram Parsons, Pentangle), but painting, poetry, flamenco dancing, caravan holidays in Ireland and one book in particular, Maurice O'Sullivan's 1933 memoir [20 Years A-Growing](#), an ode to remote living on the Blasket islands, off the coast of County Kerry, a favourite book of Butler's for 15 years and the all-time favourite of Buckley's gran.

You ask for an awful lot of trust. I'm afraid too. If [there's] not fear, then you're just jogging, aren't you?

Bernard Butler

Buckley had rarely worked like they did, creating something new from nothing – the Wild Rose soundtrack mostly featured covers, and her interpretations of musical theatre numbers go back way beyond Cabaret to her 2008 breakthrough on Andrew Lloyd Webber-helmed talent show I'd Do Anything. “I was scared, it was raw, exposing,” she says of her start with Butler. “I was sitting on a man’s floor who I’d never met. I never thought we’d even make a song, let alone an album.”

“You ask for an awful lot of trust,” adds Butler, of his lifelong collaborative process. “I’m afraid, too. If [there’s] not fear, then you’re just jogging, aren’t you?”

It’s a wonder Buckley had the time to make music at all (she is, she laughs, a “do it all” person), also completing two intriguing films last year, back-to-back: [Men](#), a high-concept horror movie populated by menacing male protagonists (all played by Rory Kinnear), and [Women Talking](#) (with Frances McDormand, Ben Whishaw and Claire Foy), the story of a Mennonite colony bedevilled by sexual assault. Instead of being tormented for months by scenes of toxic masculinity, she says she saw opportunities to

learn, and has been drawn throughout her working life to dark and even frightening stories.

“Well, there’s frightening things happening,” she notes, ruefully. “I’m a pretty joyful person but when I want to understand something more, I’m not afraid to go wherever it requires me to go. There’s so much hoodwinking going on around us that I want to know the belly of the beast. It’s in *all* of us.”

Butler was a sensitive young man who found much of the 90s toxically masculine: to him a boorish, boozy, druggy celebration of what he called earlier this year the “rock’n’roll caricature”. A prodigious guitarist, he joined the fledgling Suede, and frontman Brett Anderson, at 19 and stormed away at 24. After some bombastic, peaks-and-troughs solo releases he finally found his identity in his 30s as a creative foil, working as a producer, songwriter or guitarist with artists ranging from Duffy and Sophie Ellis-Bextor to the Libertines and the Cribs.

“I had a very heightened experience when I was young,” he says. “People always said, ‘You’re too sensitive’ and I was, ‘Sorry, no I’m not’. Now I say, ‘Yeah, I’m fucking sensitive, yeah I’ve got senses!’ I feel them, express them and I wouldn’t be doing this for 30 years if people weren’t picking up on them. I’m happy that element is respected more now. I teach young people as well and that’s one thing I look out for, introversion and sensitivity, and really protect people who have that. Because I ... wasn’t [protected]. But fuck it. I did all right. I’m incredibly lucky. To be here right now with Jessie, doing this. And anyone from that generation, who stamped down that expression and is now not getting that, more fool them. I win.”

Buckley cheers: “Yeah! It comes through in the end.”



Broken record ... Suede's Brett Anderson and Butler. Photograph: Stuart Mostyn/Redferns

Does he have any connection whatsoever with Anderson these days? “I don’t have any ... time,” he replies, a small smile dancing on his lips, “to connect with anything I made beyond two hours ago.”

Buckley contemplates her own chaotic 20s, which came in the wake of two supposed teenage failures: rejected for a place at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and runnerup aged 17 in *I'd Do Anything* (the search for an unknown Nancy in a West End run of *Oliver!*). She moved to London where she sold cereal on a market stall, and spent two years routinely ignored as resident jazz singer in the Mayfair nightclub Annabel’s. Finally accepted by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, she graduated in 2013, and by 2016 had starred in the BBC’s adaptation of *War & Peace*. Spooked by tabloid headlines when she and her co-star, James Norton, ended their two-year relationship, she has been protective of her privacy ever since, and recently moved to a “mad old house” in Norfolk built in the 1600s, where she’s always finding dead butterflies indoors.

“I had ups, downs, breakdowns, like everyone, as I probably will many times,” she says. “I fell off stage on the first night of *Cabaret*. I got back up,

finished the show, had a panic attack, came back the next day and did it all again. Those moments, they are what make you.”

I ask Buckley if, when she sings, that’s the real her as opposed to the “acting” her. “I’ve no idea what that is,” she says. Butler is having none of it, either: “We’re all operating on all levels – when I’m hunched over a piano it’s not just ‘there’s a C sharp’. I’m performing.” But that’s really you – you’re not pretending to be a piano player, are you? “Er … yeah!” Laughter ensues.

“Aren’t we all pretending all the time?” Buckley muses. “But even with acting, I want to experience something real in that moment, not something I’ve created. It’s an amalgamation. So it *is* me.” You’re not wearing a cloak, then, of someone else? “No!” she beams. “I don’t wanna put anything on. I wanna take it off. I do. You bet!” She leans forward, makes two fists and pummels them on to her thighs. “Oh, I way prefer to live life with danger and darkness and character, and wildness and stories and ancient things and new things,” she declares, vibrating with passion, as her musical partner looks on in admiration. “And put it all *into* you and just see what comes out, y’know? Fuck it. That’s it! What are you *doing* wasting your time with anything else? *Love*, and live and do it all and …” She pauses, and ends. “Don’t be afraid.”

For All Our Days That Tear the Heart is released on 10 June on EMI Records. The single The Eagle and the Dove is out now

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2022.04.15 - Opinion

- Rape is being used as a weapon in Ukraine. It should be treated as a war crime
- No sleep, little care, no medication: my 80-hour A&E ordeal
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[Opinion](#)[War crimes](#)

Russia's mass rapes in Ukraine are a war crime. Its military leaders must face prosecution

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Sexual violence will continue in war zones until commanders actually end up in the dock for overseeing such atrocities



Illustration: Thomas Pullin/The Guardian

Fri 15 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 10.15 EDT

They read like messages from one of the creepier dating apps, or else the sort of unwanted lechery with which many young women on social media are grimly familiar.

One man suggests sharing “a large bed, we could sleep together” and then letting “what we both want happen”. Another is keen to let the recipient know she is “so beautiful”, while a third immediately asks, “Are you single?” But these aren’t just any old clumsy sexual overtures. These are messages left for women fleeing war-torn Ukraine, on a Facebook group seeking to match refugees with Britons offering sanctuary. The grotesque parody of shelter some men see fit to offer is a chance to flee the threat of rape by Russian soldiers, but only for somewhere you might want to barricade yourself into the spare bedroom at night. An [undercover reporter](#) posing as a refugee found more than half the messages sent to her came from men living alone, some explicit about the strings attached to their offers.

What kind of man, you may wonder, sees in a tragedy a sexual opportunity? Well, in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, it was British aid workers who [paid desperate locals for sex](#). In Somalia, ravaged by war, it was Belgian and

Italian peacekeepers sent by the UN. In the makeshift refugee camps of northern France, it was people smugglers [preying on potential clients](#). And now on the borders between Ukraine and its neighbours, it's [sex traffickers](#), masquerading as good Samaritans offering unwary women a lift.

Wherever there is conflict, there is chaos and disruption and unguarded moments for women and children, and with depressing predictability some will always seek to exploit that. But it is the predictability that makes it more preventable. The UN has now asked the British government to ban single men from housing female refugees, advice that Michael Gove (the cabinet minister in charge of the refugee matching scheme) should act on and make policy. The more complex emerging challenge, however, is what to do about the horrific scale of systematic sexual violence emerging inside [Ukraine](#) itself, as the Russian retreat from occupied towns and villages frees victims to emerge and tell their stories.

As the war correspondent Christina Lamb writes bleakly in her book [Our Bodies, Their Battlefield](#), rape is “the cheapest weapon known to man”, one deployed every bit as strategically and deliberately as bombs and bullets. The aim is to intimidate, degrade and terrify civilians, and in some cultures to ensure victims are rejected by their own families. But some of the stories emerging from Ukraine now have a particularly chilling dimension, one all too familiar in wars of ethnic cleansing, which is the attempt to force women to bear the invading army’s children.

In the [rape camps](#) set up by Serbian soldiers during the Balkan wars, victims were told they would be forced to bear Serbian babies. In Iraq, Islamic State systematically trafficked and [sexually enslaved women](#) from the Yazidi minority as part of a campaign to destroy the community from within, knowing the children born of rape would be deemed Muslims and not Yazidi.

Now Ukraine's human rights ombudsman, Lyudmyla Denisova, [reports that](#) in Bucha, 25 girls and women aged 14 to 24 were held in a basement by Russian soldiers who threatened to “rape them to the point where they wouldn’t want sexual contact with any man, to prevent them from having Ukrainian children.” Nine of them are now pregnant. The brutal message is

that even if Ukrainians won't submit to being Russian, their unborn children will have no choice. Meanwhile, Kyiv claims Ukrainian children from occupied cities have been [forcibly moved across the border](#), fast-tracked for adoption by Russian families. When the US president, Joe Biden, talked this week of [genocide in Ukraine](#), lawyers responded that there wasn't yet enough evidence to meet the legal threshold for such a charge. But at the very least, the propaganda coming out of Moscow suggests this war isn't simply over territory or strategic interests; that it is increasingly about eradicating the very idea of being Ukrainian, submerging national identity into some twisted fantasy of a Greater Russia. These are war crimes, every bit as much as chemical weapons attacks, and must be prosecuted as vigorously.

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, this week launched the [Murad Code](#) – named after Nadia Murad, a Nobel peace prize-winning Yazidi woman who survived capture by IS – which is a welcome move to improve the collection of evidence from survivors worldwide. But Ukraine is already diligently gathering evidence. What it needs is help bringing the perpetrators to justice.

The Tory peer Arminka Helic [has called for](#) a new permanent international body to investigate, prosecute and stamp out rape as a war crime. Helic knows what she's talking about: a refugee from the Bosnian war, she went on to become special adviser to the then foreign secretary, William Hague. In 2012 she persuaded him to set up an initiative on sexual exploitation in war zones that is still bearing fruit today. But as she puts it, "impunity is the norm" still for a war crime that is less visible than bombed-out cities or mass graves, and often taken less seriously. Training and culture within armed forces worldwide can start to change that, but it's only when commanding officers actually end up in the dock for overseeing sexual war crimes that the message will really hit home. We can, and must, do better than this.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionNHS

No sleep, little care, no medication: my 80-hour A&E ordeal

[Fay Schopen](#)

Over four days and three nights, I saw the catastrophic predicament that the NHS finds itself in



‘Many may end up in grave danger thanks to this government making it nearly impossible for dedicated, hard-working and underpaid staff.’
Photograph: Julian Claxton/Alamy

Fri 15 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 11.08 EDT

When covert video footage emerged of Boris Johnson leaving St Thomas’ hospital in south London after being [treated for Covid there two years ago](#), I wondered if, being a VIP, he had received a different standard of care from the average patient.

I can safely say that had Johnson – or better yet, Sajid Javid – experienced anything like I did during an almost unimaginable, yet very real, 80-hour stay in A&E last week, the [NHS](#) just might be in line for some positive changes in the future, rather than its inevitable deeper plunge into crisis.

I saw first-hand over the course of three long nights and four days just what a catastrophic predicament the NHS is in. I've got stage-four cancer, and when my condition rapidly declined at home last week, both my GP and a specialist cancer care nurse urged me to go to A&E. A previous visit had left me stranded on a wheelchair outside a toilet in a corridor for more than seven hours before I discharged myself. I begged for other options. But there were none.

All my worst fears came true. The A&E was so understaffed that patients were often unable to access adequate, let alone good or outstanding care – through no fault of the staff, the vast majority of whom clearly care deeply about their jobs and their patients. The hospital was in “black status” when I was there, meaning there were no beds available at all. The staff themselves were astonished by the length of my stay in A&E without being transferred to a bed on a ward.

I vacillated between utter anguish, mental breakdown (sleep is impossible; no visitors are allowed) and desperate action (firing off emails to every single medic I could think of, including the head of the trust). Some of my vital medications were delayed by hours, and I was left drenched in my own urine for about 40 minutes.

And I was one of the lucky ones. Everyone is vulnerable in hospital, but the vast majority of patients there were among the most powerless in society – elderly, frail, and many clearly with dementia. They shouted out helplessly for nurses, but were often not heard due to the chaos. Security guards and police were a regular presence dealing with disruptive and gravely disturbed patients; people on trolleys took up every available inch of space.

Eventually, on the last day, I was seen by what felt like every single doctor and admin person in the hospital, including the head of nursing – something a friend who works in an A&E in London said she had never heard of

happening before. The doctors had a flurry of information and diagnoses for me; a rare blood disease had finally been pinpointed; another blood transfusion was needed; gastric and respiratory specialists wanted to say their piece; and I was promised a ward bed by the end of the day – although that quickly changed to being discharged. It did not make up for the previous four days when, except at point of admission, I saw an oncologist just once, and that was only after desperately ringing around the hospital switchboard from my bed.

On my final stretch, having requested but not received my pain and anti-sickness medication, which meant I was unable to eat, I was taken to a waiting area where hospital transport would, eventually, take me home. At the point of total, traumatic breakdown, I begged for my medicine – only to find there was just one nurse charged with medicating 30 people. Another nurse came in and said the hospital was as bad as he had ever seen it. It was, he said, “dangerously busy”. Apparently, 500 people had come through A&E that day, and it was only about 8pm.

When the nurse finally approached to give me my medication, a standoff ensued. I flinched, and warned her it would hurt going into my cannula. My veins had given up. She couldn’t give it to me then, she said. Maybe a direct injection instead. “No, put it in the cannula,” I begged, “they don’t care in A&E”. In my highly emotional state, I meant that they know it hurts and they do it regardless.

She stepped back from me, put her hand on her chest and looked genuinely offended. “We do care,” she said. “*This* is A&E. We do care.” And she did. She summoned a healthcare assistant to hold my hand and try to distract me by asking me about my daughter I was so desperate to go home to. Her nonsense manner melted away and she sang to me while putting my medicine through my worn-out veins as tears rolled down my cheeks. Shortly afterwards I was taken home – the best journey of my life.

I am just one patient among many. There are millions of similarly vulnerable, desperately ill people in hospitals up and down the country. The spectre of disaster hovering over our healthcare system can be traced back directly to 2010, when Tory budget cuts slashed training places for medics,

leading us neatly to today's dire staff shortages. Add in Brexit and rising coronavirus cases – last week an estimated 5 million people in the UK had the disease, patients are pouring through A&E doors, and there is no glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

Many may end up in grave danger thanks to this government making it nearly impossible for dedicated, hard-working and underpaid staff to translate their care and attention more thoroughly to them.

- Fay Schopen is a journalist based in Kent
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OpinionEaster

Easter easily beats Christmas – who can be miserable about the advent of spring?

[Emma Brockes](#)



This year feels particularly jolly because Ramadan, Passover and Easter all align – putting billions of us on the same page



A giant Easter egg in Koprivnica, Croatia. Photograph: Antonio Bronić/Reuters

Fri 15 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 12.41 EDT

Easter is the best holiday, hands down, no debate. In October, when the first Christmas decorations start to appear, it triggers deep dread in all right-thinking people. I'm in the US, where Thanksgiving doesn't land for me, ditto the Fourth of July. There's no day off for Halloween, but in any case that's an occasion just for the kids. Like everything else, [Easter](#) has become more commercial – the shops are full of wicker baskets stuffed with shredded paper that once spilled, will never fully be expunged from your home. But relative to other holidays, it feels like the one grownup break in the year. Truly, who can be miserable about the advent of spring?

For non-believers raised in a roughly Christian tradition, part of the joy of Easter has to do with it being uncoupled from religion without an attendant secular mythology springing up in its place. "The Easter bunny isn't real," said one of my children this week, and after giving it a moment's thought, I realised she was right. No one sells the [Easter bunny](#) as real to their kids, even as we still desperately for Santa and the Tooth Fairy. I'm not sure why this is; on paper, a giant bunny isn't any more ludicrous than a fat man flying on a sleigh. But no one cares enough about Easter to put in the ground work and the resulting low pressure of the event is sublime.

In fact, it's barely an event at all. There are no Easter rules, no expense or outlay, and only the most minimal forethought and planning required. Swing by the shops for some Cadbury Mini Eggs and a large chicken and you're set for the weekend. You can see family if you want, but don't have to. There's no Easter equivalent of Friendsgiving, or Friendsmas, at least not one that requires its own word. Being alone at Easter isn't a thing. You can spend the entire long weekend watching all five seasons of Breaking Bad and eating out of your kettle without fighting off messaging that you're doing it wrong.

Perhaps things feel particularly jolly this year because, unusually, Ramadan, Passover and Easter all align. Like an eclipse, this only happens once every few decades and puts millions of us on the same page. In the US, the public schools shut for a week, so it's not the two-week juggernaut of the Easter holiday in England. But we get Friday off, the sun has finally come out, and the daffodils at the roadside are blooming. It can be hard to enjoy summer in the knowledge that summer is passing. But at Easter, everything good is to come.

And with low expectations, it's hard for things to derail too disastrously, or for the Easter weekend to be held up against too-vivid memories. As a child, my entire Easter drama consisted of making the [chocolate bunny](#) last, starting at the ears and nibbling half an inch a day so that the greying carcass of its feet were still in the fridge in late May. In my 20s, my presiding memory of Easter is of the bus replacement service; track work that always seemed to be scheduled for that weekend I went home.

It didn't matter. There was no hurry. No one's in a hurry at Easter. You have days and days to get there; it's not like the mad Christmas Eve dash. If you faff about on Good Friday and miss your train, you still have the whole of Saturday to get home, and if you miss Easter Sunday, there's still Easter Monday. I'm not saying there aren't bad memories of Easter in among the good: Harry Secombe singing the Old Rugged Cross on ITV; [simnel cake](#); off-brand chocolate that turned to watery paste in your mouth. In 2002, the Queen Mother died on Easter weekend and I trudged back to London to work. This year, I know a lot of hacks glancing very nervously in the direction of the Queen. It's only Easter; if anything happens you can't really say no.

But the blossom is out in New York, we're heading into a chunky break with no commitments, and the summer is yet to come. It has taken a long time to get here. Recognising the superiority of this weekend is something that only comes with maturity, like understanding dark is better than milk chocolate, and cheese is better than any chocolate. Happy Easter.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist based in New York
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Immigration and asylum**](#)

UK asylum seekers sent to Rwanda? That takes punishment of fellow humans to a new level

[Enver Solomon](#)

The government wants to pay large sums of your money to a system already proven to be cruel and ineffective



Migrants crossing the Channel from France, March 2022. Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 14 Apr 2022 06.40 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 14.18 EDT

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the heartbreakingly stories of [families torn apart](#) and desperate women and children fleeing violence and atrocities have reminded us all of the brutal reality faced by refugees escaping conflict and oppression all over the world.

The British public have shown remarkable compassion and understanding in [wanting to offer](#) a warm welcome to all Ukrainians seeking sanctuary in the UK.

But instead of harnessing this compassion for refugees and making Britain a nation of sanctuary – as the Scottish government [has pledged to do](#) – Boris Johnson’s administration in England has chosen to effectively [offshore people seeking asylum](#) to Rwanda; to treat them as no more than human cargo to be shipped thousands of miles away so they are out of sight and out of mind.

The Home Office says the focus will be on single men and women, including survivors of torture and trafficking, who will in effect be forcibly removed by being given a choice of either a one-way ticket into the Rwandan asylum system or fleeing into the hands of people smugglers again. They would no longer be given a fair hearing on UK soil – and would be penalised for having, through no fault of their own, taken the wrong route to safety. It takes the government’s desire to punish and expel our fellow human beings to another level.

Under its cruel nationality and borders bill, which will next week return to the Commons after being [defeated for a second time](#) by the Lords, those coming across the Channel would be criminalised and could face imprisonment for [up to four years](#).

Rwanda already hosts [around 140,000 refugees](#) in six refugee camps. The country’s president, Paul Kagame, regularly speaks about his commitment to refugee protection, having himself been a refugee in Uganda. However, the country has a poor human rights record, is a source country for many refugees who fear political persecution and torture by the Kagame regime, and has been accused of [engaging in assassination attempts](#) against Rwandan exiles abroad. If you were a Ukrainian refugee or an Afghan fleeing the Taliban, you certainly wouldn’t want to be sent to Rwanda.

Sending people fleeing oppression and violence from Afghanistan, the Middle East or even Europe to Rwanda is not only cruel, but as a policy it is ridiculous. Only a quarter of asylum applicants in the UK in 2021 were [from](#)

[African countries](#), so there is no economic development case for sending people to their home continents. And as Professor Alexander Betts of Oxford University notes, contrary to popular belief, very few refugees move on from host countries in Africa. [Research from his team from Kenya](#) suggests that while just 8% of refugees will leave their temporary homes in camps and cities in any given year, most will move within east Africa, and just 0.1% will move to Europe.

Britain is not the first country to make a deal with Rwanda. Israel sent Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers to Rwanda under a policy that was eventually abandoned following international and domestic [criticism and protests](#). A study by German academics found they weren't given the opportunity to apply for asylum – and were forced to embark on dangerous journeys at the hands of people smugglers to get to safety elsewhere.

When Australia sought to send people seeking asylum to neighbouring pacific island nations Papua New Guinea and Nauru, the [policy was a failure](#). A [review of the sorry episode](#) by the University of NSW in Sydney concluded it didn't deter people taking dangerous journeys or do anything to break the business model of people smugglers. Instead it incurred huge financial cost for taxpayers, triggered multiple legal challenges and led to "systemic cruelty" with people [taking their own lives and self-harming](#). Over the past decade, Australian government data suggests that just more than [3,000 asylum seekers have been outsourced, at a total cost of over £1bn](#), and most were ultimately recognised as refugees.

And let's not forget that the people the government is seeking to offshore are not all illegal economic migrants, as it claims, but are mainly those who have escaped bloodshed and terror. They are exercising their right under the UN refugee convention, which the UK was a founding signatory of, to seek asylum in a country of their choosing.

Government data shows that those coming across the Channel are [mainly from 10 countries](#), including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan, where persecution and oppression are not uncommon. Overall, around two-thirds are actually [granted refugee status](#) or protection in the UK.

There is little to suggest the government's plans to send people seeking asylum to Rwanda will be a success for them individually, or for the government in terms of deterring people from making dangerous journeys at the hands of people smugglers. There are, of course, better ways to create a fair, humane and orderly asylum system. It is possible to demonstrate control while protecting the most vulnerable. Doing so has two main elements.

First, protection in host countries around the world must be strengthened. In a globalised world, if the UK is serious about reducing the need for refugees to take dangerous journeys, it should invest in humanitarian and development aid for them in countries where people flee from. In east [Africa](#), it should support countries such as Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda to better protect the refugees that they already host.

Instead of spending millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on transferring refugees thousands of miles away, we could allocate that money to assist hundreds of thousands of refugees before they risk their lives by travelling to the UK. Based on Australia's failed experience, offshoring one asylum seeker for one year is likely to cost the same as supporting thousands of refugees already in situ for a year.

Second, and most importantly, the government should adopt effective policies that will actually address the Channel crossings. It should invest in fair and effective asylum processing when people arrive, on both the beaches in France and in the UK. At the end of last year, [more than 100,000 people](#) were waiting for an outcome on their initial claim for asylum – and of them 62,000 had been [waiting for more than six months](#). The fact that initially no more than a few hundred will actually be sent to Rwanda suggests the government is hedging its bets in the knowledge that it may not deliver what it hopes, and be quietly shelved as happened in Australia.

We should also offer humanitarian visas from assessment centres set up at British embassies elsewhere in Europe, including France and other key "hotspots", to enable people in need to travel without resorting to smuggling networks. And critically, we should work multilaterally – not with remote countries such as Rwanda, but through an effective bilateral agreement with France and our EU neighbours.

There are many ways to achieve effective borders while protecting vulnerable refugees. They need not rely on criminalising men, women and children who reach our shores, or on paying large sums of taxpayers' money to other countries to run schemes that are proven to be cruel and ineffective.

- Enver Solomon is chief executive of the Refugee Council. Alexander Betts, professor of forced migration and international affairs at the University of Oxford, also contributed to this article
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[Ireland](#)

Man charged with murdering two men and assaulting another in Sligo

Yousef Palani, 22, appeared at Sligo district court to be charged in case that prompted vigils across Ireland



Crowds gathered outside Sligo district court before the police van carrying Yousef Palani left. Photograph: Brian Lawless/PA

Rory Carroll Ireland correspondent

[@rorycarroll72](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 15.50 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 16.57 EDT

A 22-year-old man has been charged with murdering two men and an assault on another in three separate attacks this week in County Sligo in the west of [Ireland](#).



Aidan Moffitt (left) and Michael Snee, both from Sligo, were found dead in their own homes this week. Photograph: Garda/PA Wire

Yousef Palani appeared at a special sitting of Sligo district court on Thursday afternoon, a day after his [arrest](#). Wearing a grey tracksuit and black training shoes, Palani did not speak during the brief hearing.

He was charged with murdering Aidan Moffitt, 41, and Michael Snee, 58, at their homes on 10 and 12 April. Palani, with an address at Markievicz Heights in Sligo town, was also charged with assault causing serious harm to another man, Anthony Burke, on 9 April.

A police van brought the accused from Sligo Garda station to the courthouse, where scores of people and camera crews had gathered. Some people shouted as the van passed.



Yousef Palani was remanded in custody. Photograph: Brian Lawless/PA Wire

The defending solicitor, Gerry McGovern, told Judge Sandra Murphy there would be no application for bail and asked for Palani to be closely watched in case he attempted to kill himself. He requested immediate psychiatric assessment. “This is quite an urgent case,” he said. McGovern also requested free legal aid, saying his client was unemployed.

Murphy granted both requests and said the defendant would receive any necessary medical treatment. Palani was remanded in custody to appear at Sligo district court by video link on 21 April.

The killings shocked Sligo and prompted vigils across Ireland. Friends and neighbours paid tribute to Moffitt and Snee.

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[China](#)

Shanghai residents forced from homes clash with police over Covid policy

Scuffles follow complaints of food shortages and over-zealous officials forcing people into quarantine

Police in hazmat suits scuffle with people in Shanghai – video

[Vincent Ni](#), China affairs correspondent, and agencies

Fri 15 Apr 2022 03.31 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 10.54 EDT

Video footage shared on social media have shown residents of Shanghai scuffling with hazmat-suited police who were forcing them to surrender their homes for coronavirus quarantine facilities, in a sign of rising discontent in the city.

Shanghai, a megacity with a population of 25 million and China's key financial hub, has been experiencing the country's biggest outbreak since Covid-19 was first reported in Wuhan over two years ago. The outbreak has prompted criticism of local authorities, and is proving a major test of Beijing's commitment to its stringent zero-Covid policy.

Residents who have been locked down since late March have complained about food shortages and over-zealous officials forcing them into central quarantine facilities, as authorities rush to construct tens of thousands of beds to house patients with Covid. Daily infections are topping 20,000.

Late on Thursday, multiple videos circulated on social media showing residents outside a compound shouting at ranks of officials holding police shields as the officers tried to break through their line.

In one clip, police appear to make several arrests as the residents accuse them of hitting people. Screaming and crying could also be heard in the

background. Bystanders took out their phones to film the scene.

The incident was triggered when authorities ordered 39 households to move from the compound so that patients with Covid could be housed there “in order to meet the needs of epidemic prevention and control”, according to Zhangjiang Group, the developer of the housing complex.

“It’s madness,” one resident in the area told the Guardian. “We’ve never thought this could have happened in Shanghai. Are we no longer China’s window to the world? Aren’t bureaucrats in Shanghai ashamed of what’s been happening in our city in recent weeks?”

Thursday’s incident has provided a rare insight into public anger in China, a country where the authorities brook little dissent and censors routinely wipe information relating to protests from the internet as fast as it is uploaded.

In one live-streamed video, a woman can be heard weeping and asking “why are they taking an old person away?” as officials appeared to put someone into a car. In another video, some residents were seen kneeling on the ground begging the police to stop.

Zhangjiang Group said it had compensated the tenants and moved them into other units in the same compound.

In a separate live-streamed video, a woman is heard shouting: “Zhangjiang Group is trying to turn our compound into a quarantine spot, and allow Covid-positive people to live in our compound.”

The group said it recognised videos of the compound that had appeared on the internet on Thursday and that the situation had now settled down after “some tenants obstructed the construction” of a quarantine fence.

China’s internet censors quickly stepped in to scrub evidence of the clash from Chinese social media sites – as they did with several other videos that have appeared over the last few weeks – with search results for the name of the apartment complex disappearing from Weibo by Friday morning.

Yet, despite the effort to silence discontent online, similar videos are still being shared among citizens. They have also appeared on platforms that are banned by Chinese regulators, such as Twitter and Facebook.

On Friday, Shanghai reported a slight decline in new infections, at over 23,000 cases. The number was down from more than 27,000 the previous day. The large majority of the city is still under a strict lockdown.

In the last few weeks, Shanghai residents have vented their anger on social media about food shortages and heavy-handed controls, including the killing of a pet corgi by a health worker and a now-softened policy of separating infected children from their virus-free parents.

Authorities have vowed the city “would not relax in the slightest”, preparing more than 100 new quarantine facilities to receive every person who tests positive – whether or not they show symptoms.

Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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[Arizona](#)

Arizona man froze nearly 200 animals in garage freezer

Some of the animals found by authorities in Mohave County, including dogs, rabbits, birds and others, were frozen alive



A New England cottontail rabbit hops away after being released at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. Photograph: Robert F Bukaty/AP

Associated Press

Thu 14 Apr 2022 20.51 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 22.25 EDT

An [Arizona](#) man faces animal cruelty charges after 183 dead dogs, rabbits, birds and other animals were found in a freezer, including some that were apparently frozen while alive, officials said.

Mohave county deputies and animal control officers found the animals in a garage freezer on 3 April after a woman reported that Michael Patrick Turland, 43, hadn't returned snakes she'd lent him for breeding, the sheriff's

office said Thursday in a statement. The freezer was at a home that Turland previously rented in Golden Valley, a rural community in far western Arizona.

The frozen animals included dogs, turtles, lizards, birds, snakes, mice, rats and rabbits, the statement said. “Several of the animals appeared to have been frozen alive due to their body positioning.” The sheriff’s office said they were kept in a “large-sized chest freezer”.

The home’s owner reportedly discovered the frozen animals while cleaning after Turland and his wife vacated the property. The owner then contacted the woman who notified the sheriff’s office, the statement said.

Turland was arrested at the home Wednesday when deputies were told he had returned to the property, the office said.

“When interviewed, Turland eventually admitted to placing some of the animals in the freezer when they were still alive,” the statement said.

Court records didn’t list an attorney who could comment on behalf of Turland, who was arrested on 94 counts of animal cruelty.

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US Capitol attack

US Capitol rioter who blames Trump for his actions is found guilty

Dustin Byron Thompson, 38, claimed he was following orders when he stole a coat rack from a Senate office



Jurors were played recordings of speeches that Donald Trump (pictured) and Rudolph Giuliani delivered on 6 January 2021, before the riot erupted.
Photograph: Jim Bourg/Reuters

Associated Press in Washington

Fri 15 Apr 2022 04.19 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 08.11 EDT

An Ohio man who claimed he was only “following presidential orders” from [Donald Trump](#) when he stormed the US Capitol has been convicted by a jury that took less than three hours to reject his novel defence for obstructing Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s presidential victory.

The federal jury on Thursday also found Dustin Byron Thompson, 38, guilty of all five of the other charges in his indictment, including stealing a coat rack from an office inside the Capitol during the riot on 6 January 2021. The maximum sentence for the obstruction count, the lone felony, would be 20 years' imprisonment.

Jurors did not buy Thompson's defence, in which he blamed Trump and members of the president's inner circle for the insurrection and for his own actions.

One juror who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity said: "Donald Trump wasn't on trial in this case."

The juror, a 40-year-old man, said as he left the courthouse: "Everyone agrees that Donald Trump is culpable as an overall narrative. Lots of people were there and then went home. Dustin Thompson did not."

Thompson himself, [testifying a day earlier](#), admitted he joined the mob's attack and stole the coat rack and a bottle of bourbon. He said he regretted his "disgraceful" behaviour.

"I can't believe the things that I did," he said. "Mob mentality and group think is very real and very dangerous."

Still, he said he believed Trump's false claim that the election was stolen and was trying to stand up for him. "If the president is giving you almost an order to do something, I felt obligated to do that," he said.

The US district judge Reggie Walton, who is scheduled to sentence Thompson on 20 July, described the defendant's testimony as "totally disingenuous" and his conduct on 6 January as "reprehensible". The judge also cast blame in Trump's direction after the verdict was announced.

"I think our democracy is in trouble," he said, adding that "charlatans" like Trump did not care about democracy, only about power. "And as a result of that, it's tearing our country apart."

Prosecutors did not ask for Thompson to be detained immediately, but Walton ordered him held and he was led away handcuffed. The judge said he believed Thompson was a flight risk and posed a danger to the public.

Thompson's trial was the third to go before a jury among hundreds of Capitol riot cases prosecuted by the justice department. In the first two cases, jurors also convicted the defendants of all charges.

The assistant US attorney William Dreher said Thompson, a college-educated pest exterminator who lost his job during the Covid-19 pandemic, knew he was breaking the law when he joined the mob that attacked the Capitol and, in his case, looted the Senate parliamentarian's office. The prosecutor told jurors that Thompson's lawyer "wants you to think you have to choose between President Trump and his client."

"You don't have to choose because this is not President Trump's trial. This is the trial for Dustin Thompson because of what he did at the Capitol on the afternoon on Jan 6," Dreher told jurors during his closing arguments.

The defence attorney, Samuel Shamansky, said Thompson had not avoided taking responsibility for his conduct.

"This shameful chapter in our history is all on TV," Shamansky told jurors. But he said Thompson, unemployed and consumed by a steady diet of conspiracy theories, was vulnerable to Trump's lies about a stolen election. He described Thompson as a "pawn" and Trump as a "gangster" who abused his power to manipulate supporters.

"The vulnerable are seduced by the strong, and that's what happened here," Shamansky said.

The judge had barred Thompson's lawyer from calling Trump and ally Rudolph Giuliani as trial witnesses. But he ruled that jurors could hear recordings of speeches that Trump and Giuliani delivered on 6 January, before the riot erupted. A recording of Trump's remarks was played.

Shamansky contended that Giuliani, the Trump adviser and former New York City mayor, incited rioters by encouraging them to engage in "trial by

combat” and that Trump provoked the mob by saying: “If you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country any more.”

But Dreher told jurors that neither Trump nor Giuliani had the authority to “make legal” what Thompson did at the Capitol.

The juror who spoke on condition of anonymity said he was “laughing under my breath” when Thompson testified he took the coat rack to prevent other rioters from using it as a weapon against police.

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Notre Dame

‘Extraordinary’: ancient tombs and statues unearthed beneath Notre Dame Cathedral

Archaeological dig also finds body-shaped lead sarcophagus buried at the heart of the fire-ravaged monument



‘We uncovered all these riches just 10-15cm under the floor slabs,’ the head of the dig said. Photograph: Denis Gliksman/Inrap

[Kim Willsher in Paris](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 13.41 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 15.19 EDT

An archaeological dig under [Notre Dame](#) Cathedral has uncovered an extraordinary treasure of statues, sculptures, tombs and pieces of an original rood screen dating back to the 13th century.

The find included several ancient tombs from the middle ages and [a body-shaped lead sarcophagus](#) buried at the heart of the fire-ravaged monument under the floor of the transept crossing.

French experts have described the discovery as “extraordinary and emotional”.

“We uncovered all these riches just 10-15cm under the floor slabs. It was completely unexpected. There were exceptional pieces documenting the history of the monument,” said Christophe Besnier, who headed the scientific team for the dig.

“It was an emotional moment. Suddenly we had several hundred pieces from small fragments to large blocks including sculpted hands, feet, faces, architectural decorations and plants. Some of the pieces were still coloured.”



Photograph: Denis Gliksman/Inrap

The discovery was revealed by France’s national archaeological institute, Inrap, on Thursday. A team from the institute was called in to carry out a “preventive dig” under a section of the cathedral floor between February and April before a 100ft-high 600-tonne scaffold was built to reconstruct the monument’s spire.

Until now, only a few pieces of the original Notre Dame rood screen, an ornate partition between the chancel and nave that separated the clergy and choir from the congregation, have remained. Some of these are in the cathedral store rooms, while others are on show in the Louvre. In Catholic churches, most were removed during the Counter-Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. The rest of the Notre Dame rood appears to have been carefully interred under the cathedral floor during the building's restoration by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc – who added the spire – in the mid-19th century.

One of the most extraordinary pieces was an intact sculpture of the head of a man, believed to be a representation of Jesus, carved from stone. Another block from the rood screen, believed to date from the 13th century, shows a Gothic-style monument.



The head of a statue that experts believe may be Jesus. Photograph: Denis Gliksman/Inrap

The Inrap team was given a strict timeframe and only a specific area in which to carry out the excavation. After fire swept through the 850-year-old cathedral, one of Paris's most symbolic and visited monuments, in April 2019, [almost destroying the entire edifice](#), President Emmanuel Macron pledged to have it rebuilt and open for mass in five years.

Last September, Gen Jean-Louis Georgelin, appointed to oversee the restoration, said the safety of the cathedral structure had been established, meaning the restoration and reconstruction of the sections destroyed by fire could begin. He said the cathedral would be open for services and public visits as promised in 2024.

Besnier said they had identified several other slabs of the rood screen under the floor, but these were outside the specified limit of the dig. “We know they are there and won’t be damaged. Hopefully, we will be able to uncover them at a later date,” he said.

The excavation also unveiled a network of masonry heating pipes installed under the floor in the 19th century.

Experts believe the lead sarcophagus may contain the body of a high church official possibly dating back to the 14th century. A camera introduced into the coffin had revealed plant remains under the head of the deceased alongside hair and fragments of cloth, but there was no plate identifying the occupant.

Dominique Garcia, president of Inrap, said further examinations including DNA tests would be carried out, but added: “A sarcophagus containing a human body is not an archaeological object. These are human remains, and while examining the sarcophagus and analysing the body and other objects inside, we must do so with respect.”

He said no decision had been made as to where the body would be reburied once the tests had been completed. “It’s too early to say. It’s possible that it will be reburied somewhere in the cathedral.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/14/ancient-tombs-statues-notre-dame-cathedral-archaeological-dig>.

Headlines

- [Live Boris Johnson says tens of thousands could be sent to Rwanda under relocation plan for asylum seekers](#)
- [Migration UK plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda sparks fierce criticism](#)
- [Coronavirus Valneva approved to be UK's sixth Covid vaccine](#)
- [Exclusive Covid disruption to NHS in England wreaks havoc with surgery backlog](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

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

UK plans to send thousands of asylum seekers to Rwanda, says Boris Johnson – as it happened

This live blog has now closed, you can read more on the UK's new asylum system plans [here](#)

- [Tens of thousands of asylum seekers could relocate to Rwanda – PM](#)
- [Key points from Johnson and Patel on Rwanda plan for asylum seekers](#)
- [Johnson says trying to turn back small boats not a practical option](#)
- [Johnson says other countries likely to follow Rwanda-type asylum plan](#)
- [Opposition parties brand Rwanda plan ‘unworkable’ and ‘evil’](#)
- [What Labour would do about small boats crossings](#)
- [Farage implies Brexit won’t be complete until Human Rights Act goes](#)
- [Johnson says he will correct record over Partygate to MPs next week](#)

Updated 3d ago

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 12.45 EDTFirst published on Thu 14 Apr 2022 04.11 EDT

Boris Johnson says thousands of asylum seekers could be sent to Rwanda – video

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 12.45 EDTFirst published on Thu 14 Apr 2022 04.11 EDT

Key events

- [3d ago Afternoon summary](#)

- [3d ago](#)'Morally reprehensible, probably unlawful and [possibly] unworkable' - former Home Office head on Rwanda plan
- [3d ago](#)Imran Ahmad Khan to resign as MP for Wakefield, triggering key byelection test for Labour
- [3d ago](#)Patel says costs of Rwanda plan 'drop in ocean' compared to potential long-term costs of flawed asylum system
- [3d ago](#)Tory MP Neil Hudson calls for Tory leadership contest 'as soon as international situation permits'
- [3d ago](#)Farage says Rwanda policy does not go far enough, and implies Brexit won't be complete until Human Rights Act goes
- [3d ago](#)Coronavirus infections falling across most of UK, ONS says

Show key events only

Live feed

Show key events only

[3d ago](#)12.45

Afternoon summary

- [Tens of thousands of unauthorised migrants who seek sanctuary in the UK will be flown more than 4,000 miles to Rwanda under a new set of immigration policies, Boris Johnson has said.](#)
- [Johnson has dodged fresh questions over the future of his leadership after being given fixed-penalty notices by police for breaking Covid laws, as a former minister suggested he should consider his position.](#)
- [Imran Ahmad Khan, the MP expelled from the Conservative party after being found guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy,](#)

[has announced he will resign, meaning a byelection will be triggered in his Wakefield constituency.](#)

- [Coronavirus infections have fallen slightly in most of the UK, figures from the Office for National Statistics show, although experts analysing the data say it is too soon to tell whether infections have passed their peak.](#)
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Updated at 13.14 EDT

[3d ago](#)[12.44](#)

These are from the **Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants**.

Today, this government has made it clear that by ‘offshoring asylum processing’ they mean deporting people who’ve sought safety here on a one-way ticket to Rwanda.

Those whose claims are accepted will be recognised as refugees in Rwanda, 4000 miles from the UK..

1/3 [pic.twitter.com/EczVK7vfis](#)

— JCWI (@JCWI_UK) [April 14, 2022](#)

These plans will endanger the lives of people who’ve fled harm & do nothing to stop treacherous journeys across the channel.

Instead, they will create new smuggling routes for vulnerable people desperate to leave Rwanda. 2/3

— JCWI (@JCWI_UK) [April 14, 2022](#)

To stop these unspeakably cruel plans, the Gov must scrap the Nationality & Borders Bill and create fast, fair and compassionate asylum processes that help people build new lives here.

You can join us in making these demands heard - info below □
3/3<https://t.co/qJ0zdF9RZs>

— JCWI (@JCWI_UK) [April 14, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#) 12.34

'Morally reprehensible, probably unlawful and [possibly] unworkable' - former Home Office head on Rwanda plan

Sir David Normington, who was permanent secretary at the [Home Office](#) between 2005 and 2011, has delivered a withering verdict on the plan to effectively deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. In an interview with the BBC's Newsnight, he said:

Let's assume that's actually going to happen, because there are lots of hurdles to get over and the prime minister admitted that, so it's not going to solve a problem very quickly. But let's assume it is going happen and the government is serious about it.

My assessment is, well, first of all it's inhumane, it's morally reprehensible, it's probably unlawful and it may well be unworkable.

"It's inhumane, it's morally reprehensible, it's probably unlawful and it may well be unworkable."

Former Home Office Permanent Secretary Sir David Normington on

the government's plan to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda [#Newsnight](#) <https://t.co/waSwdcMiTG>
pic.twitter.com/CPAjc2WJhO

— BBC Newsnight (@BBCNewsnight) [April 14, 2022](#)

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Updated at 12.42 EDT

[3d ago](#) [12.24](#)

Imran Ahmad Khan to resign as MP for Wakefield, triggering key byelection test for Labour

Imran Ahmad Khan has announced that he is standing down as an MP. He is appealing his conviction for sexual assault and, even though he is not required to resign as an MP at this point, he says that an appeal could take months and that he does not think it would be right for his constituents to go so long without proper representation.

This means that there will be a byelection in Wakefield, a classic “red wall” seat, held by Labour since the 1930s but won by the Tories in 2019. Khan had a majority of 3,358 and if Labour fail to win the byelection, then it is very hard to see the party having any chance of victory at the general election.

pic.twitter.com/RBtTJjGFVT

— Imran Ahmad Khan MP  (@imranahmadkhan) [April 14, 2022](#)

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Updated at 12.27 EDT

3d ago [12.16](#)

Patel says costs of Rwanda plan 'drop in ocean' compared to potential long-term costs of flawed asylum system

Priti Patel, the home secretary, has rejected claims that her plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda will be too expensive. Speaking to reporters in Rwanda, she said the costs were “a drop in the ocean” compared to the costs of not tackling the rising number of people arriving by crossing the Channel in small boats. She said:

The costs right now [of the asylum system] are going to go up and up and up because we can’t stop the boats today or tomorrow.

The projections for the summer are incredibly high. Currently, we stand at a bill for taxpayers for over £1.5bn pounds a year and that’ll just go up if we do nothing.

Our work with the government of Rwanda, our work when it comes to removals and charter flights, are a drop in the ocean, compared to the long-term aggregated costs to UK taxpayers and it’s unfair on hard pressed taxpayers.

I’m not ashamed to say that at all, I’m absolutely very vocal about standing up for hard pressed British taxpayers constantly, because it’s not just about the money costs. It’s about the wider strains and pressures.

Asked if she was “really sure about this idea” in light of a deal struck between the Israelis and Rwanda a few years ago which saw “many of those people ending up in the hands of people traffickers, murdered, raped, tortured, and enslaved” (see [1.50pm](#)), she replied: “The answer is yes.” She

also said that Rwanda had resettled more than 130,000 refugees from Africa and neighbouring countries - and they “do that incredibly well”.

She also confirmed that the plan was not conditional on the nationality and borders bill becoming law.

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[3d ago](#)[11.57](#)

The Ministry of Defence will bolster Border Force with an offshore patrol vessel, up to six patrol boats, and one Wildcat helicopter operating in the Channel, PA Media reports. PA says:

The MoD will make available a range of Royal Navy surface and surveillance assets to bolster Border Force capabilities until longer-term capabilities have been contracted.

It is understood the MoD will make use of offshore patrol vessels, which are typically used for coastal defence, and have been used to protect and enforce UK fishing waters.

It will also use up to six P2000s patrol boats, and one Wildcat helicopter, the latter of which is described on the MoD’s website as a “maritime attack helicopter”, capable of operating from frigates and destroyers.

The MoD has secured £50m to implement its role in the Channel and provide additional capabilities.



A group of people being brought in to Dover, Kent, today onboard Border Force vessel Searcher after a small boat incident in the Channel. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

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Updated at 12.23 EDT

[3d ago](#)[11.52](#)

The president of the **Law Society of England and Wales**, I. Stephanie Boyce, has criticised Boris Johnson for attacking “politically motivated lawyers” (see [11.39am](#)) in his speech this morning. She said:

It is particularly disappointing - this week of all weeks - the government is repeating misleading suggestions that legal challenges are politically motivated.

Legal challenges establish if the government is abiding by its own laws.

If the government wishes to avoid losing court cases, it should act within the law of the land.

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[3d ago](#)[11.44](#)

Two oligarchs linked to Roman Abramovich have faced sanctions, [the Foreign Office has announced](#). They are Eugene Tenenbaum, a director of Abramovich's club, Chelsea FC, and David Davidovich, described as Abramovich's "much lower profile right-hand man". The Foreign Office claims assets worth £10bn will be frozen as a result of these measures.

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Updated at 11.48 EDT

[3d ago](#)[11.38](#)

Conservative MPs approve of the plane to send asylum seekers to [Rwanda](#), ITV's **Anushka Asthana** reports.

Priti Patel has addressed Tory MPs this afternoon about the Rwanda policy - and sounds like huge support among the party. But also hearing that "despair" among some Home office officials - who worrying about cost, and fears some might reason. Got some good details to come on this

— Anushka Asthana (@AnushkaAsthana) [April 14, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#)[11.23](#)

The Scottish government has released a statement condemning the UK government's [Rwanda](#) plan for asylum seekers. **Angus Robertson**, its external affairs secretary, said:

This is an outrageous policy. The Home Office should focus on improving the asylum system, not finding new and shameful ways to make it more challenging and prolonged for people seeking safety from persecution.

The UK government must explain how it will ensure the welfare of extremely vulnerable people in any off-shoring arrangement, when it appears to be washing their hands of them.

Subjecting people to these horrifying arrangements is an abdication of the UK's moral and international responsibilities. People must be able to make their claims for asylum with full and fair consideration by the Home Office and, if successful, be supported to rebuild their lives as refugees in the UK.

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[3d ago 11.22](#)

[The flight from UK to Rwanda](#)

The flight from UK to Rwanda

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[3d ago 10.47](#)

Andrew Griffith, the Conservative MP who runs the PM's policy unit, told BBC Radio 4's the World at One that the government did not need to wait for the nationality and borders bill to become law before it could start sending asylum seekers to [Rwanda](#). "My understanding is this policy can come in immediately," he said.

He said it would take "weeks or months" to become operational.

In his speech and Q&A this morning [Boris Johnson](#) implied that, because of legal challenges, implementing the policy would take a lot longer.

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Updated at 10.55 EDT

[3d ago](#)[10.44](#)



Boris Johnson visiting the command room at the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Dover this morning. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/AFP/Getty Images

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[3d ago](#)[10.43](#)

From the Mirror's **Dan Bloom**

NEW DETAILS: Channel migrants removed under the Rwanda policy will be detained and sent on a one-way flight by force with just five days' notice - and no option to claim UK asylum once they're gone

It's NOT offshore processing of UK claims - it's removal <https://t.co/ZorO76WXmf>

— Dan Bloom (@danbloom1) [April 14, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#) [10.35](#)

Tory MP Neil Hudson calls for Tory leadership contest 'as soon as international situation permits'



Jessica Elgot

Neil Hudson, the Tory MP for Penrith and the Border, has told constituents he believes Boris Johnson should call a leadership election after being found to have broken the law. But he said that should take place only when the situation in Ukraine had passed the peak of the crisis.

“The fact that the lawmakers went on to break those very laws they brought

in to keep us all safe is deeply damaging for our democracy,” Hudson said in [a statement on his website.](#)

He said it would not be “prudent or responsible to change the leadership of the government in the midst of the international crisis that is the war in Ukraine”.

However, he said the prime minister should still show leadership by calling a vote of confidence.

I will therefore be looking to the prime minister to show the statesmanship he has been showing with Ukraine and outline a timetable and process for an orderly transition to a leadership election as soon as the international situation permits.

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Updated at 10.54 EDT

[3d ago](#)[10.30](#)

Farage says Rwanda policy does not go far enough, and implies Brexit won't be complete until Human Rights Act goes

The Rwanda policy looks like the sort of plan drafted to please voters who backed Ukip and the Brexit party (and who largely went Tory in 2019, but who might yet give up on [Boris Johnson](#) at the next election). But in an interview with Radio 4’s the World at One, **Nigel Farage**, the former Ukip and Brexit party leader, said that the proposal only deserved “half a cheer”.

Farage said that the proposal might work in the short term. But he predicted that it would soon be blocked by the courts.

All it needs is one abuse case and then of course the Human Rights Act could be invoked, and that will put a stop to the whole thing. So I see this really as being not much more than a short term solution, if it ever actually happens.

Farage said the only effective solution would be to turn back boats (a proposal that Johnson specifically rejected in his speech this morning – see [1.19pm](#)). Farage also said the UK would never be able to operate a robust policy towards asylum seekers while it remained signed up to the European convention on human rights. Opting out of this would complete Brexit, he implied.

We will never ever solve this problem while we stay signed up to the European convention on human rights, subject to the European court in Strasbourg, and have the incorporation of that law under the Human Rights Act into UK law ...

Boris Johnson today talked about an army of human rights lawyers. But he didn't address the elephant in the room that is the Human Rights Act. And unless we deal with [that] – frankly, unless we complete Brexit – we're not going to be able to deal with this.

The convention, of course, has nothing to do with the EU, but Farage's comment was an interesting example of how what constitutes proper [Brexit](#) is continually being redefined by Brexiters, and made more extreme.

And Johnson did not entirely ignore the Human Rights Act. He clearly hinted that he would, if necessary, repeal aspects affecting immigration policy. (See [1.19pm](#).)



Nigel Farage. Photograph: Chris duMond/REX/Shutterstock

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Updated at 10.52 EDT

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Immigration and asylum

UK plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda sparks fierce criticism

Politicians, charities and rights groups condemn plans as ill-conceived, inhumane and evil

- [Follow the day's politics news as it happens](#)

'Why Rwanda?': government immigration policy fiercely condemned – video report

Rachel Hall

@rachela_hall

Thu 14 Apr 2022 04.34 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 14.41 EDT

Politicians have described Priti Patel's [plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda](#) as "evil" and "inhumane", amid fierce criticism from refugee charities, which have said the move is ill-conceived.

The government is on Thursday expected to announce multimillion-pound plans for asylum seekers who cross the Channel in small boats to be flown for processing to [Rwanda](#).

Ian Blackford, the Scottish National party's Westminster leader, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "It's just chilling, absolutely chilling, to think that people who are coming here for a whole host of reasons – vulnerable people – are going to be taken all the way to [Africa](#) to be processed.

"This is not the mark of a civilised society. It's evil. It just turns my stomach to see that our government acting in our name can behave in such a way, and I think a lot of people are going to be quite aghast."

Map

Andrew Mitchell, the Conservative MP for Sutton Coldfield and a former chief whip, said the new approach was “globally unprecedented” and raised questions around how it would work and how the government would safeguard human rights.

He added: “MPs from across the house have already expressed concerns about adopting a policy which Australia abandoned as a failure.”

The first minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, [tweeted](#) that the plans were “cruel and inhumane” and “a cynical distraction from the prime minister’s law-breaking”.

Defending the plan on Sky News, the Wales secretary, Simon Hart, said the estimated cost was “about £120m” and followed nine months of negotiation with the Rwandan government.

He said it would deter criminal gangs and reduce exploitation by making it no longer viable to smuggle vulnerable people into the UK.

On LBC, he said: “What we are proposing with the government of Rwanda is to improve the chances to break up the criminal gangs, to reduce the horrible level of exploitation and to improve the chances for people who have crossed half the world at huge emotional and personal and financial expense.

“At the moment, they are being put in dreadful danger by these ruthless people, and so I think what we are doing is really consistent with our reputation. We pride ourselves on this ‘nation of sanctuary’ label and I hope that this, when it’s up and running, will be able to reinforce that reputation.”

However, refugee and human rights charities have vehemently criticised the plans, warning they were unlikely to address the exploitation of vulnerable people.

Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the Refugee Council, said the government had violated the principle of the UN convention, of which the UK was a founding signatory, to “grant people a fair hearing on UK soil”.

Speaking on the Today programme, he said: “I think it’s rather extraordinary the government is obsessing with control instead of focusing on competence and compassion.”

He added the plan was unlikely to discourage people from undertaking dangerous journeys to flee persecution, and recommended instead that dialogue be opened with other European countries about how to encourage safe routes to asylum, including by allowing people to apply for visas in embassies around the world.

The chief executive of Refugee Action, Tim Naor Hilton, accused the government of “offshoring its responsibilities on to Europe’s former colonies instead of doing our fair share to help some of the most vulnerable people on the planet”.

He added that the UK should have learned from “Australia’s horrific experiment” of sending refugees to camps overseas where they experienced “rampant abuse” as well as “rape, murder and suicide”.

“This grubby cash-for-people plan would be a cowardly, barbaric and inhumane way to treat people fleeing persecution and war,” Naor Hilton said.

Steve Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty International UK’s refugee and migrant rights director, noted that Rwanda had a “dismal human rights record”.

In a statement to the PA Media news agency, Valdez-Symonds said: “This shockingly ill-conceived idea will go far further in inflicting suffering while wasting huge amounts of public money.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/14/uk-plan-to-send-asylum-seekers-to-rwanda-sparks-fierce-criticism>

Coronavirus

Valneva approved to be UK's sixth Covid vaccine

Medicines regulator says it is first in world to approve Valneva product



Covid-related deaths are rising in England and Wales, though they remain well below the levels seen in previous waves. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 09.33 EDTFirst published on Thu 14 Apr 2022 02.38 EDT

A Covid-19 vaccine developed by the French pharmaceutical company Valneva has been given regulatory approval by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, bringing the total number of jabs approved for use in the UK to six.

As the Covid pandemic swept the world, scientists began developing vaccines against it, with the Pfizer/BioNTech jab being the first in the UK to [be authorised for emergency use by the MHRA in 2020](#). Since then the MHRA has approved the Moderna, Oxford/AstraZeneca, Janssen and Novavax vaccines, although, according to NHS England, Janssen and Novavax are [not currently available](#).

The UK's independent medicines regulator was the first in the world to approve the [Valneva product](#), the MHRA said. Unlike the other approved Covid jabs, the Valneva vaccine is an inactivated whole-virus vaccine, which means the live virus was grown in a laboratory, rendered unable to infect cells, then administered to people to trigger an immune response.

The MHRA said this approach was already being used for flu and polio vaccines and experts have previously [suggested](#) that Covid jabs based on the whole virus may result in a broader immune response than those that involve only the spike protein, and may work better against new variants.

[Results released by Valneva in October](#) suggested the vaccine could be as effective as the Oxford jab. In addition, it is stable when stored in a standard refrigerator, which could make it easier to distribute than some other Covid jabs.

[UK Covid deaths graph](#)

Prof Sir Munir Pirmohamed, the chair of the independent Commission on Human Medicines, said the commission and its Covid-19 expert working group had carefully considered the evidence and advised that the benefit-risk balance was positive. “The vaccine is approved for use in people aged 18 to 50 years, with the first and second doses to be taken at least 28 days apart.”

Prof Adam Finn, a member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the chief investigator on the Valneva clinical development programme, said that while the jab had been approved it was unlikely to be available in the UK soon, as the [government had cancelled its contract to buy the vaccine in September](#).

However, he said the jab could prove more acceptable than others to some people. “The people who could theoretically benefit from it now are unvaccinated 18- to 50-year-olds who want immunisation but are hesitant about currently available vaccines,” he said, adding that the Novavax jab could also appeal to this group.

However, there was another hurdle. “In the UK, no one has yet been offered any choice as to which vaccine they receive,” said Finn, a professor of paediatrics at the University of Bristol.

On Thursday it was also revealed that the MHRA had approved extending the use of the Moderna Covid jab to six- to 11-year-olds in Great Britain, an age group for which it is already authorised in Northern Ireland. At present, children aged five to 17 are only offered the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which is based on similar mRNA technology.

Dr June Raine, the MHRA’s chief executive, said the Moderna vaccine was safe and effective in six- to 11-year-olds, but that the age group was included in the ongoing safety surveillance of all Covid jabs.

“It is for the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to advise in due course on whether six-to-11s should be offered vaccination with the Covid-19 vaccine made by Moderna as part of the deployment programme,” she said.

The number of deaths involving coronavirus registered each week in England and Wales has continued to increase, although levels remain well below those reached during previous Covid waves.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/14/valneva-approved-to-be-uks-sixth-covid-vaccine>

Hospitals

Covid disruption to NHS in England wreaks havoc with surgery backlog

Exclusive: record infection rates are making targets for treating the 6m people on waiting lists look less achievable



The Covid ward at the Royal Preston hospital in Lancashire. High levels of hospitalisations with Covid across the country is absorbing capacity that could have been used for patients on waiting lists. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

[Andrew Gregory](#) and [Denis Campbell](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Operations are being cancelled across [England](#) as Covid causes “major disruption” inside the NHS, the country’s top surgeon has said, as doctors and health leaders say the government’s backlog targets look increasingly unachievable.

Six million people are on the waiting list for [NHS](#) hospital care, including more than 23,000 who have waited more than two years. The NHS in England is due to publish its latest waiting times data on Thursday.

Boris Johnson said in February that he had launched “the biggest catch-up programme in the history of the health service”, but in the same month he dropped every domestic Covid restriction. Now record-high Covid rates are wreaking havoc with the ability of the NHS to catch up with surgery that was delayed or cancelled before and during the pandemic.

More than 28,000 staff are off work every day due to Covid, recent figures show, while more than 20,000 patients are in hospital with Covid, which has dramatically reduced the number of beds and space available for planned surgery patients.

“Unfortunately, Covid-19 continues to cause major disruption in the NHS, with high staff absences in recent weeks,” Prof Neil Mortensen, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, told the Guardian.

“We have heard that planned surgery is being cancelled again in different parts of the country due to staff being off sick with the virus. This is understandably frustrating for surgical teams who want to help their patients by getting planned surgery up and running again. It’s also very distressing for patients who need a planned operation.”

Ministers promised to eliminate all waits of more than two years by July this year, all 18-month waits by 2023, and all one-year waits by March 2025, but NHS staff say Covid is already [derailing their efforts](#) to meet those promises.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, said pressure was “piling up” on the NHS across England from “a triple Covid-related whammy” of staff absences, high numbers of people in hospital with Covid and delays in discharging patients as Covid hits social care services.

“This means that the NHS hasn’t been able consistently to hit top speed on backlog recovery, as we were hoping to, coming out of winter,” he said. “Some trusts are now processing more elective cases than they were before

Covid hit, with some running at 105% to 108% of pre-Covid activity. But others, with higher Covid impacts, are some way behind that. This will impact on the NHS's ability to meet the targets we agreed."

The British Medical Association accused the government of failing to grasp how serious a threat Covid poses to the NHS, the backlog targets and to wider society.

It said that unless ministers brought in measures to bring down infection rates, such as masks on public transport and in confined spaces, and ventilation and air filtration in public and work settings, pressures on the NHS would escalate further, staff absence rates would rise further and millions of patients would wait longer for treatment.

A survey of its members found 87% of doctors said the government's pledges to reduce the waiting lists for elective care using the existing workforce were mostly or entirely unachievable.

"The government is burying its head in the sand to the immediate threat of the virus to our healthcare services," said Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the BMA's chair of council. "It is clear that the result of the government's 'living with Covid' strategy is failing to allow us to live with Covid."

One hospital chief executive told the Guardian that ministers' targets were "incredibly challenging". A second said: "These targets are not realistic at all because of staff shortages, which existed before Covid and are being compounded by the number of people still reporting sick, and also staff burnout."

Meanwhile, a data analysis by the Press Association published on Thursday revealed that dozens of patients have been waiting for more than three years. At least nine have been on the NHS waiting list for more than four years.

Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents the whole healthcare system, said the ongoing impact of Covid was now interfering with the ability of the NHS to tackle the backlog, and there should be "a healthy dose of realism" about what staff could achieve.

NHS England said staff “continue to pull out all the stops” to tackle the backlog, and were also “adopting creative innovations” to ensure patients get the care they need.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/14/covid-disruption-to-nhs-in-england-wreaks-havoc-with-surgery-backlog>

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2022.04.14 - Spotlight

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- 'I don't let my wife use it' Great TV theme tune composers savage 'skip intro'
- Sturdy, patient, there till the end The enduring appeal of the vending machine
- Waiting for Beckett Stephen Dillane and Conor Lovett stage the great playwright's novel

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‘I was told they didn’t offer C-sections’ – the dangerous obsession with ‘natural births’



Sofia Shafaq with her eight-month-old daughter, Amara, at their home in Leeds. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

Amid recent maternity scandals, women are speaking out about not being listened to when having a baby – in some cases with terrible consequences



Sirin Kale

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Sofia Shafaq, a 33-year-old accountant from Leeds, says she had been in labour for three days in July 2021, when she called her midwife and begged for a caesarean section. She had already been to the hospital three times, and, each time she had been sent home. She says the labour hadn't progressed and she was only 2cm dilated. "It felt like I was going to die. Like someone had put a knife in me and was twisting it." The midwife made her feel silly for asking for a casearean section. "She said: 'That's not something we offer.'"

Shafaq says that, when she was finally allowed into the labour ward, she hadn't slept or eaten and was too exhausted to push the baby out. Staff had to use forceps and she tore, and had to have an episiotomy. Now, she has a prolapse, which she believes is due to the forceps. "I am angry," she says. "There's a lot of trauma there. I'm always in tears." She believes that all of this would have been avoidable if staff at the hospital had listened. "I am suffering today, because I did not get what I wanted," she says.

Last week, senior midwife Donna Ockenden issued her [long-awaited review](#) on the Shrewsbury maternity scandal. She found that [nine mothers and 201 babies might have survived](#) had staff provided better care. Mothers were denied caesarean sections and forced to suffer traumatic births because of an obsession with hitting “normal” birth targets, meaning that the trust had one of the lowest C-section rates in the country. In some instances, families were blamed when their babies died.

Shrewsbury follows other, much publicised maternity scandals: [Morecambe Bay](#), where [one mother and 11 babies](#) died, east Kent, where the hospital trust recently [pledged guilty to criminal charges](#), and Nottingham, where 46 babies were left with [brain damage](#). Across these cases, common themes recur: mothers not being listened to when expressing concerns about how their labour was progressing; staff fixated with vaginal birth at all costs, even when C-sections were medically necessary; and understaffed hospital units failing to monitor women appropriately.

After the review, women are speaking out about their experiences of giving birth – and, worryingly, it appears that some of the attitudes that underpinned the Shrewsbury scandal are commonplace. “It goes so much wider than this report,” says Maria Booker of the charity [Birthrights](#). “Women are not being listened to. And staff are not listening to each other.” In 2020, Birthrights and the parenting website Mumsnet ran [a survey of 1,145 mothers](#). One in four said that [their wishes](#) about how they gave birth were not respected.

Women are not being listened to. And staff are not listening to each other

Maria Booker

This is despite the fact that, in 2015, the UK supreme court issued a ruling that deemed that women should be given information about their pregnancies and trusted to make decisions about their care. [The Montgomery ruling](#) was a response to a case brought in Lanarkshire by Nadine Montgomery, who was small and had type 1 diabetes, a condition that can lead to giving birth to larger than average babies, putting them at risk of shoulder dystocia – where the baby gets stuck during birth. But

Montgomery was not informed by her doctor, Dina McLellan, about this risk. McLellan admitted that, if she had been informed, Montgomery would probably have asked for a C-section.

As a result of Montgomery's son getting stuck during his birth, he was deprived of oxygen and later diagnosed with cerebral palsy. The supreme court was scathing about McLellan's apparent attitude to C-sections. "Whatever Dr McLellan may have had in mind," ruled the judges, "this does not look like a purely medical judgment. It looks like a judgment that vaginal delivery is in some way morally preferable to a caesarean section." The guidelines in the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence](#) (Nice), published in 2011 and updated in 2021, enshrine a pregnant woman's right to choose how she gives birth, stating that women should be able to request caesarean sections without a medical reason, after carefully considering the facts.

And yet pregnant women are still not treated as rational actors by many clinicians. "There was this general attitude," says Isobel Bradshaw, a 38-year-old communications worker from Hampshire, "of 'we don't talk about caesarean sections'. It was the bogeyman. If you talked about it, it would happen." Bradshaw is 5ft 1in and, in the final trimester of her pregnancy, her baby had a growth spurt, which was in the 90th percentile for her size. During a visit for a hospital scan, Bradshaw says she asked her doctor whether a caesarean section was necessary. "She was dismissive," says Bradshaw. "It felt like: 'Oh, we'll just give it a go, and see what happens. It will probably be OK.'"

When Bradshaw gave birth in June 2017, doctors had to perform an emergency C-section. "I was 80% sure it was going to happen," says Bradshaw. "Just from the size of me, and the size of the bump. So I was mentally prepared for it." But she could easily not have been: Bradshaw says she knows of women who have been traumatised by the experience. She wishes her C-section had been planned, so she wouldn't have had to spend the final weeks of her pregnancy worrying. If she has another child, she says: "You can be damn sure I will have a C-section. I don't want to go through this again."

Booker says that one of the most common reasons women contact [Birthrights](#)' advice line is denial of a C-section request. Other reasons include not being allowed to give birth in a midwife-led birth centre, or to have a home birth. In 2018, Birthrights published a report showing that some NHS trusts had made it incredibly difficult to go ahead with [maternal request caesareans](#). "When women have their wishes ignored," says Booker, "it traumatises them." Studies have shown such women are [more likely to develop PTSD](#).

There is a lot of pressure in the system at the moment. To listen, you need to have time

Dr Jo Mountfield

Last year, [the Commons health and social care committee found](#) that "there is still clinician-led pressure for women to choose vaginal delivery, even when this may not be in their best interests". This is despite the fact that the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) abandoned its [normal birth campaign](#), which encouraged mothers to give birth without interventions, in 2017. "Can I give you 100% reassurance that every woman feels listened to? I cannot," says Dr Jo Mountfield, the vice-president for workforce and professionalism at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. "People do their best. But there is a lot of pressure in the system at the moment. To listen, you need to have time."



Midwives protest over unsafe practices and working conditions, November 2021. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

In November 2021, the RCM warned of a [maternity staffing crisis](#). More than 57% of midwives surveyed planned to quit, citing concerns about staffing levels and fears over patient safety. “I receive messages on a daily basis from midwives,” says Leah Hazard, midwife and author of [Hard Pushed: A Midwife’s Story](#), “who tell me they’re coming on shift and realising there aren’t enough staff to keep the workload safe.” Hazard is scathing about the [£127m funding boost](#) for NHS England maternity services, given that last year the health and social care committee determined that an [annual](#) increase of around £350m was required. “It’s insulting,” she says.

Covid has put additional strain on already stretched services. “It felt like they were so stressed,” says Marissa, a 43-year-old teacher from east London. “They just wanted to get you in and out.” Marissa became pregnant in December 2020 after eight years of trying and two previous miscarriages. Because a lockdown was in place, some midwifery appointments were by phone; at in-person appointments, she says staff appeared harried.

“There was no sense of support or concern or care,” says Marissa. “They seemed irritated and rushed.” During one appointment, Marissa says, her

midwife was ordering items from Amazon on her phone. At another, Marissa asked how she should spot reduced foetal movements, but says her midwife's response didn't make sense. "She said: 'Does your baby have a pattern of movement?' I said: 'Not really.' She said: 'Well, if the pattern changes, go in.'"

Marissa's son died at 39 weeks in August 2021, after a placental abruption. She claims that hospital staff initially put her in a regular maternity ward as she waited to deliver her stillborn child. "It was horrific," she says. "All night long I heard babies being born." Just after giving her the news, she says that a doctor asked her whether she had had reduced movements. "It felt like he was blaming me," she says. "His tone was accusatory. It wasn't compassionate." (Doctors later told Marissa that her unborn son would have died quickly in the womb, and she likely would not have noticed the reduced movements until it was too late.)

It is not only male clinicians who are to blame. "The misogyny is entrenched in the women's behaviour as well," says Marissa. This is ironic, since midwifery is a female-dominated profession, and also given the natural birth movement's historical connection to second-wave feminism. The movement was "an understandable response to patriarchal control over birth", says Eliane Glaser, author of [Motherhood: A Manifesto](#). In the first half of the 20th century, male doctors took childbirth out of homes and into hospitals. Women were often sedated and forced to endure traumatic and unnecessary interventions.



Senior midwife Donna Ockenden presenting her final review at the Mercure Shrewsbury Albrighton Hall Hotel in Shropshire. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Throughout the 60s and 70s, natural birth advocates evangelised about the empowering qualities of intervention-free childbirth, even if it was painful. “The pain of normal labour does have meaning,” writes 70s activist and US midwife Ina May Gaskin in [Ina May’s Guide to Childbirth](#). In the UK, the movement was spearheaded by the controversial 1930s obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read, who argued that “[healthy childbirth was never intended by the natural law to be painful](#)”. Rather, he suggested that educated women experience pain as a result of fear, and they should look to their “primitive” sisters in the developing world, who are unburdened by this anxiety. “This attitude was racist to non-white women,” says Glaser. “And it’s also an anti-feminist attack on educated women.”

Dick-Read’s philosophy inspired Prunella Briance to found The Natural Childbirth Association in 1956, which became the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) in 1961. “I think the NCT is essentially a benign institution now,” says Glaser. But [a recent investigation](#) by the i newspaper found that the NCT had deleted information telling women that natural births will leave mothers “more satisfied”, four days before the publication of the Ockenden review. While the NCT’s leadership insists it does not favour one method of

birth over another, this message does not appear to have trickled out to some trainers.

“She actually said the words ‘too posh to push’,” says Emily, a 34-year-old film-maker from north London, of her NCT trainer. Emily is pregnant and has opted for an elective caesarean section. She claims the trainer recently split the class into groups and made them role play a vaginal and C-section birth. “She made the vaginal birth seem easy,” says Emily. “There was no discussion about forceps or tearing or stitches.” Then it was time to role play a caesarean section. “She said: ‘I need an anaesthetist, surgeon, surgeon’s assistant, birth partner, paediatrician, midwife and medical student in the room.’” According to Emily, the trainer asked, pointedly, how it felt to have so many people “crowded around”. Emily is considering lodging a formal complaint with the NCT.

An NCT spokesperson said: “We are not here to promote one way over another, but to ensure parents have access to evidence-based information and a network of peer and specialist support. It saddens us greatly if we hear that someone hasn’t had the positive experience of our services that we expect ... Our antenatal course content is guided by a framework, which has evolved over the years in response to evidence and guidelines and the views of parents. The framework expects courses to cover all ways of giving birth, reflecting the various options and outcomes that individuals may experience.”

The ideology Emily feels she experienced remains prevalent, and is often subtly reinforced through language. “The whole framing of interventions is negative,” says Glaser. “If you have a drug-free birth, it’s: ‘Congratulations! You did so well.’ And if you have a C-section, you’re a coward.”

Women tell me, ‘What kind of mum will I be, if I can’t even give birth to my baby.’ Where are they getting this from? You are literally putting your life on the line for your baby

Dr Anushka Aubeelack

As a result of this narrative, women who require interventions can feel they have failed, even though they account for [nearly 40% of births](#). “Women tell

me: ‘I wanted a vaginal birth. Everyone told me I should have a natural birth. I have failed. What kind of mum will I be, if I can’t even give birth to my baby?’’ says Dr Anushka Aubeelack, an obstetric anaesthetist at a London hospital trust. “Where are they getting this from? You are literally putting your life on the line for your baby. How is having a torn-up undercarriage greater proof of motherhood?”

Aubeelack says this anti-intervention messaging comes “from family and friends, and antenatal classes”. This was an attitude reflected by clinicians providing evidence to the health and social care committee, [who judged that](#) “the pressures of the wider community, social media, and antenatal classes … [contributed] to a big expectation of normality among expectant parents.” This message can prove actively harmful. “It leads to a sense of distrust between the mother and the medical team,” says Aubeelack. “I have seen women put off life-saving decisions because of this wariness.” An NCT spokesperson said: “Timely intervention is a vital component of safe care; women should not be made to feel guilty about any of their choices, and instead need kind, respectful support to make the decisions that are right for them and their baby.”

My midwife looked at me like I was pretending to be in pain

Sofia Shafaq

At the other end of the scale, women who do request interventions may find their requests fall on deaf ears. “There is so much evidence to show that women are denied C-sections and pain relief when they ask for it,” says Glaser. “These denials can go from flat refusals to subtle refusals, where staff say: ‘Let’s see how you get along.’” Shafaq says she was refused pain relief by a midwife in the early stages of labour. “She looked at me like I was pretending to be in pain,” Shafaq says. Hazard questions whether some staff suffer compassion fatigue, although she stresses this does not excuse their behaviour. “When you’re under chronic stress, it can be a common emotional response,” she says.

Racism may also play a factor: studies have shown that Asian and Black women [are more likely](#) to have their requests ignored on maternity units. Black women [are four times](#) more likely than white women to die during

pregnancy and childbirth. Bradshaw, who is mixed heritage, was aware of this when pregnant with her daughter, and it is part of the reason she says she tried to argue for a caesarean section, although she claims these requests were ignored by her doctor. “I didn’t want to be one of those statistics,” she says.

But the picture is not all bad. The UK has one of the [lowest maternal death rates](#) in the world and if there is one positive to emerge from the harrowing revelations of the Ockenden review, it is that they have prompted a wider reckoning across NHS maternity services, which may translate into better practice. “I hope this is a moment of reflection for us as a profession to consider whether we are really listening to women,” says Hazard. Because, ultimately, the only good birth is the one in which mother and baby come out alive and well.

** Some names have been changed*

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Television

‘I don’t let my wife use it’ – great TV theme tune composers savage ‘skip intro’

Five years after Netflix nuked titled sequences, its infamous button is now pressed 136m times a day. What are viewers missing? The whole point, say top composers, including Succession’s Nicholas Britell



‘A brilliant piece’ ... is the Succession intro triggering a revival?
Photograph: HBO

[Michael Hogan](#)

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Nicholas Britell is the composer of the definitive TV theme tune of the 21st century. The New Yorker’s [dizzily hypnotic title music](#) to HBO’s splenetic family saga [Succession](#) has been described as sounding like “a

smashed music box”. When Britell first played it to Jesse Armstrong, the showrunner of the hit TV series greeted it with the words: “Fuck, yeah!”

Yet there’s one thing that annoys softly spoken Britell: the “Skip intro” facility on streaming services, which was brought in five years ago and lets viewers bypass a show’s opening credits. “I am very against it,” says Britell. “TV theme music is incredibly important. It’s almost a show’s DNA identifier. It serves as an overture to bring you in and sets the tone. I think that formal entrée is crucial.”

Robust words from the man whose Emmy-winning, earwormy Succession work, with its gothic strings, cascading piano and skittering beats, is helping to revive TV theme tunes. Britell collaborates regularly with film-makers Barry Jenkins (writing the Oscar-nominated scores for both [Moonlight](#) and [If Beale Street Could Talk](#)) and Adam McKay (scoring [The Big Short](#), [Vice](#) and [Don’t Look Up](#)). But it’s TV music that he’s been “obsessive about since I was a kid”. As well as Succession, he scored last year’s acclaimed Amazon adaptation of Colson Whitehead’s [The Underground Railroad](#). “Every show deserves its own sonic universe,” says Britell. “A soundscape that’s unique and special.”

So why was “Skip intro” invented? We can blame Netflix and data metrics. [According to Cameron Johnson](#), Netflix’s director of product innovation, users were fast-forwarding through the first five minutes of an episode 15% of the time. This suggested that many viewers wanted to whiz past the title sequence. If you’re binge-watching, after all, intros can become repetitive. Johnson himself admits that he often tried to manually spool through the Game of Thrones titles, but got frustrated when he stopped short or went too far.

So, in early 2017, his team consumer-tested a range of names: “Jump past credits”, “Jump ahead”, “Skip credits”, “Skip intro” and simply “Skip”. Users had a clear favourite and “Skip intro” was born, with most rival streaming services following. Where does this leave theme tune composers? Have they grown to hate the little button that, according to Johnson, brings “a little moment of delight to audiences around the world”?



‘Every show deserves its own sonic universe’ ... Nicholas Britell.
Photograph: Evan Agostini/Invision/AP

Murray Gold was Doctor Who’s musical director for more than a decade and is a longtime collaborator with writer Russell T Davies, scoring hit series including [Queer As Folk](#) and [It’s a Sin](#). He’s none too keen on the button. “It really bugs me because, a lot of the time, people’s default setting is to skip past the titles,” says Gold. “When we watch [the American Office](#) at home, I won’t ever let my wife skip. The opening titles are so short and I just want to hear the music.”

Grammy-winner David Arnold scored five James Bond films but also has an illustrious TV CV, having composed the theme tunes for Little Britain, Sherlock, Dracula and Good Omens. He insists that they are a vital part of the viewing experience.

“Take [The Sopranos](#),” says Arnold. “You’ve got that amazing [Alabama 3](#) song Woke Up This Morning, which sets it up completely. I never fast-forward because I’m always happy to hear that tune. It’s the same with Succession. Great theme tunes make you feel anchored in the show’s world. That’s what I try to do with mine: welcome you and prepare you for what’s about to happen. It’s like having the lighting and the heating right in your house when you come home.”

Arnold believes intro-skippers are missing out. “A title sequence is as essential a part of the show as any other,” he says. “If you think it isn’t, you’re not watching in the way that you’re meant to. Information is being imparted. It’s like a kid snuggling down to read a book. On Listen With Mother, they’d always say, ‘Are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin.’ That’s what a title sequence does – settles you down and guides you in. It gets you excited, your mind opens and you’re away. If you decide to skip that stage, the experience won’t be as satisfying.”

Canadian-British composer Carly Paradis is responsible for [Line of Duty](#), Sick Note, The Pembrokeshire Murders and Sky’s new supernatural thriller The Rising. She has mixed feelings but concedes that skipping can be soul-destroying for composers.

“I’m guilty of using it myself, so I can’t complain too much,” she says. “But when you pour your heart, time, sweat and tears into a piece of music and get incredible musicians on it, it is a little heartbreaking. I’m glad I started out in the pre-skip era.”

However, it is not just “Skip intro” that is dealing a blow to TV theme tunes. Many dramas are doing away with theme music and title sequences altogether, instead deploying a “cold open” in a bid to seize viewers’ attention immediately. The likes of Peaky Blinders, Fleabag, Girls, I May Destroy You and Killing Eve plunge straight in, before a title card flashes up as a reminder of which show you’re watching. Even then, it’s often just a brief flash of a logo or bold typeface.



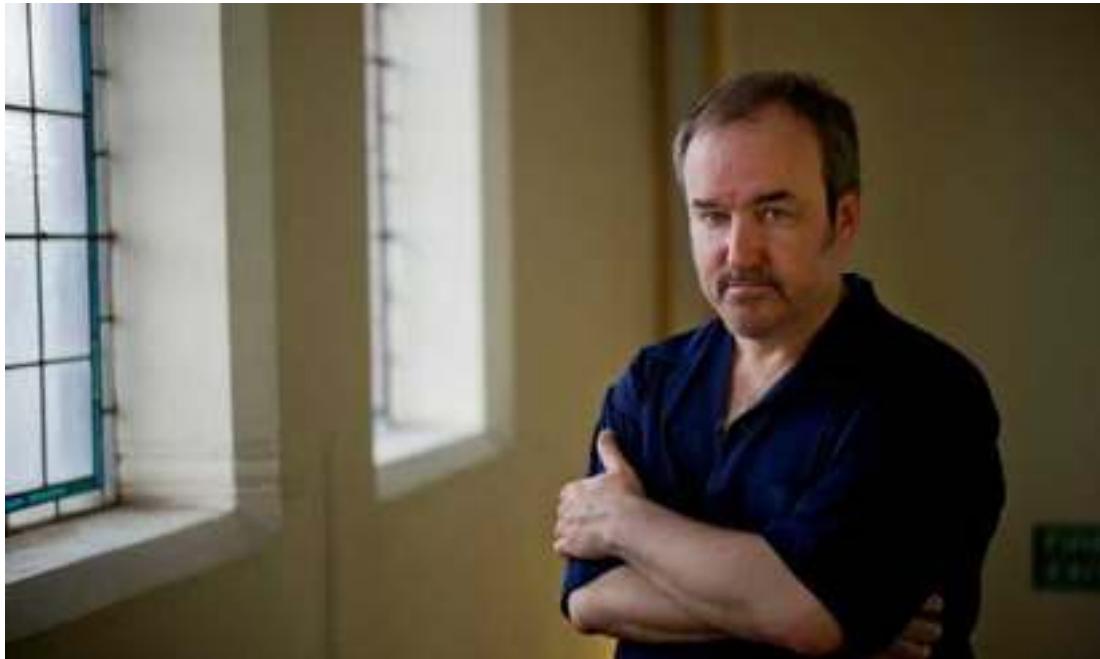
‘I’m guilty of using it myself, so I can’t complain too much’ ... Carly Paradis. Photograph: Stuart C Wilson/Getty Images

“Big theme tunes definitely went out of fashion for a while in the 2010s,” says Gold. “The trend was to go straight to picture. You tend to find cold opens in shows that want to emphasise their closeness to reality – either vérité-style dramas or things that are almost too important to have something as artificial as a piece of music to introduce them.” Arnold has another example. “With shows like Better Call Saul, you have a little signature twang sound at the start. It’s barely a theme tune, more of a punchline. It starts something, then it gets choked, and that says something about the character. It does the same job, just in a different way.”

Still, after a spell in the doldrums, “proper” theme tunes seem to be slowly making a comeback – partly because of the success of [Succession](#). “Nick Britell brought back that old-fashioned musical approach and everyone responded positively,” says Arnold. “It’s such a brilliant piece, conceptually and musically. It has its roots in classical but it’s got hip-hop beats and some ugly distorted stuff. People will always respond to a good tune.”

Gold also detects a change. “Streamers seem to be bringing theme tunes back a bit,” he says. “I think it’s because they don’t need to keep you on the channel like a terrestrial network does. When we’re in a world of drama, and

especially entertainment, you really want to bring the cast on with an old-fashioned song, don't you? There's definitely a taste for it again. It goes in cycles."



‘You’re editing to your own tastes. Why not let us mute a character we don’t like as well?’ ... David Arnold Photograph: Sarah Lee

Gold points out that, whatever else is going on, the sheer volume of programmes in today’s TV landscape means more work for composers. “We’re now producing content at a gigantic rate,” he says. “There’s never been this much drama. Although the delivery method is changing, streamers are keeping to a high artistic standard because that’s what gets eyeballs. Producers expect high-quality, interesting music and are reaching out to young up-and-coming composers. That’s encouraging.”

Unsurprisingly, the squeezing of closing credits vexes composers too, with follow-on episodes being flagged and counted down almost immediately. “I’m very against being pulled away from the end credits,” says Britell. “End credits give you a moment of reverie to sit and think back on what you’ve just seen.”

Gold agrees: “Streamers tend to serve up the next episode five seconds into the end credits. You never get to hear the closing music in full. I’d rather the

default setting wasn't to interrupt the credits. Besides – everyone wants to see their name."



'We end up getting the world we deserve' ... Murray Gold. Photograph: Richard Ecclestone/Redferns

Netflix says the "Skip intro" button is now pressed 136m times a day, saving users worldwide a cumulative 130 years or so of viewing time. While this sounds like a good thing, in the bid to save precious seconds, are we losing part of the fabric of our pop culture? To save the TV theme tune, should we resist hitting that button?

"We end up getting the world we deserve," says Gold, while Arnold compares it to CDs replacing vinyl: "Albums were assembled carefully, with songs designed to be listened to in a certain order. As soon as CDs turned up, people would just skip to their favourite songs. I'm not sure 'Skip intro' delivers the experience the makers were hoping for. You're editing it to your own tastes. Why not let us mute a character we don't like as well? If you give people the tools to do that sort of thing, we shouldn't be surprised when they use them."

Arnold has just finished working on a drama for the BBC and Netflix. Called *Inside Man*, the show is written by [Steven Moffatt](#) and stars David

Tennant. “It’s a dark, twisted, logic-defying, cerebral conundrum of a show,” says Arnold. “And the music reflects that. Next, I start work on the second series of Good Omens.” Presumably both theme tunes are too good to be skipped? He laughs and says: “Let’s hope so.”

Unskippable: our composers’ favourites

Murray Gold

“Ramin Djawadi’s themes for Westworld and Game of Thrones are both fantastic. Toast of London puts me in a happy mood. Sex and the City is underrated too – musically complicated yet so witty and minimal. I always want to hear every second of The Simpsons. And with The Royle Family, the pathos of the music completes the journey of each episode. You need the closure of those final resolving chords.”

Carly Paradis

“The X-Files theme by Mark Snow influenced how I approached tension and suspense in [Line of Duty](#). Great ones from when I was a kid include Miami Vice, The A-Team, Murder She Wrote, Knight Rider and The Twilight Zone. More recent favourites are Stranger Things, Succession, Curb Your Enthusiasm, Downton Abbey and Peaky Blinders.”

David Arnold

“I grew up in the 60s and 70s when every TV theme tune was a classic: Dad’s Army, Are You Being Served?, The Protectors, Van Der Valk, The Sweeney, Z Cars, This Is Your Life, even Crossroads. You can whistle all of them. More recently, I loved Succession and Devs. That’s an incredible piece of work.”

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Vending machines. Illustration: Guardian Design/Alamy/Getty

[The long read](#)

A day in the life of (almost) every vending machine in the world

Vending machines. Illustration: Guardian Design/Alamy/Getty

What's behind the indestructible appeal of the robotic snack?

by [Tom Lamont](#)

Thu 14 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 08.08 EDT

A minute before midnight on 21 July 2021, as passengers staggered sleepily through Manchester airport, I stood wringing my hands in the glow of a vending machine that was seven feet tall, conspicuously branded with the name of its owner – BRODERICK – and positioned like a clever trap between arrivals and the taxi rank. Standard agonies. Sweet or savoury? Liquid or something to munch? I opted for Doritos, keying in a three-digit code and touching my card to the reader so that the packet moved jerkily

forwards, propelled by a churning plastic spiral and tipped into the well of the machine. My Doritos landed with a *thwap*, a sound that always brings relief to the vending enthusiast, because there hasn't been a mechanical miscue. Judged by the clock, which now read 12am, it was the UK's first vending-machine sale of the day.

Nine hours later, I was sitting in a spruce office in the Manchester suburb of Wythenshawe, drinking coffee with John "Johnny Brod" Broderick, the man who owned and operated that handsome airport machine. I'd had an idea to try to capture 24 hours in the life of vending machines. These weird, conspicuous objects! With their backs against the wall of everyday existence, they tempt out such a peculiar range of emotions, from relief to frustration, condescension to childish glee. For decades I'd been a steady and unquestioning patron. I figured that by spending some time in the closer company of the machines and their keepers, by immersing myself in their history, by looking to their future, I might get to the bottom of their enduring appeal. What made entrepreneurs from the Victorian age onwards want to hawk their goods in this way? What made generations of us buy? Johnny Brod seemed a good first person to ask.

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Freckle-tanned, portly and quick to laugh, Broderick has a playful exterior that conceals the fiery heart of a vending fundamentalist. He is a man so invested in the roboticised transmission of snacks that, come Halloween, Johnny Brod has been known to park a machine full of sweets in his driveway, letting any costumed local kids issue their demand for treats via prodded forefinger. With his brother Peter and his father, John Sr, he runs the vending empire Broderick's Ltd, its 2,800 machines occupying some of the most sought-after corridors and crannies of the UK. The Broderick family sugar and sustain office workers, factory workers, students, gym goers, shoppers and schoolchildren. They pep up breaktimes in a nuclear power station. If you've ever wolfed a postpartum Snickers in the maternity ward at Chesterfield or Leeds General, or turned thirsty while waiting to fly out of Stansted or Birmingham airports, then you've almost certainly shopped, at one mechanical remove, with Johnny Brod. He thanks you.

The coffee we drank that morning had trickled into cardboard cups from one of his own hot-beverage makers. Business had been hurt badly by Covid, he said. There had been one wretched day in the spring of 2020 when he awoke to find himself not the owner of the second-largest fleet of vending machines in the UK, but instead, of “timebombs. All these machines of ours in places we couldn’t access. All full of perishable food.” After enduring months of closed workplaces, abandoned airports and dead campuses, the Brodericks had lost millions on foregone Twirls and Mini Cheddars. Even so, Johnny Brod was bullish, insisting that the pandemic presented him with opportunities, too.

As he led me on a tour of his Wythenshawe headquarters, I told him about my early hours purchase from a Broderick machine at the airport. Talk about a smooth transaction, I said. No snagging! I imagined he would be pleased to hear this, but he twitched his head in frustration, as if at a grave breach of etiquette. Vending people hated it, he explained to me, this unexamined expectation of mechanical failure. Modern machines contained many failsafes against botched vends. Despite this, the one time that Johnny Brod could remember his beloved industry trending on Twitter, a cruel joke had done the rounds. “About change being inevitable. Except from a vending machine.”



John Broderick Sr (left) and his son Johnny in the warehouse of their vending machine business in Manchester. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

Every one of his machines, he countered, was fitted with a contactless card reader. Since Covid, people didn't want to touch anything they didn't have to. Big change was sweeping through automated vending, and the first thing to go was small change. As cash sales tumbled in 2020 and 2021, and contactless sales climbed, the Brodericks had been the beneficiary of new and better information about their customers. Pre-Covid, not only did they have to go and fetch someone's coppery quid, then count it – they didn't even know whose quid it was. Now the tycoons of vending understood us better. Johnny Brod had released a smartphone app that tempted people with discounts in return for permission to track their vending habits.

He led us into a control room that had large screens mounted on the walls and employees arranged Nasa-style, facing screens on which stationary dots and travelling arrows identified thousands of vending machines and the technicians who roved between them. We watched a live ticking record of the day's sales activity, north to Aberdeen, south to the Isle of Wight. A couple of quick clicks on a technician's computer and we were marvelling at the snacking history of a loyal, I would say fanatical, Broderick customer in Manchester, someone who must have been sourcing two full meals a day from behind glass. While Johnny Brod made a note to slip this customer a thank-you tenner via the app, I asked his team if they'd be able to find the record of my midnight Doritos. A few keyboard taps and there it was.

The Doritos fell from their spiral at midnight, closely followed by a sachet of peanut M&Ms, a stubby Mars and a bottle of water. What happened next in the wider world of these machines? I contacted a number of Johnny Brod's competitors, outfits of all sizes, and asked them to share with me similar sales data for that day in July. I enlisted volunteers to help me track vending activity around the globe. Everywhere mouths watered, spirals turned. A world of people bent double, their hands patting blindly inside retrieval wells, claiming juice boxes, cola bottles, cereal bars, gum, whatever they'd bought, whatever they craved.

At 12.45am, a white-chocolate Twix dropped into the well of a machine in Blackfriars in London. At a taxi depot in Belfast, drivers on overnight standby thumbed in coins to buy keep-aware Cokes. Cans of sugar-free Tango slammed down in the surgeons' staffroom at an Edinburgh hospital. Bottles of Mountain Dew, already long past expiry, turned another hour older inside a Covid-shuttered office in North Carolina. A Japanese accountant, several hours ahead of Europe and the US in a southern prefecture called Ehime, eyed the familiar choices in a cup-noodle machine by his desk. At 4.14am, UK time, a night owl in Newcastle bought Haribo. As the sun rose on Dundee, an employee at a packing factory turned the Perspex carousel of a chilled food machine, sliding back a sprung door, choosing for breakfast a shrink-wrapped sausage roll.

At 7.31 am, on a train-station platform in Wakefield in West Yorkshire, a machine was tapped for Tango Orange as the first morning commuters came through. Wakefield is the birthplace of automated vending. This is where the world began its determined effort to uproot the salesperson from the sale. In the 1850s, an inventor here patented a “self-acting machine” for the dispensation of stamps. Later, in the 1880s, a cast-iron contraption shaped like a trident and painted post-box red, patented by the Sweetmeat Automatic Delivery Company of London, was the first machine to vend comestibles. Before the end of the century, beer and wine fountains became fashionable in Paris. In the US, gumball machines sprouted everywhere. British law dictated that tobacconists must close their doors at 8pm, so unattended cigarette dispensers were bolted to the pavements outside.

As the social historian Kerry Segrave notes in her 2002 book, *Vending Machines*, the moment these “silent salesmen” appeared on the streets, they were viewed as fair game to be swindled. Tricking vending machines was called “slugging”, because you fed in cheap brass slugs instead of money. Hundreds of worthless metal lozenges advertising boot polish were found inside a single machine in south-west London in 1914. More than a century later, Johnny Brod told me that sluggers were still at large, only these days they tended to use counterfeit currency. He once had a shoebox full of recovered dud coins in his Wythenshawe office, but it was stolen during a break-in.



A vending machine in London circa 1920. Photograph: Hulton Deutsch/Corbis/Getty Images

Back in 1926, the battle against the cheats brought the Fry family into vending. And the Fry family changed the whole game. BE Fry was an inventor in St Louis, Missouri, who noted that the machines in his city were gullible enough to be fooled by cardboard circles. He came up with an improved coin-swallowing mechanism that would answer to nickels and dimes or nothing, he swore. By the 1940s, Fry's family business, renamed National Vendors, was booming. National Vendors established many of the industry customs that hold sway today. Roving technicians on the roads. A sales team on the phones back at HQ, fighting off turf incursions from rivals, signing new sites to new contracts.

Every vending machine is a battleground. Profits are ruthlessly haggled over. Competition for spots is intense. Broadly speaking, the vending game is built on deals between operators (who own machines and have the skills to install them, fix them, constantly fill them with fats and sugars) and site owners (who have the rights to advantageous pieces of land). Either a machine is placed on private property – say, a factory, where the site owner surrenders profits to the operator in return for keeping a workforce fed and present – or, a machine is placed somewhere public, inside a teeming airport,

for instance. Here the site owner will expect a cut of each item sold, anywhere from 10% to 30%.

Those midnight Doritos at Manchester airport cost me £1.10. Though Johnny Brod, the operator, would not say how much of a cut went to the site owner, Manchester Airports Group, he did acknowledge that he made 22p in profit per Doritos packet. (And that Manchester Airport Group made more.) We were discussing this in headquarters when his father, John Sr, wandered through the office, ready to reminisce about the old days. John Sr explained how he founded the business in the 1960s with a single National Vendors machine, imported from the US. He struck a deal to put it in the foyer of Macclesfield baths. Everything escalated from there.

As the Broderick business grew, the family watched their rivals big and small start to eat each other. For the past 20 years or so, global vending has been dominated by corporations that have carved up the world into domains, buying and absorbing regional operators. The big fish in Japan is a vending company called Glory. In the US, it's Crane. Europe is ruled by Selecta, founded in Zurich in 1957 and owned by the Swiss private-equity firm KKR since 2015. From its English outpost in Hemel Hempstead, Selecta bosses the UK market, with 80,000 machines scattered around hotels, transport hubs and petrol stations. On more than one occasion, Johnny Brod said, he'd received speculative phone calls from Selecta about the possibility of a buyout. But the Brodericks always told Selecta no. Unfinished business.

As Johnny Brod explained to me in the Wythenshawe office, the post-pandemic world was one that needed feeding to an ever-greater degree by unmanned food stations. He had secretive concept sketches on his phone, and prototype machines behind a locked laboratory door at his headquarters, all part of a plan to help usher in a new vending age. I made him promise to show me the secret lab after lunch.

Lunchtime. In Belfast, that same day, Emmet Oppong walked into a taxi depot near his home carrying as many Cokes as he could handle. He also had pouches of midget gem sweets, massive Twix Xtras and three types of Wrigley's gum. Weeks earlier, this 21-year-old business graduate had become the owner of a beige and somewhat time-ravaged vending machine

that was, in fact, a little older than Oppong himself. He bought it from an online broker for £100 and had since spent about £500 trucking it around, renting storage space, pondering locations, till he found it a home among the taxi drivers. Oppong unlocked the machine's front and began to feed in packets and cans.

He was drawn to vending because he liked the idea of earning money while he slept, ate, studied, interviewed for other jobs, and in general applied his energies elsewhere. Ignoring for a moment the fierce battle for plots, the maintenance stresses, the logistical feats required to keep far-flung machines stocked and clean, at the core of any vendor's ambition there is often a dream of becoming rich while doing better things. This dream is not always achievable. The second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-hand machines being sold online are a testament to the many dabblers who plunge in only to beat an eventual retreat. But Oppong was doing alright so far. A few more midget gems sold, a bit more gum, and soon he expected to break even on his £600 investment. Perhaps today.



Emmet Oppong with one of his vending machines in west Belfast.
Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

Before that summer, Oppong had never looked inside a vending machine or wondered how they functioned. Then he became the owner of a model

called a SnackMart, which came to him wrapped in dusty cellophane, with alien interior workings. He spent a fortnight in a storage unit, stood before the machine with an owner's manual in hand, trying to distinguish what from what. He learned that "spacers" were clamps that kept slender items, such as drinks cans, snug in their rack. "Product expellers" were slip-on tongues for the spirals that helped send puffier items such as crisps on their reluctant drops to the well. An evaporation unit above the door sucked in moisture and stopped the glass from steaming over. Though the outer facades of vending machines have become jazzier, and payment methods have modernised, the insides of most vending machines have barely changed in decades.

Oppong followed certain fundamental laws of vending. He put his Twix Xtras and some Maltesers down on the bottom shelves, nearest the SnackMart's fridge unit. Crisps were placed in the warmest part of the machine, up at the top. The midget gems could go anywhere, really, and today he decided to give them a try in primetime – halfway along, halfway up. In vending, this part of the job, as delicate as flower arrangement, is known as planogramming. How best to spread the wares? Fiona Chambers, who runs the vending company SV24-7 in the Scottish town of Alloa with her husband, Ian, puts much thought into planograms. She told me she likes two central spirals of KitKats, two of Twirls, these being her champion sellers. Declan Sewell, the young and ambitious CEO of a company called Decorum Vending in Portsmouth, will always, always put Snickers in the middle. Sewell told me he preferred to keep more colourfully packaged items on the fringes of his machines, to catch the eye and draw attention across his range.

If the glass or Perspex window of a vending machine is like a canvas, these operators aimed to paint a picture of abundance. "You don't want the customer saying, och, there's nothing to choose from," Chambers said. At the same time, margins being tightest for operators in the industry's middle tier, she and Sewell couldn't afford to fill their machines so generously that items expired before they were bought. Certain planogramming wheezes mitigated against this. Items put close to a button panel, Sewell insisted, sold quicker than items below or above. Chambers had read an academic study that claimed to prove options on the left outsold options on the right, at least

in Europe and the US, because we read these machines how we read our books.

Oppong closed the front of his SnackMart, locking it carefully. The names given to vending machines are reliably charming, sometimes hinting at their places of manufacture. Spain makes Mistrals. The US makes Cascades. Germans make Bistros! (exclamation mark included). Italian machines tend to be given musical names: Operas, Melodias, Sinfonias, Jazzes. There are machines out there called Shoppers, Shoppertrons, SuperStacks, NarrowStacks. There are Brios, Astros, Tangos, Sambas, Festivals, Visions. There are BevMaxes, Polyvends, Merchants – and SnackMarts, which were created by a British engineer called Richard Brinsley and his company Westomatic. “West”, for their west-of-England base, “omatic” because what do you think.

I went to visit Brinsley one day at his workshop in Devon. In a part of one warehouse, malfunctioning SnackMarts were lined up for repair, while other, sadder machines, like a miserably rusted Kenco dispenser, were beyond salvation and awaited final destruction. Something of a pioneer when it came to vending English tea, Brinsley was the first to bring to market a machine that brewed from leaves, not powder, in the 1980s. He called that creation the Temprano, “because it was ahead of its time”, Brinsley told me. He led us into a part of the warehouse where a brand new hot-drinks dispenser was coming into being. “We’re going to call this one the Autorista,” he said, as he stood in front of a huge purple machine, the first in the world, according to Brinsley, that could prepare a coffee with real milk or real cream.



Richard Brinsley, managing director of Westomatic Vending Services Ltd, in his warehouse in Devon. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

“One of our electronics guys came up with the name,” he said, hitting a few buttons and automatically barista-ing out a cappuccino that contained fresh cow’s milk. Johnny Brod in Manchester, obsessional about new kit, had placed an order for the first 25 Autoristas that Brinsley could manufacture. In order for this latest innovation to be effective in the field, both men knew, an Autorista would have to be visited every 24 hours by a technician who knew how to clean its interior pipes and flush out the old milk and cream before it soured. If this was the future of unattended sales, I thought out loud, it was going to require a lot more human attention than in the past. But leaving the Autorista alone and full of spoiling dairy did not bear thinking about, Brinsley said.

Over in Belfast, Oppong had the option of leaving his SnackMart to take care of itself for weeks at a time. Out of sheer enthusiasm, he had been visiting the taxi depot almost every day. He popped in mornings and nights, to feed in new stock and to pull out the coin tray, relishing the weight of the drivers’ one- and two-pound coins. Declan Sewell of Decorum Vending had rigged his own fleet with wifi units so that he could track his live sales by smartphone, refreshing for updates like a fan following the Saturday football. Fiona Chambers in Scotland relied on reports that came nightly by

email. Oppong was still tracking profits with a pen and paper. He tallied the latest. Nearly there.

A few timezones west, the US awoke, its 7 million vending machines getting busier and busier as another working day began. An IT analyst in North Carolina, returning to his office for the first time since the start of the pandemic, decided to buy a Mountain Dew from the break-room machine. He noticed when it was too late that the bottle had expired 16 months earlier, in March 2020. “If I die,” the analyst tweeted, opening the Dew anyway, “just know I died doing what I love.” I got in touch with him. He survived. His drink was only a little flat.

Vending machines do kill their human patrons every so often. A US [study](#) in 1998 recorded 37 deaths and 113 injuries over a 20-year period, which amounted to an average of 1.85 kills per annum. This statistic, never formally updated or corrected since, sometimes prompts the claim that vending machines are deadlier than sharks. In the 1980s, cans of drink were left for the taking on top of vending machines near Hiroshima in Japan. These cans had been deliberately laced with a potent herbicide. Twelve people died and their killer was never caught.

Vending machines can be vessels for all manner of plots, ambitions and initiatives. In Glasgow, that same day in July, health officials unveiled a free-to-use [dispenser](#) of sterilised needles, an attempt to curb infections among the city’s drug users. At the same time, over in California, the porn actors Carmela Clutch and Kyle Mason debuted a film that had for its setting the patch of ground in front of a sex-toy dispenser. Carmela had her hand stuck in the flap. Kyle, as an arriving technician, caught a vibe. The scene developed from there. While I was in Manchester I read news reports about a civic effort in Nairobi to put sanitary-pad dispensers in schools. A similar scheme was announced for women’s restrooms in Tokyo, where, that same day, hundreds of journalists were flying in ahead of the Olympic Games. On arrival at Tokyo’s Olympic Village, international guests were offered the chance to buy locally apt souvenirs in a locally apt way, via robotic vend.



Street vending machines in Tokyo. Photograph: Matthew Childs/Reuters

If Wakefield is the literal birthplace of the automated sale, Japan is the spiritual home. There they vend umbrellas, ice-cream, fancy dress. In Nagasaki, there is a machine that sells the edible chrysalises of silkworms. You can vend fresh tomatoes in Kobe and, in Tatsuno, fresh oysters. In Osaka, during the summer of 2021, a Japanese airline had started selling tickets to mystery destinations from a machine that asked 5,000 yen, or £30, per turn. This concept was so popular that 10,000 tickets were sold by the end of 2021 and the airline put duplicate machines in Tokyo, Nagoya and Fukuoka.

At the last formal count, conducted by a trade body in December 2020, there were 2.7m vending machines spread around Japan: one for every 46 citizens, the highest density anywhere. Affection for vending is so pronounced that a machine selling something unique may become the subject of fascination, even pilgrimage. On 21 July, while I was in Manchester with the Brodericks, and while Emmet Oppong was keeping a close eye on his Belfast machine, a Japanese accountant named Masaharu Mizota was coming to the end of his day in Ehime. Mizota had recently learned about an unusual, indeed, one-of-a-kind machine in Uchiko, a small town on the Oda River, and he daydreamed about taking a roadtrip to try it. Would it be crazy to drive for hours to Uchiko, just to push a coin into a slot and punch a few buttons?

Vending machines have the power to beguile a certain type of person. As I am one of those types, wandering up to scuffed Perspex wherever it is to be found, often overpaying in this way for my Boosts or my ready salted crisps, I've spent a lot of time wondering about their hypnotic power. There is a logic that underpins the will to vend to other people. It's that allure of passive income. The operator of a vending machine gets to experience the idle fancy of exhausted shopkeepers everywhere, selling their wares without getting up early in the morning, without necessarily getting up at all. But what is behind the will to be vended *to*? This is more complicated. I think it has something to do with the proffered combination of convenience, novelty and nostalgia.

Mizota told me that he felt the culture of automated vending to be a part of his culture as a Japanese citizen. He was as willing to take a long journey to try out a novel machine as he would have been to visit a monument or a place of natural beauty. Mizota was eight hours ahead of me in the UK, almost ready to go to bed. Before he did so he checked his maps, figuring out a route for the morning.

In Manchester it was mid-afternoon. Leading me into a room at his headquarters that he called his concept lab, Johnny Brod waved an arm at a pair of unplugged prototypes. "My babies," he called them. His actual children and even a couple of grandchildren happened to be visiting that day. If everything went according to plan, Johnny Brod said, these prototypes would secure his family's fortune long into the future. He was nervous about me repeating specific details, lest his competitors gain a jump. But the gist of what Johnny Brod was plotting went as follows.

Many workplace canteens, closed during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, had not reopened, or not at their former scale. For reasons of in-house virus management, employers were no longer so eager to have employees roam out at lunch to the nearest sandwich shop or supermarket. Those high-street retailers still wanted to reach a hungry workforce, however, and Johnny Brod hoped to become the bridge. He wanted to run new-wave machines of his own design inside offices and factories, as one-stop robotic canteens. There was a prototype up and running in the distribution centre of a well-known UK retailer, from which the Brodericks vended salad bowls, fruit

bowls, “anything you’d see in a garage forecourt. Soon we’ll be diversifying into sushi. Crudités!”

These manoeuvrings were part of a wider shift that had been taking place across the vending industry for a decade. Back in the early 2010s, innovators in the US came up with an alternative to the traditional spiral machines that they called micro-markets. Take out its turning coils, leave in the shelves, and a vending machine is essentially a transparent larder. What if customers could open the door of that larder and remove by hand whatever they could afford? Instead of being stocked with products of a uniform shape – products that could be relied on to move forward in the embrace of a spiral then fall in predictable ways – a machine could sell anything. Loose golf balls. Bikinis. A jeroboam of champagne. A curved banana. Over time, the tempting possibility of vending fresh fruit had frustrated the tinkerers like Johnny Brod, because fruit tends to create jams inside traditional machines, figuratively and sometimes literally.



Face masks for sale in a vending machine at Edinburgh airport in February 2021. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Micro-markets full of swipe-to-open larders and fridges began to open in offices, factories and prisons across the US. Sensitive shelves and CCTV cameras helped determine who had bought what. In Europe and the UK,

Selecta opened about 150 micro-markets which, at least until the summer of 2021, were in workplaces not accessible to curious outsiders. That week in July 2021, however, Selecta [had opened](#) a micro-market for use by anybody in East Croydon train station in London. A small retail unit by the gates had been fitted with larders full of fruit tubs, wide-bottomed milkshakes, shallow nut trays, Jaffa Cakes in sealed blue parcels. Everything was left unattended, at the disposal of any passing customer with a credit card.

For most of the morning on 21 July 2021, according to figures later provided to me by Selecta, the East Croydon micro-market went unused. Then, a canned latte, a ham-and-cheese croissant later, sales crept up. By mid-afternoon, as I stood in Johnny Brod's lab, about 20 items were being removed from the London micro-market every hour. Hummus chips. Bircher muesli pots. Juices laced with ginseng. Johnny Brod was so unnerved by Selecta's innovative leap, he'd sent a spy south.

He checked and rechecked his phone, waiting to receive word from East Croydon. Next to his concept lab there was a large staff lounge, its walls lined with old, experimental Broderick's machines, and we killed some time in there. A few of the old machines had no touchscreen. One had *only* touchscreen, its entire front replaced by a doorway-sized digital display. Johnny Brod had been among the first to embrace screens, back in 2011, an innovation that later became the industry norm. But his all-screen, only-screen model never took off; customers, it turned out, needed to see the object of their desire. Now this lone model stood as monument to noble failure in the Wythenshawe lounge. At last his phone buzzed and Johnny Brod read his spy's report on the new micro-market. "It's quite nice apparently," he said, sounding forlorn.

At 5.51pm the snack machine in Blackfriars in London sold a porridge-to-go bar. At 6.04pm, a mango drink. It was one of those newer vending machines that could talk, and it spoke to customers with a robotic, feminine voice, advising, apologising. Another machine, many thousands of miles away, told prospective customers: "My name is James, I serve delicious snacks." James was situated in an apartment block overlooking the Langat River in Malaysia. He had his own [Twitter account](#). Spend any time immersed in the vending world and you start to see that these machines, insentient

cumbersome things, are repositories for the most unlikely human notions and emotions. There was once a drinks dispenser in Singapore that had to be cuddled before it would unloose a can. That was a bid to teach us something about spontaneous acts of compassion, courtesy of Coca-Cola Incorporated.

We bring our prejudices to these machines. We have ungracious feelings for them that they know nothing about; we anticipate their betrayal. There was once a Seinfeld episode dedicated to George Constanza's furious efforts to secure a snagged Twix. When Johnny Brod lent a branded coffee-maker to the producers of the ITV drama Cold Feet, he was pained to see it malfunctioning for dramatic purposes. ("And our competitors *love* putting clips of that online.") In one of my earliest London memories I am on an underground platform, watching a disgruntled man in a raincoat apply a handmade out-of-order sign to a Cadbury's chocolate dispenser. He'd fed in his coin. But no Dairy Milk. I still remember his appalled expression, his wounded grace as he warned off others.



The inner workings of a vending machine at the Westomatic warehouse in Devon. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

This initial encounter did not prejudice me against the machines. Instead, I've always found them to emanate reassurance, particularly so during moments of dislocation: jetlagged layovers, late-night jobs, early starts. I

first noticed their palliative effect at school, when we called it going venders (“You going venders?”) and when a visit to the machines meant a respite from classwork, junior lust, the bickering over which bands were best. One day a savvy pupil set himself up in competition with the school venders. He started to sell the same snacks, cheaper, from his backpack. I stayed loyal to the machines. They had inexhaustible patience, they let you ponder every option, walk up, walk away, malinger at the glass, wallow in a pre-purchase. I think what comforted me then, as now, was their height, their stuffedness, their immobility, their always-on-ness, their middle-of-the-night-ness, their there-til-the-end-ness.

A decade ago, when my wife went into a long and intermittently frightening labour that lasted for days, my bleary walks to the hospital vending machines took on the character of therapy, necessary little trips out of chaos to find something sturdy, upright, understood. How right it felt that in Cormac McCarthy’s dystopian novel *The Road*, the last can of Coke in a ruined world had to be plucked from the innards of an old vending machine. So often they are a comfort of final resort, as anybody who has concocted a contingency meal in a budget hotel or a motorway service-station will know. They facilitate jokes, complaints, unhealthy diets, but the emotions these machines inspire are real. I know of at least one love story that has a vending machine as its core. Fiona Chambers of SV24-7 first met her husband, Ian, when she was a salesperson for a drinks firm. Ian was a buyer. “I’m not saying that we flirted, exactly,” she recalled, “but hey-ho. I sold him a shitload of Cokes.”



George, son of the Brodericks' accountant, at the company's HQ.
Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

The more time I spent with Johnny Brod, the more I saw how sincerely concerned he was for his fleet. He had a horror of unclean machines, having once inherited a second-hand BevMax that had spores of mould growing in its corners. He'd been known to clamber down on his belly in malls or on airport concourses, to peer under retrieval wells, dragging out chocolate wrappers, recovering abandoned flip-flops. His machines were like his pets or his zoo animals. He maintained them with fastidious care, and he couldn't let me leave Manchester, he said, without taking me on safari to visit a prized specimen.

Over in Leeds General, said Johnny Brod, he owned an absolute beauty by the benches in A&E, a machine that was much used by fight-night drunks. "Insane on weekends ... we can't fill it fast enough." And he loved his BevMaxes by the luggage belt in the local airport. "Because if that belt breaks down, I've got you trapped." But the machine he wanted to show me was in Manchester's Trafford Centre shopping mall. No gimmicks, no tricks, just a boss dispenser in a prime location, capable of slurping in thousands of pounds a month. He drove us over in an SUV.

“There,” Johnny Brod whispered, signalling for us to halt on a concourse near a spotless, richly stocked BevMax. It loomed, looking tempting. “Wait,” he muttered. It was like watching a well-baited snare. He knew it wouldn’t take long. Soon a young shopper paused on her way through from clothes and jewellery, leaning in to ponder the choice. Water? Fanta Lemon? When she kept walking, I told Johnny Brod: tough luck.

“Wait,” he repeated. And here she came, returning for water after all. Fanta, too.

In Belfast, that night, when Emmet Oppong looked in on his vending machine before bed, no midget gems had been sold. Crinkle-cut crisps had done better, and as usual every Coke he could fit inside was gone. Oppong clicked his pen and did some sums. As long as he wrote off the personal labour, he was satisfied his SnackMart had now paid for itself. He was newly in profit: a vending entrepreneur. Months later, in autumn 2021, and trading as Em Vending Solutions, Oppong would go on to triple the size of his operation, purchasing a pair of silvery machines covered in cartoony decals of Homer Simpson and the Tasmanian Devil, £750 the pair.

As I came away from Manchester that night in July, I took with me a final image of Johnny Brod, expansionist-king of UK vending, owner of a thousands-strong fleet – standing in front of an empty slab of wall in the Trafford Centre. He took photographs. He noted nearby plug points. He couldn’t believe, he said, he hadn’t thought to put a vending machine *there* yet. The last time we spoke, in spring 2022, he was about to take delivery of his 25 Autoristas. He was considering an expansion into London Heathrow, “where they still have the same shit machines you saw in Love Actually, 20 years ago. And you can print that.”

But back on that July night, at 8.08pm, a swimmer in Glasgow bought a bottle of energy drink from Fiona Chambers’s machine near a public pool. At 9.53pm, Declan Sewell’s chatty machine in Blackfriars sold a final peppermint Aero. A smoked-salmon sandwich and a Pepsi were bought for somebody’s dinner from East Croydon. Soon all this UK trade would slow, purchases continuing in the US, resuming again in waking Asia. It was nearly midnight in the UK when I arrived back in London from Manchester.

As I had made the day's first vend, I thought it would be neat if I made the day's last vend, too.

I wandered around St Pancras station, trying to find a just-so machine that would suit my appetite, as I provisioned and planogrammed ideal arrangements of confectionary and crisps in my head. After a day with the loquacious Johnny Brod, I was pleased by the knowledge that whatever vending machine I found, it would ask for no conversation. Zero civility. We would commune, if we communed at all, with a poked finger and the warm coins I had in my pocket. Perhaps this is at the heart of the machines' unique appeal, a displaced misanthropy. Perhaps we transform our gratitude at not having to deal with *one more human being today* into tenderness for the SnackMarts and Shoppertrons and BevMaxes that feed us and reward us by a path of least resistance.

Under a St Pancras escalator, a couple were dancing in front of an automated jukebox. On a concrete walkway beyond, a machine waited to vend foldable Brompton bikes. I checked the Google alerts on my phone, scrolling through social media, too, learning that a radio producer in Chicago had at that moment bought an attractive sugar-dusted ganache from a machine in a garage off Interstate 55. A cannabis-oil manufacturer had put a dispenser on top of a majestic sandstone mountain in Utah, to deliver balms to achey hikers. An animal sanctuary in Colorado was awarded a patent on a vending machine to be used exclusively by captive apes. "Come find me near the swimming pool," tweeted James, the Malaysian vending machine, from his fourth-storey berth.

In Japan, it was morning. The accountant Masaharu Mizota woke earlier than usual and climbed aboard his motorbike. He drove south, between mountains, crossing bridges, paying at tolls, following a map that was mounted on his handlebars. He pulled into sleepy Uchiko at about 7.30am and parked by the one-of-a-kind vending machine he'd read about. Of all the things to be sold from an ungainly glass-and-steel machine, it was selling pieces of fragile and beautiful origami. There were folded-paper sea creatures. Delicate flowers and birds and stars. After his long journey, Mizota fed in a 50-yen piece, about 30p, and ran a gloved finger over the buttons, trying to choose.

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Theatre

Waiting for Beckett: Stephen Dillane and Conor Lovett stage the great playwright's novel

As they prepare to bring the mesmerising *How It Is* to London, the actors reflect on performing a text with no characters and no punctuation



‘There is no point at which you say, “Ah, that’s it” ... Stephen Dillane and Conor Lovett in *How It Is* (Part One) at the Coronet theatre. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian



Mark Fisher

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Two men are meeting on Zoom, as they have done twice a week for the past two years. One of them is in northern France, his cottage bathed in bright spring sunshine, two portraits of a craggy [Samuel Beckett](#) behind him. The other is in a chilly Sussex, his window casting a dull grey light.

The first starts to recite. “Before Pim long before with Pim vast tracts of time,” he says. “A few traces that’s all seeing who I always.”

The second interrupts to correct him. “Thoughts,” he says. “Kinds of thoughts.”

The first man begins again. “Before Pim long before with Pim vast tracts of time kinds of thoughts same family diverse doubts emotions too yes emotions ...”

And so it goes until it is the second man’s turn to incant these mysterious words. An hour later, they are still in full flow, a ritual as mesmerising as it is strange. Phrases loop and repeat. Themes fade in and out of focus. Rhythms emerge from the unpunctuated text to form a dreamy, austere poetry.

It must be hellish to memorise, which is why these two men must test their recall so frequently. The words are from Beckett's novel *How It Is*. The first man is Conor Lovett, who with Judy Hegarty Lovett is the driving force behind [Gare St Lazare Ireland](#), a company renowned for facing Beckett head-on. The second man is [Stephen Dillane](#), the screen star and National Theatre regular.



Expressing thought ... Samuel Beckett. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer

"If you're not careful you'll go off on page 23 instead of the page you're actually on," says Conor Lovett before their line run. "You have to be on the ball."

"There are many occasions when both Conor and I feel exposed on the stage in a way that you don't in a conventional piece," says Dillane. "There's no character. You're not even sure that you're there. You're not sure if it's the past or the present, so how on earth can you possibly speak?"

The staging has a long history. In 2018, towards the end of a three-year residency, they performed [How It Is \(Part One\) at the Everyman, Cork](#), as well as at London's Coronet theatre. They had just given the second part an airing when the Covid pandemic struck. That led to [a six-hour online version](#)

for the Dublin theatre festival in 2021. The Irish Times said it was “[difficult to click pause](#)”.

Now, they are bringing the second part to London, with music by Mel Mercier and the Irish Gamelan Orchestra, and setting their sights on a live staging of the whole book. “It’s a wonderful text to stay with and revisit,” says Dillane. “It’s continually shifting, continually revealing itself and disguising itself again, while always, because of the sheer perfection of the language, maintaining your faith that there is something worth staying around for – and more.”

As a veteran interpreter of Beckett works, including First Love, Molloy and The Unnamable, director Judy Hegarty Lovett is unfazed by the novel’s open-endedness. “Very often the characters in those prose works are nameless and aren’t drawn that heavily,” she says, and is delighted to have been awarded a doctorate for her PhD on the making of How It Is (Part One). “It’s less to do with specifying character and more to do with expressing thought.”

Published in English in 1964, the three-part novel features an unknown narrator speaking from the darkness, his circumstances reduced to a sack, a few tins, the mud beneath him and the memory of meeting someone called Pim. With not so much as a comma, never mind a full stop, it is wide open to interpretation, even if its rhythm points to units of meaning.

“Rightly or wrongly, we have both identified where the full stop is, where the paragraph break is, where the turns are, but they are entirely provisional,” says Dillane. “There are syntactical arrangements that are self-explanatory and have to be the way they are, but it’s by no means all of them.”

When commentators attempt to suggest a meaning for this elliptical work, their claims can seem nebulous. Critics talk vaguely about the “human condition”. Summing up Beckett can make him seem banal. What interpretation do the actors have? “It’s something to do with a mind trying to understand itself and recognising the absurdity of that task,” says Dillane, whose repertoire [also includes TS Eliot’s Four Quartets](#). “It seems to be an

attempt by a binary, logical mind to make sense of stuff in order to continue to exist while recognising that it can't possibly do that.”

Yet, even then, the book resists. “There is no point at which you say, ‘Ah, that’s it,’” says Conor Lovett. “We go through moments when it’s crystal clear what it’s all about and then a day later we say, ‘Why did we think that?’”

- How It Is (Part Two) is [at the Coronet theatre, London, from 20 April to 7 May](#)
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[**OpinionRishi Sunak**](#)

Farewell, Rishi Sunak, parliament's Icarus who has finally crash-landed

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



From overseeing mass fraud to messing up furlough, the chancellor's mistakes are many. It's amazing his popularity held so long



Rishi Sunak visiting Caunton Engineering, a steel manufacturing business in the East Midlands, in March 2022. Photograph: Simon Walker Hm Treasury

Thu 14 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 13.48 EDT

When the [Times](#) last put Rishi Sunak on the cover of its Saturday magazine, in August 2020, it used a picture that was almost normal. There stood the chancellor behind a green leather chair, wearing a navy suit and purple tie – but Photoshopped above his head was one extra detail: a gold halo, as if to say here is no mere finance minister, but an envoy from God.

Back then, lots of people thought the chancellor was simply divine. This was the era of “dishlisty Rishi”, of pundits gurgling in delight over a professionally curated Instagram feed, of GQ magazine mooning over the 40-something as an “unlikely style hero”. “Are Sunak’s suits really all that good? Or am I being blindsided by those kind eyes and that flawless complexion?”, [mused its style director](#), like a character from a Judy Blume novel. It might have been only two years back, but it feels like an eternity ago.

Bad news now clings to Sunak like burrs to a dog after a walk in the woods. First, the resounding emptiness of last month’s [spring statement](#), even as the country was sliding into a historic social and economic crisis. Then last week’s revelations that his wife doesn’t pay UK tax on her international

income and that the chancellor himself held a US green card while living in Downing Street. And on Tuesday, the Metropolitan police slapped him with a fine for attending a birthday party for Boris Johnson. Sunak's allies are [telling journalists](#) he is furious about the police decision, saying he only went to the cabinet room to see the prime minister about something else. This may be true. What is false is the chancellor's claim that he broke no rules and that he "did not attend any parties". Just like his boss, he has lied to both the public and parliament.

It is now almost impossible to see Sunak as a serious contender for No 10, as he was just a few months ago. His abstemious diligence offered a contrast to Johnson's exuberant shamelessness. He spoke fluent spreadsheet while doling out relatable content on social media. During the pandemic, he slogged away at his desk while his colleagues went [paddleboarding](#) or [smooched in their ministerial offices](#). He was a technocrat in an age of populism, a grownup among a cabinet of sullen bumblers. He was a David Cameron protege who'd thrived in the Johnson era, going from rookie MP to second-top job in government in just five years. He was slick, sharp, seemingly centrist. He was, in short, the prime minister for those who claimed to be politically homeless.

Or so went the pitch. I have never bought it. Throughout his time at No 11, Sunak has veered between myopia and cruelty. He was late to spot just how serious Covid would prove to be, delivering a [budget](#) in mid-March 2020 that had to be pulled apart and updated, week after week. His crowning achievement was to introduce the furlough scheme, which he wound up with such indecent haste that he was then forced to [extend the scheme](#), at one point only five hours before it was due to expire.

Johnson and Sunak are 'guilty men' and should resign, says Keir Starmer – video

In organising the £46bn "bounce back loan scheme", he has overseen the greatest amount of fraud of any chancellor – so bad that one of his own ministers, Lord Agnew, [resigned in disgust](#). Considering the sums of public money involved, this scandal should be on every front page in Britain: tens of thousands of loans handed to potential fraudsters and an estimated figure of up to [£20bn lost](#) from the public purse. Perhaps £4bn of that will be

written off as fraud – roughly as much as Sunak has [chopped off](#) this year’s foreign aid budget.

The apparently non-ideological Conservative, as William Hague [dubbed him](#), has allowed out-of-work benefits to fall this month to a [50-year low](#). The man who couldn’t [sort out the sick pay system](#) at a time when unprecedented numbers were falling sick, instead dreamed up Eat out to help out, which cost taxpayers £840m while also encouraging Covid to spread. According to the latest issue of the peer-reviewed [Economic Journal](#), the scheme “can account for between 8% [and] 17% of all new [Covid-19] infections” during the period in which the scheme was active, (and likely many more non-detected asymptomatic infections). But it did yield a great photo op, in which everyone’s favourite ex-hedge funder put in a shift [waiting tables at Wagamama](#).

No Labour chancellor could have got away with wasting such vast sums. No politician should get off the hook for enacting policies that make people ill. And no prime ministerial would-be should be allowed to have no plans to deal with the soaring cost of fuel and goods. Those are the charges for which the chancellor should be arraigned, not chirruping Happy Birthday with Carrie Johnson.

Yet, up until very recently, Sunak has enjoyed an amazing lack of scrutiny. He sits at the very centre of the curious nexus between the Spectator and Downing Street. He was best man at the wedding of the magazine’s political editor – the wife of whom went on to become Sunak’s spokeswoman. The newspapers treated this cosiness as mere happy coincidence. His background in shadow banking, his [£10m portfolio of houses](#), his anti-lockdown politics: none of it raised so much as an eyebrow. He married into the family of one of the most important businessmen on the planet, Narayana Murty of Infosys, but the chancellor’s father-in-law has aroused barely any curiosity in the British press. Yet as the writer Emiliano Mellino points out in his latest [Substack](#), the man who Sunak calls “wonderful” opposes the forming of trade unions in India’s IT industry and has called for workers to put in 60-hour weeks.

Sunak was the Icarus of this parliament, the man who crashed to Earth but should never have been allowed to fly so high in the first place. And now the

competition to replace Johnson will go on without him, its new frontrunners exposing just how strange and swivel-eyed today's Conservative party really is. Liz Truss, anyone?

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionGrenfell Tower inquiry

Ex-ministers could have shown humility and regret at the Grenfell inquiry. They didn't

[Lucie Heath](#)

Despite weeks of evidence about safety deregulation, those who were in charge seem convinced they are above reproach



Eric Pickles, secretary of state for housing from 2010 to 2015, gave evidence to the Grenfell inquiry last week. Photograph: MI News/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

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Over the past two weeks, more than four years after its first hearing, the Grenfell Tower inquiry finally heard from senior government figures responsible for housing and building regulations in the years before the disaster.

Eric Pickles, the secretary of state for housing under David Cameron from 2010 to 2015, [made the headlines](#) for telling the inquiry to use its time “wisely” as he had an “[extremely busy day](#)”. He also managed to offend survivors and the bereaved by getting the number of victims wrong during his closing statement, in which he also [concluded](#) that changing his actions as minister “wouldn’t have made any difference whatsoever”.

Stephen Williams, a Liberal Democrat junior minister [with responsibility](#) for building regulations from October 2013, said there was not “anything I could have done to materially make a difference to what happened in July 2017”. The fire took place in June.

It seems that a moment of self-reflection – or even an accurate account of the tragedy – was too much to ask for from our most senior elected representatives. They insist they are not responsible for decisions leading up to the fire. However, over its investigation, the inquiry has consistently painted a damning picture of the deregulation drive that was a key focus during Cameron’s time as prime minister. The [obsession with abolishing red tape](#) saw ministers at that time ignoring warning signs about a growing building safety crisis, and civil servants too disaffected to speak up.

The state failure to prepare for tower block fires goes back decades. Fires in Merseyside and Scotland in the 1990s provided stark warnings, and unpublished tests commissioned under New Labour showed how poorly the cladding used on Grenfell performed in a fire.

However, perhaps the most crucial moment in the narrative being pieced together by the inquiry is the [Lakanal House fire](#) in 2009, in Camberwell, south London, which killed six people. This should have been a turning point for setting out clear and comprehensive regulations. In 2013, the coroner investigating the fire made a number of recommendations to the government. Ministers were advised [to review](#) a document called Approved Document B, which provides guidance on the fire safety part of the building regulations.

Pickles, the housing secretary at the time, agreed to a review, but set a deadline of 2016-17. In reality, the review had barely started by the date of the Grenfell fire in 2017.

This delay proved fateful. Since Grenfell, ministers have insisted that the building regulations did not allow for combustible cladding to be installed on high-rise buildings, shifting the blame to industry. However, confusion over Approved Document B led many in industry to believe this type of cladding was permitted. More than 480 high rises in England have now been found to contain the same type of cladding as Grenfell Tower, while many more contain other dangerous claddings.

One stark example includes an email sent from a cladding manufacturer to the civil servant responsible for Approved Document B, that warned “confusion and misunderstanding” over the building regulations was leading to a situation of “grave concern” and called for clearer guidance to be issued. Meanwhile, successive ministers between 2014 and 2017 were sent more than 21 letters from a group of MPs, led by the late David Amess, that warned a review of the guidance must be carried out urgently before another deadly fire occurs.

Given these warnings, the government still dragged its feet on reviewing Approved Document B. The civil servants with responsibility for the building regulations certainly have a lot to answer for. Much more should have been done to raise the alarm.

However, the failures of officials must be understood within the context of the deregulation agenda of the time. In January 2012, Cameron announced that his “new year resolution” was to “kill off the health and safety culture for good”. “We need to realise, collectively, that we cannot eliminate risk and that some accidents are inevitable,” he wrote in the Evening Standard in April of that year.

He tasked the civil service with a “one in, one out” rule for departments wishing to introduce new regulations. This was toughened to “one in, two out” in January 2013 and “one in, three out” in 2016.

Multiple officials told the inquiry last month that this policy made their job extremely difficult. One senior civil servant related the “anxiety and frustration of not being able to actually move things forward”, and noted that ministers made it “very clear” that items like the Approved Document B fire guidance were part of the desired cuts.

The politicians interviewed over the past two weeks have disputed these claims. Ministers have insisted that fire safety rules were exempt from the deregulation drive, with Pickles saying the idea that Approved Document B was included in the “one in, one out” policy was “ludicrous”.

Any mistakes made in the years leading up to Grenfell were blamed mainly on the civil service. In his witness statement to the inquiry, James Wharton, the junior minister who was responsible for building regulations between May 2015 and July 2016, said: “Everything happens slowly in the civil service.” Pickles raised concerns about the “line management” of the junior civil servants who received the warnings about the building regulations.

The lead counsel for the inquiry, Richard Millett QC, likes to ask if there is anything witnesses wish they had done differently. In the past, this question has provoked tears and outpourings of regret from the architects, contractors, officials and firefighters who have been called to give evidence.

But there was no such reflection by these ministers. They don’t appear interested in examining whether their overwhelming drive for deregulation contributed to an environment where important reviews into matters affecting life safety were kicked into the long grass.

Not even the death of 72 people was enough to make these politicians realise that, by minimising the state’s role in regulating businesses, their government failed in its most basic of tasks: keeping people safe.

- Lucie Heath is the deputy news editor of Inside Housing

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[Opinion](#)[Social media](#)

Is the US really a ‘failed state’ or has the internet just become a series of poor comparisons?

[Rachel Connolly](#)

On social media, a tendency to connect disparate news stories is causing many of us to lose our sense of reality



Will Smith's Oscars slap immortalised in graffiti on the Loddon Viaduct in Reading. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

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As a child, in the back of the car on drives along the motorway, I would look for connections between the number plates on surrounding cars. How many started with an odd number? How many with an even number? The search for patterns is a common human trait. People also see images in TV static, or nonexistent patterns in the goals scored in football games. There is a term

for this: illusory pattern perception, the human tendency to try to make sense of the world by finding relationships [between stimuli](#). It has been found to be a “[central cognitive mechanism](#)” accounting for conspiracy theories and supernatural beliefs.

I see this in the inclination to stitch together disparate cultural events (see, here I am, looking for meaning) that has become widespread on social media. The tendency to think that everything can be linked to something else, or compared, or both, and hence explained. The recent Oscars slap by the actor Will Smith was compared, nonsensically, to both Harvey Weinstein’s sustained history of sexual abuse and harassment, and [Russia’s invasion of Ukraine](#). This was just one recent example of something that happens all the time.

There are the associations drawn between politicians and the types of boyfriends common to stock internet jokes. The wildly inappropriate and crass comparisons between geopolitical disasters such as the US invasion of Afghanistan and interpersonal conflict such as familial abuse. Or even between Afghanistan and the generational fall in living standards experienced by some western millennials (a rise in student debt or rent is of course bad, but not even vaguely comparable to living in a conflict zone). Recently, I’ve noticed a trend whereby Americans refer to themselves as residents of a “failed state”. Words such as violence and harm are used to mean slightly different things, and then slightly different things again, and again and again, until those words don’t really mean anything at all.

This thing is basically that thing, which is just like another thing, which is practically something else. On and on and on it goes, in a never-ending chain of nonsense, each iteration stripping back a layer of seriousness until none remains. It is chaos born out of an attempt to make sense of the enormous flux of disparate information on social media. The endless stream of celebrity gossip, wars, professional announcements, kidnappings, birthdays, statistics about rent and gas and the rising cost of a pint and the cinema, political corruption, good news about friends, good news about enemies, sexual violence. Everything. Too much.

And all of it is flattened. Everything depicted on social media is presented in the same small number of available formats: scraps of text, photos, links (for further information or to convey authority?), short video clips and cartoons. Everything is reduced to little squares of information, like car number plates on a motorway. There is no real distinction made, in terms of the presentation of information, between the gravity of disparate events or the severity of situations. The gulf between serious and silly is collapsed. Concepts like “trigger warnings” emerge and quickly become so widespread and misused that they aren’t meaningful. I recently saw suggestions that they should be applied to April Fools’ Day pranks.

Nothing is in proportion. Even death is strangely meaningless. One illustration of this is how normal it has become for people to send strangers on social media messages telling them to kill themselves (the last time I received such a message, for example, was a few weeks ago). We can talk about the clear internet poisoning at work here, or we can say this behaviour is unhinged. That doesn’t detract from how strange it is. And how strange it is that I doubt anyone who sends a message like this even means it. Because killing yourself is just like violence, which is practically Harvey Weinstein, which is basically a slap at the Oscars, which is more or less a Russian tank, which is, for all intents and purposes, a toxic ex-boyfriend.

I don’t know what we gain from treating cultural events and life experiences as interchangeable units of information which can be easily linked, like nodes in a huge, all-encompassing web. But I think we lose our sense of life as it really is. When we see the meaning of an event in terms of its relationships to something different, it is the relationship we consider rather than the event itself.

And I wonder if this is the point. If this is a way to insulate ourselves from the true weight of certain facets of reality. A way of addressing wars and suicides and sexual assaults and so many other brutalities without really considering them; of touching everything without feeling it. Because, who really wants to take it all in?

When I think of the cars on the motorway, it was very rare that I could connect the numbers. Mostly it worked if I cheated a bit. I could count two odd starting numbers in a row and if the next was an even, I could look to

the second in the row for an odd, maybe count two more like that. Or start again, looking for prime numbers this time. And then three plates later, a new rule. But it was a good distraction. I could do it for hours.

- Rachel Connolly is a London-based journalist from Belfast
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From daffodils to thick mist, springtime in the UK feels indecently tranquil

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I've been travelling the country, making films for the BBC's Countryfile, and marvelling every mile at the changing landscape



Idyll ... on the banks of the River Teifi in Cenarth, west Wales. Photograph: Jason Jones Travel Photography/Getty Images

Thu 14 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 02.10 EDT

We live in a wonderful country peopled by many kind and fascinating souls. Just saying. It's not said often enough. Over the past month, I've been all over the place making films for the BBC's Countryfile programme. I've travelled by train and motorbike, marvelling every mile at the changing landscape. The train to Penzance, a long haul wherever you start from, was further delayed, but I cared not a jot with my nose pressed to the window all the way. When I finally arrived, I went to check something at the ticket office. "Alright Ade," said the lady, in the strongest Black Country accent. I asked her what had brought her there. "I came here 20 years ago and I loved it, so I stayed," she said.

At times, with war raging despicably elsewhere, and the cost of living crisis biting, the places I've been to have felt quite indecently tranquil. [Floating but barely moving in a coracle](#) on the River Teifi in Pembrokeshire, time and space lost all meaning for too short a while.

OK, the weather's not been completely wonderful, but what of it? This week we filmed atop the Isle of Man's second highest hill, from where the view is

wonderful if you're not enveloped in thick mist. I saw nothing but the camera crew, and I could barely see them if I strayed more than a few strides away. This mist, I learned, was the work of the Isle of Man's kind of founding deity, Manannán. They call it his cloak, which he throws over the island to shroud the people, protecting them from their enemies. But I came in peace! No worries though, even sea gods make mistakes.

Whatever the weather, I love this time of year. [Spring](#) has not quite shown itself in the trees; only the daffodils seem to have got the memo that it's time to shine. Everything is full of promise. Bring it on.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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[French presidential election 2022](#)

Marine Le Pen proposes closer Nato-Russia ties after Ukraine war

Presidential candidate says it is ‘inaccurate and unjust’ to suggest she is indebted to Vladimir Putin



‘I only ever defended the interests of France’: Marine Le Pen during the press conference in Paris. Photograph: Vincent Isore/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

[@achrisafis](#)

Wed 13 Apr 2022 13.48 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 00.12 EDT

The French far-right presidential candidate [Marine Le Pen](#) has said that once the Russia-Ukraine war is over, she would propose closer links between [Nato](#) and Russia and pull France out of the military command of the US-led alliance.

“As soon as the Russian-Ukrainian war is over and has been settled by a peace treaty, I will call for the implementation of a strategic rapprochement between Nato and [Russia](#),” she said at a press conference.

Le Pen, who is polling at 45% to Emmanuel Macron’s 55% for the presidential runoff vote on 24 April, called the press conference on foreign policy to try to take the spotlight off her previous close relationship with Vladimir Putin, which has led to claims from Macron that she was “complacent” and “financially dependent” on the Kremlin.

Le Pen said any talk of her betraying French interests or being indebted to Putin was “inaccurate and particularly unjust”.

As she spoke, a protester stood up holding a heart-shaped picture of Le Pen and Putin shaking hands at the Kremlin in 2017. The protester was tackled to the ground by security guards and dragged out along the floor.

In 2014, Le Pen’s party – then called the Front National, and since renamed National Rally – borrowed €9m from a Russian-Czech bank for local election campaigns. It is still paying off the loan.

Five years ago when Le Pen also faced Macron in the 2017 runoff, which she lost heavily, Putin hosted her at the Kremlin, posing for a handshake.

At the time, Le Pen declared admiringly that she shared the same values as Putin and that a “new world order” was emerging with Putin, Donald Trump and her at the helm.

She has changed tack on Russia since the outbreak of war, condemning the invasion of Ukraine and saying she is independent of any foreign nation, and she has tried to shift attention on to the domestic price of sanctions, inflation, energy costs and the cost of living crisis.

At the press conference she said: “I only ever defended the interests of [France](#).” She said her approach was very similar to Macron’s, since he had built up a personal relationship with Putin and pursued dialogue with him, inviting him to the Palace of Versailles and to his summer residence on the Mediterranean.

Le Pen said better ties with Russia would prevent Moscow from becoming too close to China, noting that she was echoing an argument made by Macron in the past.

On defence, Le Pen said: “I would place our troops neither under an integrated Nato command nor under a future European command,” adding that she would refuse any “subjection to an American protectorate”.

In the final weeks before what is expected to be a close vote, the pro-Europe Macron has savaged Le Pen on foreign policy grounds, attacking her for nationalism and friendships with rightwing leaders. He told a rally in Strasbourg this week that “nationalism is war”.

Le Pen has changed her policy on Europe from five years ago when she pushed for France to leave the EU and the euro. But Macron has said her proposed changes to treaties, dismantling of rules and cuts to budget contributions would mean France was pushed out of the EU.

“She wants to leave but she doesn’t dare say it,” Macron said, accusing his opponent of wanting to strike a special alliance with the right in Hungary and Poland. Le Pen took a loan from a Hungarian bank for the campaign, and told the press conference that French banks had refused to lend to her.

Le Pen said she did not want “Frexit” but a looser version of the EU. “Nobody is against Europe,” she said. “I would not stop paying France’s contribution to the EU, I want to diminish it.”

But she said the UK’s Brexit had been a big success. She said the French “ruling political class” had been proved wrong after it predicted a “cataclysm for the English”.

She said: “The British got rid of the Brussels bureaucracy, which they could never bear, to move to an ambitious project of global Britain.” But she added: “This is not our project. We want to reform the EU from the inside.”

Le Pen insisted she wanted to keep a close relationship with Germany, but then launched a stinging attack on their strategic differences, which she said

would mean putting an end to a series of Franco-German joint military programmes.

She said she would continue “reconciliation” with Germany, “without following the Macron-Merkel model of French blindness towards Berlin”.

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Marine Le Pen

Le Pen's plans for post-Brexit treaty 'ignorant and dangerous'

Peter Ricketts, former UK ambassador, says presidential hopeful's plans would completely isolate France



Marine Le Pen has proposed a restored defence cooperation treaty between the UK and France. Photograph: Vincent Isore/Zuma Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Patrick Wintour](#)

Wed 13 Apr 2022 14.05 EDT Last modified on Wed 13 Apr 2022 14.12 EDT

Marine Le Pen's plan for a new partnership with a post-Brexit Britain is dangerous for France, ignorant and completely misunderstands the basis of British alliances, Peter Ricketts, the former UK national security adviser and UK ambassador to France, has told the Guardian.

He said the far-right presidential hopeful's proposals represented a plan for French isolation from its main strategic partners, the US, Germany and the

UK.

In her defence manifesto, Le Pen held out the hope of a restored Lancaster House treaty, the Franco-British defence cooperation treaty first signed in 2010, and underlined this by illustrating her defence plans with a picture of the union jack and tricolour flags.

Lord Ricketts described her proposals “as ignorant, superficial and completely misunderstanding the basis of France’s cooperations with all her allies”. “It is a recipe for disaster for [France](#),” he said. “There is a lingering assumption in her proposals that a Brexit Britain will be a natural ally for a nationalist Le Pen France.

“But what her proposals bring out is that France under her leadership would be a very dangerous ally for the UK with her plan of leaving the Nato military command structure, renegotiating its alliance with America, being much more nationalistic in its purchase of defence equipment and continuing a strategic partnership with Russia in all sorts of areas.”

He added: “It is frankly inconceivable that she would be able to drive a wedge between the US and the UK.

“She has an idea that if the UK wants to have a close alliance with a Le Pen France, the UK should show goodwill by buying French equipment, such as the Exocet, and ditching US defence equipment. There is also talk of abandoning the Franco-British Joint Expeditionary Force since she sees it of no practical purpose.

“No British government or indeed any Nato ally is going to touch a defence relationship with France on those grounds. It shows a complete misunderstanding if she thinks Britain would be interested in a defence relationship on Le Pen’s basis.”

He added: “France’s closest military allies are the US, the UK and Germany, yet her suggestion is the foundations of all these agreements can and will be changed. It is a recipe for complete isolation for France. She treats Germany [with] short shrift. The US has to accept France’s withdrawal from Nato

command structure whilst Britain in some way has to buy France's partnership by buying French defence equipment, and not that of the US.

"Apart from her relationship with Russia, I don't see how any of France's traditional alliances would survive her presidency. It would have been far better if she had been honest in her defence manifesto and replaced the union jack with the Russian flag, because that is the only potential ally she is likely to find."

Le Pen has already insisted that bilateral, as opposed to multilateral, relations will form the centrepiece of French foreign policy. But Ricketts said she seemed intent on undermining all of France's most important bilateral relationships.

Although Le Pen has insisted she is not interested in Frexit, her defence manifesto contains echoes of Boris Johnson's Global Britain strategy paper by suggesting that France needs to extend its influence in the globe in new areas, including the Indo-Pacific. She seems willing to overlook the UK decision to form an alliance in the Indo-Pacific with Australia and the US, even though it carved France out of the region.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/le-pen-plans-post-brexit-treaty-ignorant-dangerous>

[South Africa](#)

South Africa braces for more heavy rain after floods kill hundreds

President describes ‘catastrophe of enormous proportions’ as more than 300 people die in Durban area



A flood-damaged house in Durban. Meteorologists said the scale of the flooding had taken them by surprise. Photograph: EPA

[Jason Burke](#) in Cape Town

Thu 14 Apr 2022 05.08 EDT Last modified on Thu 14 Apr 2022 13.40 EDT

South Africa is bracing for more heavy rain in districts hit by massive and lethal downpours earlier this week.

More than 300 people [have died in flooding](#) in and around the eastern coastal city of Durban in recent days. On Wednesday the president, Cyril Ramaphosa, described the flooding as a “catastrophe of enormous proportions”, directly linking it to the climate emergency.

“It is telling us that climate change is serious, it is here,” Ramaphosa said as he visited the flooded metropolitan area of eThekweni, which includes Durban. “We no longer can postpone what we need to do, and the measures we need to take to deal with climate change.”

The South African weather service has warned of continuing high wind and rain bringing the risk of more flooding in KwaZulu-Natal and some other provinces over the Easter weekend.



Shipping containers carried away and left in a pile by the floods in Durban.
Photograph: AP

Meteorologists said the flooding had taken them by surprise. Some parts of KwaZulu-Natal recorded almost their average annual rainfall in 48 hours.

“Whilst impact-based warnings were indeed issued in a timely manner it appears that the exceptionally heavy rainfall exceeded even the expectations of the southern African meteorological community at large,” [a statement](#) from the weather service said.

The service said although it was impossible to attribute an individual event to the climate crisis, “we can state with confidence that globally (as a direct result of global warming and associated climate change) all forms of severe and extreme weather … are becoming more frequent and more extreme than

in the recent past. In other words, heavy rain events such as the current incident can ... be expected to recur in the future and with increasing frequency."

The death toll is expected to increase as search and rescue operations continue in KwaZulu-Natal, officials said.

"KwaZulu-Natal is going to be declared a provincial area of disaster, so that we are able to do things quickly. The bridges have collapsed, the roads have collapsed, people have died and people are injured," [Ramaphosa said.](#)

'I heard a thunderstorm': aerial video shows South Africa's deadliest storm on record – video

Along with the loss of life, damage to infrastructure was extensive. Durban's port, the busiest in southern Africa, was badly hit.

In one township a Methodist church was swept away. A Hindu temple was badly damaged in Umhlatuzana, Chatsworth, near Durban, after a river burst its banks. Elsewhere, flooding triggered massive landslides.

Many people were traumatised. Nokuthula Ntantiso's house survived, but many others in her Umlazi township did not. "It's scary, because even last night I didn't sleep because I was wondering if even this [home] that I'm sleeping in can collapse at any time," the 31-year-old call centre operator [said.](#)

Authorities were seeking to restore electricity to large parts of the province after heavy flooding at various power stations. NGOs were working to distribute clean water. A dozen crocodiles that went missing from breeding ponds after the heavy rains swamped a crocodile farm near Durban were reportedly recaptured.

Rescue efforts by the South African National Defence Force were delayed as the military's air wing was affected by the floods, Gen Rudzani Maphwanya said. The military was able to deploy personnel and helicopters around the province on Wednesday, he said.

Rain continued in parts of Durban on Wednesday afternoon and a flood warning was issued for the neighbouring province of Eastern Cape.

Durban has struggled to recover from [deadly riots last July](#) that killed more than 350 people, South Africa's worst unrest since the end of apartheid.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/14/south-africa-braces-more-heavy-rain-floods-kill-hundreds-durban>

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[Philippines](#)

Tropical storm Megi: Philippines death toll rises to 123 as landslides bury villages

Focus now on retrieving bodies, says mayor, after strongest storm to hit archipelago this year devastates communities



An aerial view of a landslide that hit a village in the Philippines' Leyte province amid heavy rain from tropical storm Megi. Photograph: Bobbie Alota/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse in Abuyog

Thu 14 Apr 2022 03.01 EDTFirst published on Wed 13 Apr 2022 21.47 EDT

The death toll from landslides and floods in the [Philippines](#) rose to 123 on Wednesday with scores missing and feared dead, officials said, as rescuers dug up more bodies with bare hands and backhoes in crushed villages.

Most of the deaths from tropical storm Megi – the strongest to hit the archipelago this year – were in the central province of Leyte, where a series of landslides devastated communities.

Eighty six of the casualties were in Baybay, a mountainous area in the province, where 236 people were also injured, the city government said in a report. Waves of sodden soil had smashed into farming settlements in Baybay city.

Twenty-six people died and about 150 were missing in the coastal village of Pilar, which is part of Abuyog municipality, after a torrent of mud and earth on Tuesday pushed houses into the sea and buried most of the settlement, authorities said.

“I have to be honest, we are no longer expecting survivors,” Abuyog mayor Lemuel Traya said, adding that emergency personnel were now focused on the difficult task of retrieving bodies.

About 250 people were in evacuation centres after being rescued by boat after roads were cut by landslides, he said. A number of villagers were also in hospital.

A rumbling sound like “a helicopter” alerted Ara Mae Canuto, 22, to the landslide hurtling towards her family’s home in Pilar. She said she tried to outrun it but was swept into the water and nearly drowned.

“I swallowed dirt, and my ears and nose are full of mud,” Canuto said by phone from her hospital bed. Her father died and her mother has not been found.

Megi, which made landfall on Sunday with sustained winds of up to 65kph and gusts of up to 80kph, has since dissipated.

The disaster-prone region is regularly ravaged by storms – including a direct hit from super typhoon Haiyan in 2013 – with scientists warning they are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer because of human-driven climate change.

Aerial photos showed a wide stretch of mud that had swept down a hill of coconut trees and engulfed Bunga village, where only a few rooftops poked through the now-transformed landscape.



The Philippine coast guard evacuates residents from flooded homes on a makeshift raft in Panitan town, Capiz province. Photograph: Philippine coast guard/AFP/Getty Images

“We were told to be on alert because a storm was coming, but they did not directly tell us we needed to evacuate,” said Bunga farmworker Loderica Portarcos, 47, who lost 17 relatives and a friend in the landslide.

Portarcos braved heat and humidity as she advised a backhoe operator where to dig for three bodies still embedded in the soft soil, which had started to smell of rotting flesh.

“Our dead relatives are all in the morgue, but there will be no time for a wake to mourn them because the mayor told us they smell bad,” she said.

Three people were also killed in the central province of Negros Oriental and three on the main southern island of Mindanao, according to the national disaster agency.

Black body bags containing 26 victims from Pilar were laid out on sand in Abuyog for relatives to identify on Wednesday.

The Abuyog police chief, Captain James Mark Ruiz, said more boats were needed, but getting access to the shore was difficult.

Photos posted by the Bureau of Fire Protection on Facebook showed buildings crushed or turned over by the force of the landslide and debris in the water.

“We’re using fiberglass boats, and there are steel bars exposed in the sea, so it’s very difficult,” Abuyog Mayor Traya said, adding that the ground was unstable and “very risky”.

While Pilar survivor Canuto counts herself lucky to be alive, she said “many of us died and a lot are missing, too”.

Pope Francis expressed solidarity with the victims, the Vatican said in a statement.

“He also offers the assurance of prayers for the dead, injured and displaced as well as those engaged in recovery efforts,” it said. “His Holiness willingly invokes upon all the Filipino people God’s blessings.”

Whipping up seas, Megi forced dozens of ports to temporarily suspend operations, stranding thousands of people at the start of Holy Week, one of the busiest travel periods of the year in the Philippines.

It came four months after super typhoon Rai devastated swathes of the country, killing more than 400 and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless.

The Philippines, ranked among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change, is hit by an average of 20 storms a year.

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Headlines

- [Exclusive Peers will fight UK government's 'awful' Rwanda plans, says Lord Dubs](#)
- ['It will fail' UN refugee agency condemns asylum plan](#)
- ['People will suffer there' Refugee who fled torture attacks deal](#)
- ['I will die here' Migrants respond to removal plan](#)

Immigration and asylum

Peers will fight UK government's 'awful' Rwanda plans, says Lord Dubs

Exclusive: Alf Dubs, former child refugee, says sending asylum seekers to Rwanda is effectively 'state-sponsored trafficking'

- [Rwanda asylum plan: who does it target and is it going to happen?](#)



Dubs said of the government's plans: 'You can't just shunt them around like unwanted people.' Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

@breeallegretti

Sat 16 Apr 2022 02.30 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 04.01 EDT

Ministers will face a fierce battle in parliament over plans [to force some asylum seekers to be relocated to Rwanda](#), a Labour peer and former child refugee has vowed.

Alf Dubs, who was brought to Britain from Czechoslovakia on one of the Kindertransport trains in 1939, told the Guardian that the government was trying to “ride roughshod” over international agreements designed to help those seeking sanctuary.

After the announcement that many of those who arrived in the UK on small boats from across the Channel would be removed and settled in [Rwanda](#), Dubs said peers would fight against the “awful, shocking decision” when legislation was introduced.

“I think it’s a way of getting rid of people the government doesn’t want, dumping them in a distant African country, and they’ll have no chance of getting out of there again,” he said.

“I think it’s a breach of the 1951 Geneva conventions on refugees. You can’t just shunt them around like unwanted people.”

While Conservative MPs have largely welcomed the policy as a way to try to avoid desperate migrants being exploited by people-trafficking gangs and curtail the record high numbers of crossings, Dubs said there would probably be legal challenges and fierce resistance from fellow peers.

He pointed to an amendment to the nationality and borders bill, passed in the House of Lords earlier this month, which said the government could proceed with any offshoring only with the express permission of both chambers in parliament. The amendment is likely to be scrapped when the bill returns to the Commons next week.

Asked if the resettlement scheme was ever likely to get off the ground, given the threat of judicial reviews and other court action, Dubs said: “I think it’s unlikely. As soon as they try and remove one person, I’m sure there’ll be a legal challenge, and I’m not sure the government will win it.”

Despite the home secretary Priti Patel’s reported boast to Tory MPs that she would stand up to “lefty lawyers”, Dubs said the government appeared “quite happy to ride roughshod” over the UK’s commitments under the Geneva conventions.

'Why Rwanda?': government immigration policy fiercely condemned – video report

He continued: "If [Patel] says she'll get rid of the lefty lawyers' claims, well, I think she may have another thing coming. My understanding is that they're going to have real difficulties in getting this through anyway."

Dubs said the legislation needed to put the deal with Rwanda on legal footing would lead to "a battle in parliament", particularly in the House of Lords.

Referring to the process by which the Commons and Lords keep disagreeing and sending bills between them, Dubs added: "No doubt, the government will make us sit and then just ping-pong it through until they think they can wear us down. But I think there will be quite a battle about this."

The bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, who sits in the House of Lords, also vowed to fight the move. "The whole idea of declaring asylum seekers' claims as inadmissible is wrong," he told the Guardian.

"Where asylum seekers arrive from or how, is irrelevant in international law. It is also wrong to apparently punish those seeking asylum. It is the traffickers who need to be targeted and brought to justice for their terrible crimes."

Butler called on the UK not to "offload our international responsibility on to another nation" – warning this would "effectively be conducting state-sponsored trafficking ourselves if we forcibly remove people from our shores to a nation these asylum seekers do not know and have no wish to go to for consideration as asylum seekers".

Butler agreed with Dubs the project would be "extremely costly" and said the money would be better spent on improving the way asylum seekers' claims were processed in Britain, and providing further safe and legal routes alongside those that existed for Afghans, Ukrainians and British Nationals Overseas in Hong Kong.

The Home Office has said the £120m partnership with Rwanda was necessary because existing approaches had failed and that there was no single solution to tackling migrant crossings in the Channel.

It has praised Rwanda's "strong experience in supporting and integrating refugees" and said the country was "internationally recognised for its safety, strong governance, low corruption, gender equality and as one of the fastest growing economies across Africa".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/16/peers-will-fight-uk-governments-awful-rwanda-plans-says-lord-dubs>

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Immigration and asylum

UN refugee agency condemns Boris Johnson's Rwanda asylum plan

Gillian Triggs, assistant high commissioner at UNHCR, says plan is 'symbolic gesture' that will prove unworkable



Migrants arrive after crossing the Channel in Dover on 15 April. The UK intends to provide those deemed to have arrived unlawfully with a one-way ticket to Rwanda. Photograph: Stuart Brock/EPA

[Amelia Gentleman](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 13.54 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 05.40 EDT

The UN's refugee agency has condemned Boris Johnson's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda as "a symbolic gesture" that will be unworkable in practice.

Speaking to the Guardian, Gillian Triggs, the assistant high commissioner at the UNHCR, said the proposed arrangement would only accommodate a few

hundred people a year, making it extremely expensive as well as illegal and discriminatory.

Ministers insisted on Friday that the scheme would save money in the “longer term”, despite a reported cost of up to £30,000 per person.

But government insiders said the expected torrent of legal battles could leave it costing substantially more, with some predicting it could take two years before anyone was flown to Rwanda.

We are in an environment in which populist governments will appeal to their to rightwing, anti-migrant sentiment

Gillian Triggs, UNHCR

Home Office sources said they were braced for judicial reviews and a wave of immigration tribunals over the lawfulness of attempts to offshore asylum seekers who arrive after travelling across the Channel on small boats.

There are two appeal stages for judicial reviews and three for those seeking to challenge their removal through an immigration tribunal, casting in more doubt Johnson’s stated aim of removing people to the central African country in the next six weeks.

The home secretary, Priti Patel, signed a “ministerial direction” authorising the policy to be implemented despite an objection on spending grounds from her department’s permanent secretary.

A Home Office source said the ministerial direction was issued because the savings made in the long-term by the new policy could “not be quantified with certainty” but that Patel did not want to let “a lack of precise modelling” hold the decision back.

Downing Street has said it expects that thousands of asylum seekers will be relocated within the first few years of the scheme.

'Why Rwanda?': government immigration policy fiercely condemned – video report

Triggs accused the UK of “attempting to shift its burden to a developing country” and warned that the arrangement signed off by Patel “would not comply with the UK’s international legal responsibilities”, adding: “All the indications are that it will be unworkable.”

Triggs continued: “We want to end the vulnerability of people on the move to people-trafficking and of course we want to stop people drowning, but we strongly disagree with victimising the very people who need protection. There should instead be an increase in legal pathways to the UK.”

The proposals seemed designed to appeal to anti-migrant sentiment in the UK, she suggested.

“We are a politically neutral, humanitarian body – it’s not really for me to comment on the politics,” Triggs said.

“But we are in an environment in which populist governments will appeal to their rightwing, anti-migrant sentiment and this would presumably be part of that.”

Two former Tory international development secretaries on Friday voiced their opposition to the policy, and cast doubt on whether the government would successfully fly anyone to Rwanda.

Rory Stewart told the Guardian there was a “very strong possibility it’s complete pie in the sky” and had been “rushed out to distract people” from the [prime minister being fined by police for attending a party](#) in Downing Street that broke Covid laws.

Stewart, a minister under Theresa May, said that when he was in government, it was hard enough to remove citizens of some countries back to their place of birth.

“It’s a completely extraordinary thing to be doing and I think legal challenges will mean they won’t make it on to the planes,” he predicted.

Stewart, who visited Rwanda earlier in the month, said it was “one of the very poorest countries on Earth” and a “particularly extreme environment into which to put people”.

People seeking asylum in the UK face the possibility of being flown to a facility in Rwanda

The Conservative MP Andrew Mitchell also said it was an impractical, immoral and incredibly expensive plan.

“The costs are eye-watering,” he told the BBC. “You’re going to send people 6,000 miles into central Africa – it looked when it was discussed in parliament before that it would actually be cheaper to put each asylum seeker in the Ritz hotel in London.”

Triggs also warned that the UK was introducing a discriminatory approach towards refugees, offering an uncapped scheme for asylum seekers from Ukraine and a “draconian” system for refugees from other countries.

“At the political level, we are seeing levels of discrimination,” Triggs said. “We are deeply concerned that the processes appear to be discriminatory. One of the fundamental principles of international law is non-discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnicity or nationality.”

Triggs hoped the popular support for Britons to house Ukrainian refugees would encourage the government to rethink its proposals.

She said: “We saw an outpouring of sympathy and generosity by the British people themselves. So we see this announcement as out of character with British values. We hope that the public response will help to ameliorate the negative aspects of this proposal with Rwanda.”

Johnson was also sent a letter by 150 British organisations supporting refugees that warned the plan would “cause immense suffering” and “result in more, not fewer, dangerous journeys – leaving more people at risk of being trafficked”.

The signatories, including the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, LGBT+ refugee advocates Rainbow Migration and HOPE not Hate, said Rwanda had “a poor record on human rights” and the most vulnerable people were set to “bear the brunt”.

Alf Dubs, a Labour peer who was a child refugee, told the Guardian he expected there would be “quite a battle” over the issue. The Bishop of Durham, who also sits in the House of Lords, has signalled his opposition to the policy, saying it is “wrong in so many ways”.

Home Office minister Tom Pursglove defended the Rwanda initiative, saying it would “crush” the business model of people smugglers and lower the costs of housing all those that arrive in the UK illegally, which he said ran to £5m per day.

He said on top of the £120m already committed to fund the scheme, “we will continue to make contributions to Rwanda as they process the cases, in a manner that is similar to the amount of money we are spending on this currently here in the UK”.

Pursglove added: “But longer term, by getting this under control, it should help us to save money.

“We are spending £5m per day accommodating individuals who are crossing in hotels. That is not sustainable and is not acceptable and we have to get that under control.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/15/un-refugee-agency-condemns-johnsons-rwanda-asylum-plan>

Immigration and asylum

Refugee who fled torture in Rwanda attacks UK asylum deal

Journalist who sought safety in Britain still in fear for his life after his paper criticised President Kagame



The Home secretary, Priti Patel with Rwandan foreign minister Vincent Biruta during the signing ceremony of the £120m migration and economic development partnership in Kigali, Rwanda. Photograph: Eugene Uwimana/EPA

Diane Taylor

Sat 16 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

A refugee who fled torture in Rwanda and was given asylum in the UK has criticised [government plans](#) to fly unauthorised migrants to his home country.

The 42-year-old journalist told the Guardian that even though he has been granted refugee status here he remains in fear of being targeted by Rwandan government agents in the UK.

The man, who lost many family members in the country's 1994 genocide, decided to become a journalist after he left school in the country's capital Kigali, because he had concerns about government corruption. He worked for a newspaper which was critical of President Kagame and his government, and was later shut down.

He was accused of being an 'enemy of the state' and was captured trying to flee across the border, blindfolded and tortured for four months.

His torturers – who used electric shocks on him – tried to get him to reveal the names of his journalistic sources working for the government, but he refused.

He eventually managed to escape to the UK, where he had a mental breakdown. He claimed asylum and after a long legal battle was granted refugee status, with the Home Office accepting his account of what happened to him.

Government plans to send unauthorised asylum seekers on a one-way ticket to Rwanda have been roundly condemned as inhumane and unworkable. The prime minister [on Thursday](#) outlined the proposals to hand an initial down-payment of £120m to Kagame's administration in the hope that it will accept "tens of thousands" of people.

"I know of so many Rwandans who have fled the country," he said. "Anyone who criticises Kagame, it is not good for them. Not so many Rwandans come to the UK but some escape to Germany, to Belgium or to Holland or to other African countries like Zambia and Mozambique."

"Rwanda is a good country for image, but not for freedom of speech. I'm really shocked that the offshoring to Rwanda is happening. It is like selling people. It's really shameful for a country like the UK to be doing this. It's like a business," he said.

“People will suffer there but it won’t stop the smuggling gangs. I believe asylum seekers will get bad treatment in Rwanda. I live outside London because the Rwandan embassy is in London and I don’t want to be near them. So many Rwandans who have left the country live in fear wherever they are.”

He said he was scared of what would happen to him if he was ever sent back to Rwanda. “Those who oppose Kagame end up in prison. The Rwandan government use torture and violence against their opponents.”

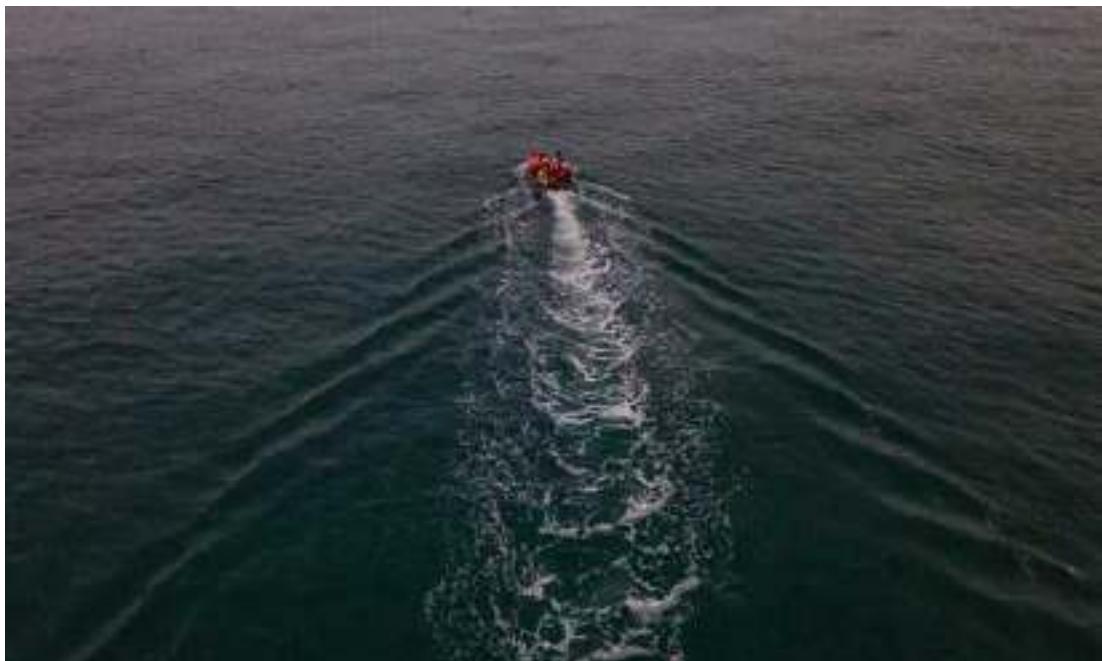
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Migration

‘I will die here, I can’t go back to Africa’: migrants respond to Rwanda removal

Asylum seekers say there is no freedom in Rwanda and fear for their lives if sent to Africa



‘Rwanda is like Eritrea, it does not keep human beings safe. Here in Europe, you are free,’ – Eritrean man. Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP/Getty Images

[Nicola Kelly](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 16.07 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 16.33 EDT

Small boat arrivals on the Kent coast have expressed fears that they will be removed from the UK and transferred to [Rwanda](#), after hearing the government’s announcement that asylum claims will be processed offshore.

“If they send me to Rwanda, I will not go. I will die here, I will take my life,” Jemal, a new arrival from Eritrea, said. “Do you know how many thousands of miles I travelled to be here? How long I was in [the] desert ...? To reach this point, to be here, we all had to make so many sacrifices. A lot of [people] lost their lives on the sea. I left my country now – I cannot go back to [Africa](#).”

“No one knows Africa like we Africans do,” another man from Eritrea said. “Africa is Africa – there is no freedom there. Rwanda is like Eritrea, it does not keep human beings safe. Here in Europe, you are free.”

Of the group of 22 migrants, all said they would take their own lives, rather than face removal from the UK to Rwanda.

“100%, people will lose their lives by themselves,” a man from Sudan agreed. “Some, they will go up to the hills [the cliffs] here, some they will go to the train, to the sea, to any place. This one is the human rights problem, not only in Rwanda.”

“I don’t know where Rwanda is – all I know is it is dangerous there,” said a member of the group from Iraqi Kurdistan, gathering around a map.

“Last night I could not sleep ... thinking, thinking all the night what will happen to me. We do not know the culture in Rwanda. It is so different from what we know.”

Many among the group said they believe that only new arrivals from Africa would be transferred to Rwanda; those from other nationalities felt confident they would not be sent there.

“I come from Iran – the government, they will not send us to Africa ... only Africans,” a man from Iranian Kurdistan said. The Eritreans and Sudanese said they also believed only Africans would be transferred to Rwanda, if the plans went ahead.

The group had mixed views about whether the prospect of removal from the UK would act as a deterrent to those attempting to cross the Channel.

“I think it will stop people from coming here,” an Eritrean man said. “Maybe they will decide to stay in France, maybe go to Germany, places like [that].”

“People will always want to leave, they will always need to live safely,” another man said.

'Why Rwanda?': government immigration policy fiercely condemned – video report

Many said they thought the Rwandan government had struck the deal with the UK for economic reasons.

“It is for money. Rwanda is a small country. It is a poor country. They need British money. It is only for this.”

While all the new arrivals said they hoped the government would drop its plans, they thought there was a high likelihood they would go ahead.

“Everything, it is easy for them. I think they will do it,” they agreed. “Money, it is not a problem here [in the UK]. It is a problem for Rwanda – that is why this is happening. But we hope, we hope, they will cancel it.”

- In the UK, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 and the [domestic abuse helpline](#) is 0808 2000 247. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is on 13 11 14 and the [national family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. In the US, the [suicide prevention lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255 and the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Other international helplines can be found via www.befrienders.org.

2022.04.16 - Spotlight

- 'That's it? It's over? I was 30. What a brutal business' Pop stars on life after the spotlight moves on
- Sarah Solemani on TV post #MeToo I used to think, I don't want to frighten them off with "female stuff". Not any more
- Blind date I persuaded him to read his poetry aloud just as the waiter came over
- Tim Dowling I'm at the DIY store – surrounded by things I don't need

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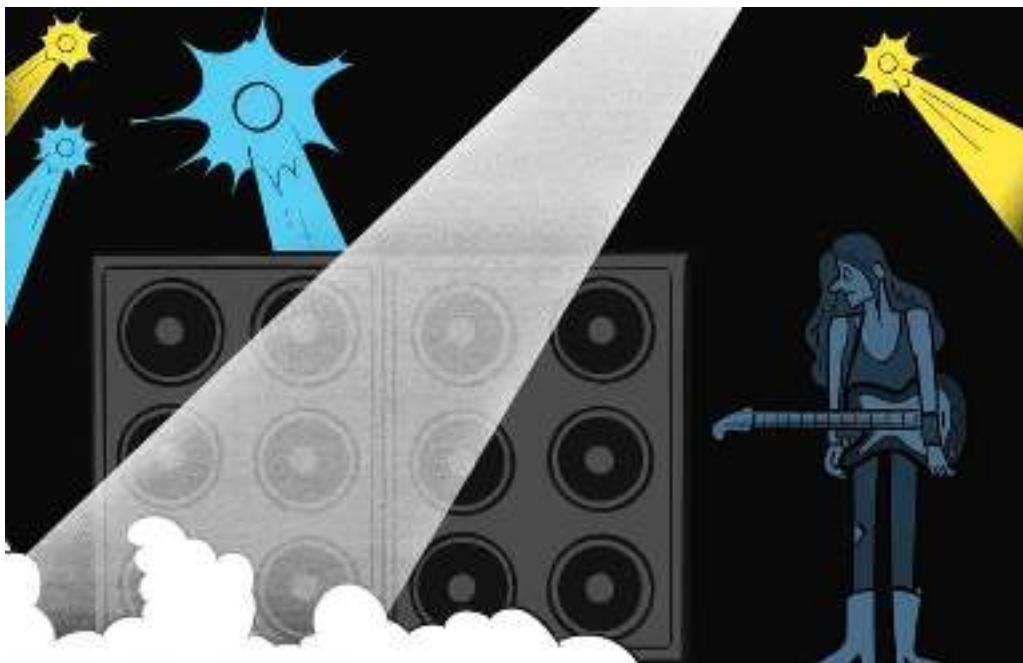
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[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Music](#)

‘That’s it? It’s over? I was 30. What a brutal business’: pop stars on life after the spotlight moves on



Starburst Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian

Musicians from Bob Geldof to Robbie Williams and Lisa Maffia reveal what they did – and how they felt – after the hits dried up and the crowds

vanded

[Nick Duerden](#)

Sat 16 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 22.29 EDT

In her classic memoir, [Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys](#), [Viv Albertine](#) recounts not only the time she spent as a punk during the 1970s in her pioneering band [the Slits](#), but also documents her life *after* the band had ended. This is unusual. Most music books don't venture into this territory, tending to stop when the hits stop, thereby drawing a veil over what happens next. The unspoken suggestion seems to be that, were it to continue, the story would descend helplessly into misery memoir.

"The pain I feel from the Slits ending is worse than splitting up with a boyfriend," Albertine wrote, "This feels like the death of a huge part of myself, two whole thirds gone ... I've got nowhere to go, nothing to do; I'm cast back into the world like a sycamore seed spinning into the wind."

I loved Albertine's book, and it was this one paragraph in particular, I think, that propelled me into writing my own book on this very subject: the curious afterlife of pop stars. I wanted to know what it's like when that awkward next chapter begins, where anonymity replaces infamy, and the ordinary reasserts itself over the extraordinary. The life Albertine forged for herself after punk was complicated, as life tends to be. She returned to education, studying film; underwent IVF; and endured both illness and divorce. But she never fully let the music go, because musicians mostly don't; they *can't*. I finished her book convinced she was a hero.

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But then perhaps *all* pop stars are? They're fascinating individuals, compelling and gifted, not short of self-confidence and, yes, occasionally a little odd, too. Artists may not always be the best people to operate the heavy

machinery of adulthood, but they remain tenacious, driven and inspirational. They dared to dream, and then went out and made that dream come true.

But falling back down to earth, in this business, is an inescapable certainty. Like sportsmen and women, they peak early. A songwriter once told me, citing Bob Dylan, that “artists tend to write their best songs between the ages of 23 and 27”. Despite his enduring success, Dylan has suggested he couldn’t write the songs he wrote in his 20s in his later years, at least not in the same way or with the same instinct, largely because, after that early momentum has fizzled out, things settle down into simply *the thing that you do*, with all the humdrum ennui associated with that. So what’s it like, I wondered, to still be doing this “job” at 35, and 52, and beyond? What’s it like to have released your debut album to a global roar, and your 12th to barely a whisper? Why the continued compulsion to create at all, to demand yet more adulation? Frankly, what’s the point?

Do I unashamedly want to still be one of the biggest artists in the world? Yeah, I do

Robbie Williams

And so, armed with a batch of potentially indelicate questions – because who likes to discuss failure? – I began to reach out to musicians from various genres and eras, those who hadn’t died young, but were still here, still working, to ask them what it was like in the margins.

A great many never bothered to respond. Others enthusiastically agreed, only to later bail out. The guitarist from one of America’s most stylish modern rock acts, someone whose skinny jeans no longer fit quite as well as they used to, was initially keen, but cancelled at the last minute because, his manager informed me, “his head just isn’t in the right place to discuss this right now. It’s a difficult subject.” Those who did speak, however – 50 in total, from [Joan Armatrading](#) to [S Club 7](#); [Franz Ferdinand](#) to [Shirley Collins](#) – were endlessly revealing and candid in a way they would never have been at the peak of their fame. I sensed they enjoyed the opportunity to talk again, to be *heard* above the din of Ed Sheeran and Adele and Stormzy. All were humble, replete with wisdom, *resolute*. (Many were divorced, too; at least one was high.)

They're the true Stoics, I realised. We could learn a lot from them.

Each individual story in popular music has a common beginning. Because in the beginning, all is gravy. In 1987, seemingly overnight, [Terence Trent D'Arby](#) became the most arresting new pop star of his generation. To hear him sing songs such as If You Let Me Stay and Sign Your Name was to bear witness to the art of aural seduction; the knees buckled. He became terribly famous, terribly quickly. He was 25.

"I wanted adulation and got it," D'Arby tells me almost 35 years later, by now working under the name Sananda Maitreya, "but I had to die to survive it."

If his ascendancy had the stuff of legend about it, then so did his demise. Like Prince before him, he began to feel himself capable of anything, each new song he composed a masterpiece. His record company felt differently – it wanted hits, not ornate rock operas – but D'Arby was not someone easily restrained. And so, in pursuit of his muse, he spent the early 90s reportedly living the life of a tormented recluse in a Los Angeles mansion. When I speak to him – which takes six months to arrange – he suggests he was grateful to move on "from such excess and artifice. I didn't give a fuck about it then, and even less about it now that memory has been kind enough to allow me to forget most of it."



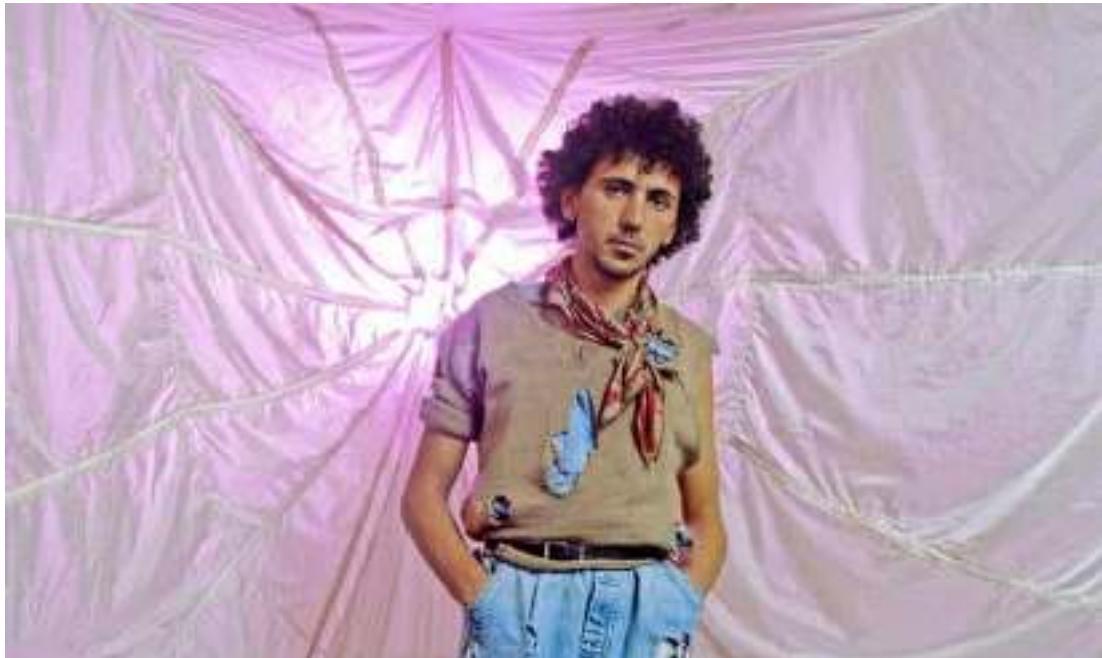
Terence Trent D'Arby achieved huge fame in the 80s – he now lives quietly in Italy as Sananda Maitreya. Photograph: Alamy

Prince had died, Michael Jackson, too. D'Arby was still here, albeit with a name change – prompted by a dream he had in 1995 – to help him better bury the past. Today, Maitreya lives in Milan, is happily married with young children, and writes, records and produces his own music, which he releases on his own label, behaving as he damn well pleases. In 2017, this meant issuing a 53-track album with at least one song dedicated to a first-hand experience of impotence. “I’m a fellow who likes to drink and smoke/It used to once hang down to the tops of my shoes/Now all I’ve got is these limp dick blues.”

The question of whether anyone is listening any more doesn’t seem to trouble him unduly. When I ask what, if anything, he misses from the old days, he replies: “I miss the unbridled, bold, naked stupidity of youth’s vibrant electric hubris.”

During the same era, [Kevin Rowland](#) found himself in a comparable position. “I’d been too confident, too arrogant,” the Dexys Midnight Runners singer says. “I thought everyone would hear our new music and go: ‘Wow.’”

The fact that they didn't, not any more, left him bewildered. Dexys were one of the more brilliant bands of the 80s, with a slew of hits, several No 1s and an eternal classic in Come On Eileen, a song legally required to be played at every wedding disco on mainland Britain ever since. But by the end of that decade, Rowland wanted to develop his craft, and leave boisterous singalongs behind. His label, and quite possibly some members of his own band, simply wanted more of the same. It wasn't broke, so why fix it?



'I could have done without that,' says Kevin Rowland of the chorus of Come On Eileen that greeted him at the dole office after the demise of Dexys Midnight Runners. Photograph: Brian Cooke/Redferns

But, Rowland tells me, "I just knew that I couldn't write the same songs again, and so I never even tried." Their new music took on an increasingly introspective tone, mournful and ruminative; not ideal for radio, in other words. The band were dropped, they split up, and the singer found solace in drugs. Whatever money he'd made was soon lost, and before a stint in rehab came the need to sign on: a profound humbling. At the dole office, his fellow unemployed recognised him and broke into a rendition of Come On Eileen, half hoping he'd join in. "I could have done without that," he notes.

The passing of fad and fashion is rarely the artist's fault. In a [1997 piece for the New Yorker](#), the American essayist Louis Menand suggested that

stardom cannot last longer than three years. “It is the intersection of personality with history, a perfect congruence of the way the world happens to be and the way the star is. The world, however, moves on.”

To her credit, [Suzanne Vega](#) tried to move with it. It was 1990, and by this stage she’d enjoyed huge success for three years. This was no mean feat, because her unadorned acoustic songs stood in direct contrast to the more brash preoccupations of pop in the 80s, a time when Madonna ruled. “But by 1987,” Vega recalls, “every door was open to me, every gig I did sold out.”



Suzanne Vega realised her star was waning when her record company stopped sending cars to pick her up at the airport. Photograph: Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis/VCG/Getty Images

And so, in 1990, she announced her most ambitious tour yet. Rather than her usual requirements of an acoustic guitar and a single spotlight, she now had “a set designer, trucks and buses, a crew, a backing band; catering, a backup singer, a woman to do the clothing. This was a big deal for me.”

On the tour’s opening night in New York, the venue was just a third full. “I thought: ‘Where’s the rest of the audience? Maybe they’re still out in the lobby?’”

There was no rest of the audience; they'd already moved on. Vega herself had done nothing wrong here, but rather done things a little *too* right. The industry had taken note of her earlier success, reminding them of the marketable power of a singer in touch with her emotions, and so had invested in a new batch: [Sinéad O'Connor](#), [Tanita Tikaram](#), [Tracy Chapman](#). These artists rendered the scene's godmother abruptly superfluous.

Vega's tour, haemorrhaging money, was cut short. When she arrived back at JFK, she looked out for the car her record label would always send to collect her. But there was no car. Not any more.

"I took a taxi," she says.

But Vega, like Maitreya and Rowland, didn't throw in the towel simply because others had come along to steal her thunder. She simply, and by necessity, pivoted towards cult status, which at least came with the safety belt of a loyal fanbase that still sustains her today. There are benefits to staying in your lane. "Would I like another hit?" Vega wonders. "I wouldn't say no, but I'm not going to chase it."

The writing on the wall is only easy to read in hindsight. At the time, it's all a blur. I approach the wiliest of pop provocateurs, [Bill Drummond of the KLF](#), an act that, at the height of their success in 1992, disbanded and then [deleted their entire back catalogue](#) with the sole intent of swiftly disappearing up their own fundament. When I ask him what an artist should do once the spotlight swings elsewhere, he writes me a play – or rather, two, "in case the first one's shite", he helpfully explains. The plays reference Prince and 80s hitmaker [Nik Kershaw](#), and the way both leaned on the public's endless appetite for nostalgia in order to stretch out their careers. Drummond prefers a more flamboyant gesture: the very moment any singer fails to crack the Top 40, they should offer themselves up for sacrifice. "The failed pop singer will be given the choice of a noose hanging from a gallows or a razor-sharp guillotine," he writes.



Bill Drummond on stage with the KLF at the Brit awards in 1992.
Photograph: Rex Features

This may well suit self-sabotaging provocateurs, but other artists have less appetite for creative suicide. It is true, though, that a future of looking back, of existing solely on nostalgia, is a creative cul-de-sac, an eternal Groundhog Day where [China in Your Hand](#) is No 1 *for ever*. Steps should be taken to avoid such a fate.

When Mancunian stalwarts James, for example, split in 2001, frontman [Tim Booth](#) moved to northern California, where he became a shaman and studied the practice of “consciousness expansion”. He only rejoined the group on the condition that they wouldn’t become a heritage act, “which for me is the kiss of death”. After singer [Róisín Murphy](#) had navigated the end of her pop duo, Moloko, and then attempted to steer an idiosyncratic solo career with a determination Orson Welles might have admired, she moved to Ibiza to focus on two things: motherhood and the Mediterranean. “Sometimes it’s nice to just relax, you know,” she says.

Billy Bragg realised *he* needed to take a pause from his career in 1990, once Margaret Thatcher had been toppled. Bragg’s antagonism towards the former prime minister had been his whole *raison d’être*, after all. With her gone, what then? “It was time for a rethink,” he tells me. He got married and

had a child, and later eased himself back into music, by then sporting a beard and plying the kind of alt-folk that would allow him to both age gracefully *and* bring his fans – who were also ageing – along for the ride. Occasionally, he [writes comment pieces](#) for the Guardian, largely to keep the spark alive. He still pops up on picket lines, too. Why? “Because I’m Billy Bragg, that’s what I do.”

If all bands crave headlines in their early days, then [So Solid Crew](#) achieved all the wrong ones. It became increasingly easy to overlook the musical achievements of the first UK garage act to break through into the mainstream back in the early 2000s because what happened off stage became far more compelling. Several live shows were [blighted by violence](#), while members G-Man and Asher D – the latter to find fame later as the [Top Boy](#) actor Ashley Walters – were [arrested for possessing handguns](#). Once So Solid imploded, its sole female member, [Lisa Maffia](#), a single mother, needed to start earning again, as she’d spent everything she’d accrued. “Three cars in the driveway, so much jewellery, clothes in abundance! Limousines!” she recalls. She launched a short-lived solo career, record label and clothing line, but her “brand” appeared in terminal decline. So she started her own booking agency, with herself as the sole employee, calling up clubs across the country masquerading as the personal assistant to one Lisa Maffia, formerly of So Solid Crew, now an international solo star and occasional fashion designer. Her PA, “Celine”, was tasked with asking clubs’ management if they’d be interested in a personal appearance.



‘I hustle. Never been afraid to hustle,’ says Lisa Maffia of how she has got by after So Solid Crew imploded. Photograph: Eamonn McCabe/The Guardian

“The bookings came in almost immediately,” Maffia beams. “I hustle. Never been afraid to hustle.” She now runs a beauty salon in Margate.

Maffia has achieved what many former pop stars don’t, and what Albertine for a long time couldn’t: replacing one satisfying career with another. The majority find themselves instead with an embarrassment of yawning time on their hands: how to fill it?

Some I speak to use that time as an opportunity for personal growth. [David Gray](#) and [the Darkness’s Justin Hawkins](#) discuss the growing conviction that they might have autism and ADHD, respectively, both convinced this played a key part in the art they made. “I love upheaval, I love emotional disasters, and mismanaging every relationship I’ve ever had,” Hawkins suggests, which sounds less like introspection than a robust embracing of who he is, sod the consequences.

When the [Boomtown Rats](#) abruptly reached their dead end in 1985, singer Bob Geldof wasn’t happy. He felt they still had so much more to offer, but it was Duran Duran’s turn now. Geldof slunk home, drew the curtains, “and I

thought: ‘That’s *it*? It’s *over*? Had the best years of my life already passed? I was 30. What a brutal business pop music is.’



Despite everything he achieved with Band Aid and Live Aid, Bob Geldof still hankers after the musical success he had with the Boomtown Rats.

Photograph: Lynn Goldsmith/Getty Images

It was during a quiet night in – when, by rights, he should have been straddling a microphone stand on a stage somewhere glamorous and, crucially, *far away* – that he happened on Michael Buerk’s report from a famine-ravaged Ethiopia on the news. This gave him an unexpected new focus, but here’s the thing: even after feeding the world, and, later, a hugely successful career in business (launching the TV production company Planet 24; investing in tech), all Geldof wanted to do was to go back to music. In 2020, the Boomtown Rats, average age then 66, released a new album.

“In my passport, my profession is listed as musician,” says Geldof, “not saint.”

The Boomtown Rats reformed because bands do. It’s practically mandatory. When [Tanya Donelly](#), of 90s US indie darlings Belly, quit after winning a Grammy (and promptly suffering burnout), she craved normal work and became a doula. When [10,000 Maniacs’ Natalie Merchant](#) grew tired of

being a marketable commodity, she quit for the quieter life of a solo artist, and was then duly horrified when her debut album, 1995's *Tigerlily*, sold 5m copies, because "then came the treadmill again". The next time she tried to retire, she did so more forcefully, and now teaches arts and crafts to underprivileged children in New York state. "I look at people like Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney," she says, referring to the way both legends continue to tour, "and I think to myself: 'If I were you, I'd just go home and enjoy my garden.' It's a question of temperament, clearly."



'I look at people like Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney, and think: If I were you, I'd just go home and enjoy my garden,' says Natalie Merchant of 10,000 Maniacs. Photograph: Getty Images

And yet, just as Donelly would ultimately return to her old band, Merchant is also entertaining the idea of new music. "Maybe," she says. "My daughter is off at college now, so I do have more time to myself . . ."

But why? Why do they all come back? Perhaps because nothing else compares. It must be nice to be quite so loudly loved.

Even those who were scarred by their experiences still curiously hanker after it. Child reggae stars [Musical Youth](#) were a ray of early-80s sunshine when their single Pass the Dutchie sold 5m copies around the world. Once their

fame elapsed, and it did so with breathtaking speed, one member, Patrick Waite, developed drug problems, turned to crime, and died of heart failure at 24. Another, Kelvin Grant, became a recluse; singer Dennis Seaton a born-again Christian. “It saved me,” he tells me. Now in his mid-50s and a father of four, Seaton is the chairman of the Ladder Association training committee, alerting builders to the dangers of working at altitude without sufficient protection. “Which is funny, I know,” he shrugs, as if the idea of a former pop star now doing an ordinary job boggles the mind. At weekends he still tours nightclubs to sing his famous song to crowds of people who want nothing else from him and are simply grateful to be in his orbit. “To have touched so many people, let me tell you, is humbling,” he says.



‘I was in competition with the world and with myself,’ says Robbie Williams of his time in Take That. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

Robbie Williams sums it up well. “I felt very driven in the early days, in competition with the world and with myself.” He remains a big draw, of course, but 30 years in, he’s no longer guaranteed hits and is now more likely to be playlisted on Smooth Radio than BBC Radio 1. But that sense of competitiveness never fully recedes. He tells me the new songs he is writing are sounding like David Bowie and Lou Reed, experimental and avant garde, “But do I unashamedly want to still be one of the biggest artists in the world? Yeah, I do.”

And so he, and so many like him, linger in those margins, watchful for other opportunities, biding their time. They judge TV singing competitions and appear on reality shows, and wait for the world to turn slowly on its axis to bring them back into fashion. Eventually, everything comes back into fashion.

The midlife pop star's best virtue, then, is patience, and the conviction that the best might be yet to come. "I've had an interesting first half of my life," Williams notes. "I'd like an interesting second half, too."

Nick Duerden's *Exit Stage Left: The Curious Afterlife of Pop Stars* is published by Headline (£20) on 28 April. To support the Guardian and the Observer order a copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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Interview

Sarah Solemani on TV post #MeToo: ‘I used to think, I don’t want to frighten them off with “female stuff”. Not any more’

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Sarah Solemani, photographed in Los Angeles last month. Photograph: Amanda Hakan/The Guardian

From an awful encounter aged 19 to being told her ideas are ‘too female’, the actor and writer has battled sexism for 20 years. But, she says, things are changing



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Sat 16 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

In the sharp and smart new Channel 4 comedy-drama Chivalry, written by [Steve Coogan](#) and Sarah Solemani, the acclaimed feminist director Bobby (Solemani), who has to work with Cameron, a classic chauvinist studio boss (Coogan, in a classic Coogan role), explains why her progress in the film industry has been so slow compared with her contemporaries: “I’ve been hacking through this jungle that the most average man can stroll into,” she says with feeling.

“Steve came up with that line, actually,” Solemani, 39, tells me over a breakfast of brisket and scrambled eggs in a deli around the corner from her home in Los Angeles. I’d assumed she’d written it, because she herself has been hacking through the jungle of British TV and film for two decades, to the point where she considered writing her memoir just to title it “Nearly”.

“Because it was always TV commissioners telling me, ‘Right, this is so nearly what we want, but … ’” she says. Over the years, she has been pitched by magazines and the TV industry as “the new Lena Dunham”, “the new Amy Schumer”, “the new [insert any big-name female comedian]”, only to then be told by British TV bosses that she was nearly what they wanted, but not quite.

Not that she was unsuccessful: she starred in sitcoms including [Him & Her](#) with Russell Tovey (2010–13), [Bad Education](#) with Jack Whitehall (2012–14) and [The Wrong Mans](#) with James Corden (2013–14); she had a flashy film role as Bridget’s best friend in [Bridget Jones’s Baby](#) (2016), and she adapted Jo Bloom’s novel [Ridley Road](#), about British fascism in the 1960s, which was screened on BBC One last autumn. But around and in between these gigs, there was, she says, “*a lot*” of rejection.

“A toxic culture still exists in the industry; one in which the artistic potential of half the human race is constantly undermined,” she [wrote in the Guardian](#) in 2017 in the wake of #MeToo. Once, she and the writer and actor [Olivia Poulet \(The Thick of It\)](#) wrote a script, but a TV commissioner told them: “I know I asked for something a bit female, but this seems a bit too female.” “I’ve got that note somewhere,” Solemani says in the tone of one who has kept all of her receipts. I say that it’s interesting that all of the sitcoms she starred in were created by men. Her eyes widen, and she makes an emphatic “believe me, I noticed” nod.

Solemani grew up in London and moved to Los Angeles six years ago. She has a nice mix of British candour and Californian earnest optimism that slips occasionally into light LA woo-woo-ness (we take a brief detour into the importance of “celebrating oneself, like, ‘I did a good show’, ‘I did a good bedtime with the kids ...’”). She is a longtime [campaigner for the decriminalisation of sex work](#), and in 2016, when she turned up for the premiere of *Bridget Jones’s Baby*, she carried a placard [demanding creches on film sets](#). Coogan is no slouch when it comes to campaigning either, having [taken on the British tabloids in the phone-hacking scandal](#). But his reputation as what people used to call a *roué* precedes him on both sides of the Atlantic, and he was once cited by Courtney Love, of all people, “[one of](#)

[my life's great shames](#)”, along with crack cocaine. In Chivalry, he and Solemani have the same enjoyable odd-couple dynamic as Coogan’s collaborations with [Rob Brydon](#) on [The Trip](#).

That Coogan wrote that particular line about how much harder it is for women in the entertainment business suggests Chivalry was as successful behind the scenes as it is on screen at “engaging in a dialectic”, as Solemani puts it. “Now in the culture, people don’t talk to each other. We announce our standpoint, we shout at opposing views and we affirm each other’s politics. We don’t have the kind of gritty debate that makes you question your viewpoint, and that’s what Steve and I both wanted in the show,” she says. Solemani spent years getting rejected, whereas Coogan, she says, “has been famous and rich for most of his adult life – he even [had a statue in Norfolk](#)”. Did working so closely with her make him question some of his experiences?

“I think that’s for him to say,” she says carefully. “But that journey is definitely in the show.”



With Steve Coogan in Chivalry. Photograph: Channel 4/PA

Chivalry opens with Bobby reluctantly taking over a film project after the previous director – a sexist of the old school – dies, and she tries to remake

it as a little more female-friendly. The show has been described as a #MeToo satire, but that's a description that makes Solemani wince. Because it doesn't explain what the show is satirising? "Yes, exactly," she says. "And that was one of our challenges. We were constantly walking this tightrope between wanting to give something to everyone in the audience – from the most woke feminist to some old dinosaur – but without minimising what the movement was, which was a declaration of systemic abuse of women."

Far be it from me to punch up a comedy writer's words, but this description does not make Chivalry sound like a barrel of laughs. In fact, it is very funny, and more nuanced than I was expecting. The show satirises the extremes on both sides, from Cameron describing his twentysomething assistant as "the love of his life" but admitting he doesn't know her birthday, to the actor who gets intense counselling from the set's intimacy supervisor ([Aisling Bea](#)) to cope with a sex scene, while the initially supportive Bobby rolls her eyes impatiently. Eventually, she pushes the intimacy supervisor aside so she can just finish the damn scene. "Don't feel like you've betrayed the movement," Cameron says consolingly, much to Bobby's irritation. What makes this scene even more interesting is that [Solemani has written](#) in the past that she felt deeply exploited when acting in sex scenes. Chivalry shows the occasional tension between not treating actors like pieces of meat, but also needing them to do their job.

"There's a lot of hypocrisy running through the show, and we wanted the characters to navigate that," Solemani says. The show is far more nuanced than most discussions of #MeToo, let alone most sitcoms that look at battles between the sexes.

Coogan and Solemani have been engaging in a dialectic about the #MeToo movement since 2019, when they were on the set of the [Michael Winterbottom film Greed](#), in which Coogan plays a [Philip Green](#)-like tyrant and Solemani plays one of his minions. Coogan was aware of her feminism and so, she says, "he would totally wind me up" about the #MeToo movement.

In what way? She hesitates to answer, cautious again.

Would he say, "So am I still allowed to say this? Or do this?"

“Yeah, yeah, all of that,” she says.

Was Solemani the only one on set willing to spar with Coogan, given that he was the star of the film and the power dynamics that comes with?

#MeToo was a huge cultural shift, and the intensity of it needed comedy. So off Steve Coogan and I went’

She pauses and then answers carefully: “I think on every set there’s a hierarchy, and maybe people who have been number one on a call sheet for a lot of their lives, maybe they forget that hierarchy exists. But he’s actually very good with actors, so it wasn’t like no one could talk to him. So no, I wouldn’t say I had bravery to stand up to him that no one else did,” she says.

I ask how they made the move from debating #MeToo over lunch to thinking, “Hey, this could be a really funny sitcom!”

“Well, it was just this huge cultural shift, and the intensity of that needed comedy. We came from different perspectives, and a lot of our dialogue was like: ‘It’s gone too far, it’s not organised.’ ‘But a movement never is strategised. It’s going to be messy. That’s what a movement is, and it’s necessary.’ And from that dialectic, we both knew we needed to laugh about it, and off we went,” she says.



Taking on the role of best friend to Renée Zellweger's Bridget in Bridget Jones' Baby. Photograph: Collection Christophe/Alamy

Solemani has been [writing about sexism](#) in the entertainment business for a long time, and has been experiencing it for even longer. When she was 19, she went to a fiftysomething director's house for what she thought was a work dinner. He asked how she felt about on-screen nudity, and then suggested she strip for him to prove it. She lied and said she had her period. She didn't get the job. "It was a decade before I realised what an abuse of power this had been, and how I'd normalised it," she later wrote. After graduating from Cambridge, where she was "the one woman" in the Footlights, she struggled to get a job, whereas the boys she knew – including [Simon Bird](#) and [Joe Thomas](#) of [The Inbetweeners](#) – seemed to soar off effortlessly. She ended up getting a job in a call centre. But since #MeToo, she says, things have changed.

"It's night and day, it really is. I was in a writers' room and a studio representative came in to explain that if you invite a colleague to lunch, or even dinner, that is a working engagement, nothing more. And I thought, 'Finally, that behaviour is over.' I was crying! Some people feel policed, but for women, it feels safe. Plus, there is a greater curiosity [from TV commissioners] about the female experience. Before I used to think, 'I don't

want to frighten them off with female stuff", but now I have more shows in my head than I can write."

Solemani's life looks pretty great now, a far cry from call centres and creepy directors. In 2016, she was hired to write for the HBO show [Barry](#), and so she and her family moved to California. With that credit under her belt, her agent sold several of her old scripts, which had previously been rejected or stuck in development, including Ridley Road. She is visibly bubbling with excitement about all the projects she currently has on the go, none of which she can talk about yet, but one will be a feature film, which she will direct.

With the proceeds from her newly sold, once-rejected scripts, she bought a house in one of the prettiest neighbourhoods in LA, around the corner from where we are meeting. Her husband, who works in sustainable investment, and young daughter and son are waiting for her, eager for their Saturday morning trip to the beach. "So I don't want to spend too much of this interview complaining, because I'm now making everything," she says with a delighted laugh. I ask if things changed for her because she moved to the US where more projects get made, and she says no, it's because the times have moved on. Things, she says, have really, really changed.



'I have more shows in my head than I can write.' Styling: Charlotte Patterson. Hair: Jillian Halouska. Makeup: Karo Kangas. Photograph:

Amanda Hakan/The Guardian

But does she think she could have made a show about a feminist director and the [#MeToo movement](#) if Coogan hadn't been her co-writer?

"Oh God, Hadley," she says, momentarily taken aback by the question. But she quickly finds her footing again. "No, I don't think I could have because what I wanted was the dialectic ... "

Solemani is the older daughter of a father who was raised Orthodox Jewish and a mother who was raised Christian but became an atheist. "I think because they'd grown up with these quite oppressive family structures, they were like this island of resistance together. I remember a really embarrassing time we were on a train in Paris and a guard told them they had to move because a school trip needed their seats, and they staged a protest: 'No, we will *stay!* We refuse!' And all these French people were telling them to move. They really prided themselves on these small acts of resistance."

Her parents instilled a steel rod of self-belief in her. When she was working at the call centre and told her father she was considering giving up on her dreams of writing, he told her: "You mustn't, because you have talent." The last thing her mother said to her before she died was: "I don't know what you're going to do, but it's going to be incredible."

Solemani went to one of the top grammar schools in the country, and that also helped to build her ambitions, although she has recently been wondering whether that was a short-term help but long-term hindrance.



With Russell Tovey in *Him & Her*. Photograph: BBC/Big Talk

“The school’s attitude was: ‘You can do anything!’ But that can also sound like: ‘You’d better do something!’ It’s a fine line, and as I’ve got older I’ve wondered whether what serves you to achieving A* GCSEs might not work when you later have to learn how to establish boundaries and decide how much of yourself you’re willing to give,” she says. Her mother was diagnosed with cancer when was 42. Solemani was 12 and her sister was eight. She died four years later. “She was such a brilliant mother, too. So I missed out on that, and I also missed out on having a mother to blame.” The week after her mother died, she was accepted into the National Youth Theatre. Soon, she was [playing Elaine in a West End production of The Graduate](#). “It was such a dark time and my dad was in such agony. I wanted to move into the light, and this was the light,” she says.

How does she think that awareness of death from such a young age affected her in the long term? “It’s a big question, and I’m reflecting on it a lot now. I think that’s a classic thing of experiencing mortality. Life is now, it will end. What are you going to do with your time?”

Despite her father rejecting his Orthodox upbringing, Solemani says she always “felt Jewish”, even though her family in Israel don’t regard her as such. (Traditionally, Judaism is passed down through the mother.) One of the

nice things about moving to the US, she says, is “patrilineal Judaism is recognised. I’m just as Jewish as Barack Obama is black.” Solemani’s husband is Jewish, and the two of them spent four years studying Hebrew, reaffirming their identity. I ask how much that played a part in her writing of Ridley Road. “Loads. I couldn’t have written that show had I not done that intense learning about my faith and had the dual perspective of being an inside outsider, coming from a family that didn’t grow up with Jewish culture,” she says.

Like Chivalry, Ridley Road set a fictional story within real social shifts. In it, Vivien (Agnes O’Casey) moves to London’s East End in the early 60s and, with the encouragement of her uncle Soly (Eddie Marsan), she starts a relationship with the (nonfictional) neo-Nazi leader Colin Jordan (Rory Kinnear), in order to spy on him. The reviews were largely positive, but there was some criticism, saying the depictions of British fascism were overblown.

“The response to that show really woke me up to antisemitism in Britain, because people would say, ‘It really wasn’t that bad back then.’ Well, it was bad for the Jews who saw Nazis walking in front of their homes. One review which really upset me said Eddie Marsan ‘shouts’ a particular speech. He didn’t shout, he whispered. But there’s something about the Jewish testimony of pain that makes some people assume it’s exaggerated, or they’re being lectured. It was very revealing,” she says.

The more I talk to Solemani, the more I can’t figure something out. She’s so smart, so aware of the rights and wrongs of the world. And sure, things are great now, but why did she keep slugging it out in the entertainment business, dealing with prejudiced rejections and lecherous older men for two decades before things finally went her way? Why not just quit and focus on activism? She laughs and says she knows what I mean but she just really, really likes writing.

I ask her how she finds living in California. “It’s good, but there have been times when it’s like, ‘Oh my God,’” she says. “During Covid, the schools were closed for a year, and then it was peak Trump incompetence. Then there was this weird plague of mosquitoes and everyone was like, ‘This

hasn't happened for a hundred years.' Then the fires came and you couldn't breathe outside, but you also couldn't meet anyone inside. Then the house started shaking: there was an earthquake. Then I really was like, 'Why am I here?'" she says, still sounding a little shaky at the memory.

She turns around and looks out the window of the diner at the sunny day. The sky is clear blue and the palm trees are barely rustling in the warm breeze. "But, you know, every place has its challenges, and this one really is a place of extremes. And now," she says with the smile of one who has come through the fire of the pre-#MeToo entertainment world and the fires of southern California, "things are good".

Chivalry is on Channel 4 at 10pm on 21 April.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/apr/16/sarah-solemani-interview-metoo-chivalry>.

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Blind date: ‘I persuaded him to read his poetry aloud just as the waiter came over’



Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Artemis, 19, history student, meets Sienna, 20, fashion student

Sat 16 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT



Artemis on Sienna

What were you hoping for?

Honestly, to be proposed to.

First impressions?

Terror – she claimed we had matched on a dating app before.

What did you talk about?

We spoke about a range of topics, but I can say that Sienna is not as zealous about trying grilled human meat as I am.

Any awkward moments?

Sienna didn't finish her croquette. It wasn't an awkward moment, but I really wanted the little leftover ham chunks and never asked for them.

Good table manners?

I've never seen someone wield a knife and fork like that before. Sienna is the Zoro [anime character who is a masterful swordsman] of table etiquette.

Best thing about Sienna?

She is attentive, and incredibly fun to talk to.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

For sure.

Describe Sienna in three words

Introspective, pretty, octagonal.

What do you think she made of you?

That I'm super-duper charming.

Did you go on somewhere?

Nope but we did have cookies and marshmallows for dessert.

And ... did you kiss?

No – I think it was the caramelised onions that I ate.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

We probably should have ordered a more expensive bottle of complimentary wine.

Marks out of 10?

She laughed at my jokes, so 10.

Would you meet again?

I would be down.

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 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

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.



Artemis and Sienna on their date



Sienna on Artemis

What were you hoping for?

Fun and a departure from the everyday (and from my nascent ear woes from listening to loud music).

First impressions?

He was self-assured, relaxed and a confident orderer.

What did you talk about?

DNA tests. Monogamy v polyamory. Parents. Therapy. Dancing. The paradox of choice. Books. Ear health.

Any awkward moments?

I persuaded him to read his poetry aloud just as the waiter came over to set up a grill on the table. He got more of an audience than he bargained for.

Good table manners?

Yes, beautiful. His white top stayed white despite gruelling grilling.

Best thing about Artemis?

He was a great listener. He showed enthusiasm for everything I said, even if I interrupted him.

Would you introduce him to your friends?

Some of them for sure.

Describe Artemis in three words

Elegant, thoughtful, curious.

What do you think he made of you?

A pleasing person to sit opposite while he tried his first s'more [American-style chocolate-marshmallow-cracker snack] and drank wine we would usually not be able to afford.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, but it was midnight on a Wednesday. We got the tube together.

And ... did you kiss?

No, we just hugged. That felt fitting.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

Not to be fretting about my ears.

Marks out of 10?

A great 8.

Would you meet again?

Yeah, for sure, probably as friends.

Artemis and Sienna ate at [Parrillan](#), London N1. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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[The Tim Dowling columnDIY](#)

Tim Dowling: I'm at the DIY store – surrounded by things I don't need



Composite: Shutterstock/Linda Nylind/Guardian

The shape of bracket I am looking for seems to exist only in my dreams



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Sat 16 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

It is Saturday, and my wife and I are in a queue of cars trying to find spaces at the big B&Q.

“Everybody’s had the same idea as us,” my wife says.

“We had the idea before any of these people,” I say.

Here is the idea: make a long list of everything that is broken, and then go out and get a bunch of stuff to fix it. We hatched this plan long before anybody else noticed it was sunny and decided to buy a pizza oven.

“Should we go to the little B&Q instead?” she says.

“No,” I say. “It must be the big one, for depth of choice.”

Once inside, I find myself stranded in the shallows of choice. They have white grout, and clear grout, but no grey grout. I know there is such a thing as grey grout, because my shower is inexpertly grouted in it.

The expansion bolt display has an empty hook where the size I want should be, but the shape of bracket I am looking for seems to exist only in my dreams. Eventually I find my wife in the outdoor section, pushing a flatbed trolley.

“There’s some kind of grout shortage,” I say. “Did they have floor paint in the right colour?”

“No,” she says.

“Then why are we still here?” I say.

“I’m buying plants,” she says.

From a distance it now looks perfectly level. The whole edifice has a distinct aura of intentionality

Exasperated, I wander up and down, looking at fountains and decorative gravel. On my third circuit something catches my eye: a fence post with a triangular profile, the last of its kind for sale. When I stand it on end, I discover that it’s well over two metres tall.

“What’s that?” my wife says as I approach her, my new purchase banging against overhead signs.

“Giant fence post,” I say. “Eight quid.”

“What for?” she says.

“To mend the thing,” I say.

“The pergola?” she says.

“Yes, that.” For complex reasons, [I cannot say pergola](#).

“How?” she says.

“Once it’s cut to size,” I say. “I should be able to use this to brace the structure and stop it falling down.”

“Is it strong enough?” she says.

“Dunno,” I say.

“Will it fit in the car?” she says.

“These are all very good questions,” I say.

It does fit in the car, just. When I get home I carry it through the house to the bottom of the garden, where the collapsing structure resides. The back end had been bolted to a brick wall, but the supporting batten had since rotted away, and as a result the right rear corner sags about a foot lower than the left.

I jam the triangular end of the fence post under the low corner, lift it an inch and set the bottom end on the ground. The new bracing post sticks out at a sharp angle, but remains in place. I am calculating how much I will need to saw off when the youngest one appears in a T-shirt and bare feet.

“That doesn’t look good,” he says. “Can’t you lift it any higher than that?”

“It’s not that simple,” I say. The youngest one drags the garden table up to the wall and climbs on top. Crouching underneath the structure, he grabs two crosspieces and pushes upward. I move the post in, and the angle decreases slightly.

“That’s a bit better,” I say. The boy, red in the face and still pushing, grunts something I cannot understand.

“What?” I say.

“Keep going!” he says.

We proceed by degrees: he lifts, and I inch the bottom of the post a little further corner-ward. Finally, in what seems like a last bid to court disaster, I

give the post a sharp and reckless kick.

“Whoa,” says the youngest one. We both stare.

A minute later I go inside to my wife.

“The pergola is fixed,” I say.

“Did you say pergola?” she says.

“Yes, I’m cured,’ I say. “Come and see.”

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From a distance, the pergola now seems perfectly level – although it isn’t, quite – and from certain angles the triangular fence post appears to be square, matching the two front posts. The whole edifice has a distinct aura of intentionality.

“No sawing, no nails,” I say. “Just immense structural pressures.”

“Well done,” my wife says. “It’ll do until someone can fix it properly.”

“You should know that I consider this to be a permanent solution,” I say.

“When are you gonna do the grout?” she says.

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2022.04.16 - Opinion

- Johnson to stay because of Ukraine? Nonsense. The war makes it more urgent that he go
- Mixed-race Britons – we are of multiple heritages. Claim them all
- The Stephen Collins cartoon #GetRishiQuick: start your wealth journey with the chancellor now!

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

Johnson to stay because of Ukraine? Nonsense. The war makes it more urgent that he go

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The people of Ukraine are fighting for values that the British prime minister tramples on. Our support would mean more without him



Boris Johnson and Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Kyiv, 9 April 2022: ‘What matters to Ukraine is the position of the UK government … that would not alter with a change of PM.’ Photograph: Ukraine Government/PA

Fri 15 Apr 2022 11.26 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 04.10 EDT

Of all the spurious arguments advanced for [Boris Johnson](#) to stay in office even though he broke the law, there’s one that stands out. Not because it’s the most offensive: in fact, the stink given off by some of the other attempts to defend the prime minister’s behaviour may be even more rank. But this one looms large because its implications are wider and graver.

Start with the first of the explanations offered as to why the criminal sanction imposed by the police on Johnson this week – making him the first prime minister ever found to have broken the law in office – should not see his immediate removal from Downing Street: that the lockdown birthday party that prompted a fixed-penalty notice was brief, lasting “[less than 10 minutes](#).” Of course, that’s a risible defence: there was no exemption in the rules for short gatherings. But it’s especially feeble in the case of Johnson because we know that the party in June 2020 was no one-off. On the contrary, even his defenders expect this week’s fine to be the [first of several](#) because Johnson was a serial rule-breaker.

Second comes Johnson's insistence that "it did not occur" to him that he was breaking the rules. This is what a lawyer might call the idiot's defence: that the PM was so stupid that, even though he leads the government that introduced the rules and even though he briefed the nation on those rules almost daily in a televised press conference, he did not know what the rules said. We're used to Johnson insulting our intelligence, but in this move he insults his own.

Third, and most hurtful, comes the [Fabricant justification](#). The eccentrically coiffed MP suggested that Johnson was no more guilty than those teachers and nurses who retreated to "the staff room" after a tough shift to "have a quiet drink". That remark casually smears all those teachers, nurses and other essential workers who [did no such thing](#), but who instead worked long hours at the safest possible distance, then collapsed into a heap at home from exhaustion.

As for those who echoed Michael Fabricant, hinting that, let's face it, everyone was breaking the rules one way or another, that is both untrue and an unforgivable slur on the vast majority who, in fact, followed Covid instructions to the letter. Worse, it makes fools of those who did so at great human cost, telling every person who bade [farewell to a dying parent or partner](#) via a phone, without the consolation of touch, that they were stupid for doing so – that they should have followed Johnson's example and done whatever they damn well pleased, and to hell with the rules.

All of those arguments give off a foul stench. And yet, the most troubling is the one that has now become central to Johnson's rationale for continuing in office: that it would be wrong to remove a British prime minister while conflict rages in Ukraine. It was put most starkly by the [Daily Mail front page headline](#) referring to calls from "the Left" for Johnson's resignation: "Don't they know there's a war on?"

Perhaps surprisingly for those who never stop proclaiming their patriotism, such talk betrays ignorance of both British history and the British system of government. Even a nodding acquaintance with Britain's past would tell you that this country has a habit of dispatching prime ministers in wartime, even during wars in which, unlike the current one in [Ukraine](#), British forces are

directly engaged. Odd that 1940 should have slipped the recall of Winston Churchill tribute act Boris Johnson. Odd too that Conservative MPs have apparently forgotten they pushed out Margaret Thatcher in 1990, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and when everyone knew it was a matter of weeks before British troops would be in combat.

Besides, what matters to Ukraine is the position of the UK government, not just its first minister. To be sure, [Kyiv is delighted](#) that Johnson visited the city and has been such a vocal supporter, but under our parliamentary, rather than presidential, system, none of that would alter with a change of PM. Given Labour's position, it wouldn't even alter with a change of government.

Worse than ignorant, the Daily Mail argument is cheaply manipulative. It uses the desperate people of Ukraine as a human shield, exploiting their suffering to cover Johnson's misconduct. And yet, appalling as all that is, it is not the chief source of its illegitimacy.

For that, one need look no further than the [resignation letter of David Wolfson](#), who this week quit as a justice minister. The government, he wrote, could only "credibly defend democratic norms abroad, especially at a time of war in Europe, if we are, and are seen to be, resolutely committed both to the observance of the law and also to the rule of law".

That is the heart of the matter. Far from Partygate being dwarfed into trivial irrelevance by Ukraine, the two are linked in a way that matters greatly. Vladimir Putin's attempted invasion of his neighbour has stirred the entire west because people understand what is at stake, that this is a battle not simply for territory but for democracy and the rule of law. Putin and his [allies across the world](#) have contempt for democratic norms. Their favoured model is rule by strongman at home, the law of the jungle abroad.

In his rhetoric, Johnson stands with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. But in his actions he declares his kinship with Hungary's Viktor Orbán and the others. He writes life-and-death laws which he then breaks, flagrantly and repeatedly. Next, he lies about his lawbreaking to parliament

– the same parliament, remember, that he illegally suspended as one of his first acts in power.

None of this is in the past. This week, perhaps in an attempt to divert attention away from the Partygate scandal, he announced plans to ship those seeking asylum – including those ultimately found to have a just and fair claim to refuge – to faraway Rwanda, a dictatorship with a record on human rights so bad the UK government raised concerns just last year. It's likely that the new policy is against the law, “a breach of the right to life, the right not to be subject to inhuman and degrading treatment and the right to be tried before conviction”, according to one legal scholar. But that did not hold Johnson back. On the contrary, he would like nothing more than a court battle, so he can pose as the people's tribune, once again frustrated by those he pre-emptively referred to in his Rwanda announcement as “an army of politically motivated lawyers”.

The pattern is clear: contempt for the law, contempt for those tasked with upholding it. Johnson's defenders say he must stay in office because of Ukraine. In fact, the war for that country, and the wider struggle it has come to represent, make it all the more urgent that he go.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionFamily

Mixed-race Britons – we are of multiple heritages. Claim them all

Natalie Morris

With my father's death I lost the link to my Jamaican lineage, and I needed to address that. It is vital to embrace all sides of yourself



Natalie Morris with her father, Tony Photograph: Natalie Morris

Sat 16 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

Losing a parent is profoundly destabilising. It takes the world as you knew it – the certainties, the constants, the safety nets – and whips it out from under you. In addition, as I have discovered over the past two years, there is an extra layer of complexity that comes with being mixed-race and losing the person who connects you to half your heritage.

My dad, Tony, was Black. He was a quite well-known figure here from his work as a journalist with ITV and the BBC, particularly in northern England. And in the months after [he died one sunny day in August 2020](#), I began to question everything about myself.

Like many people who lose a father at a relatively young age, I've asked myself, who am I without him? Am I living the life I should be? Would my decisions make him proud? But beyond that, my dad was for me the one person who could reaffirm my sense of self, who could tell me who I was with little more than a look. And he was no longer here.

When I walked down the street with my father, I never felt as if I had to explain my existence: there were no questioning looks, as my sister and I still sometimes get when we're with our white mum. Dad was our tangible, physical answer to the question, "What are you?" In those early, broken months without him, I felt I was no longer able to answer that question.

My dad's parents were Jamaican, and all three of them died within a year of each other. His father went first. I watched my dad's stoic face as the coffin was carried to the front of the church, not knowing that in just a few months my sister and I would have to watch the same thing. Six months after dad died, his mum passed away in Jamaica. Two generations gone, just like that, and with them so many unanswered questions.

Dad was estranged from most of his relatives for most of his life, after being brought up in the care system. He has an older sister who grew up in Jamaica, and a younger half-sister whom he was close with, but the family was fractured. As a result, my sister and I never travelled to Jamaica with him, or had those natural connections with that side of our family.

Losing this one firm link to my Jamaican heritage was forcing me to question my racial identity. My place in the world, even the authenticity of my Blackness, suddenly felt up for debate. Why hadn't I pushed harder to forge those family connections for myself, to ask the questions about where we come from? The guilt that comes hand-in-hand with grief took on a different dynamic through this lens of mixed parentage.

There is a secret shame that comes with having little to no knowledge of one side of your heritage. It leaves you feeling as if you're playing catch-up, trying to fit all the pieces together retrospectively so you're not clueless when people ask you where you're *really* from – so you can cook the recipes people expect you to be able to make, so you can claim that part of yourself with a greater authority. I thought there would be more time to play catch-up, to sit down with my dad and ask him these questions, to travel to Jamaica together.



Tony and Natalie, with sister Becky and mum Kim. Photograph: Natalie Morris

During the many interviews I conducted for my book *Mixed/Other*, with people from all different kinds of mixed backgrounds, this sense of feeling a need to prove your heritage, or the fear of being perceived as “inauthentic” and “not enough”, was a recurring theme. So then it should be no surprise that the world-crushing pain of grief can bring these deep insecurities back to the surface.

Being mixed-race can be a blessing – having two distinct family histories gives you an insight into an extra part of the world, and a wider perspective on many aspects of life. Given my experience, I’d advise those of dual heritage to make the most of this – to create strong connections with both

sides of your family. Building your knowledge this way can be incredibly empowering.

Clearly, this isn't always within our control, and it isn't a personal failing if some are unable to uncover part of their heritage. But I'd urge people not to stop trying. One young man I spoke to, of Pakistani and British heritage, told how he was learning Punjabi in his 30s so he could joke with his cousins. Another spent months travelling solo to find his grandparents' birthplace. For others, those steps were as small as expanding their reading or messaging an auntie on Facebook. No matter whether you face a lack of connection due to geography, politics or bereavement, there are always ways to restart that conversation, to pick out your own path back to yourself.

Earlier this year, my sister and I went to Jamaica for the first time. We did it like other British tourists, staying in a beach-front hotel in Montego Bay; and yet there was something about being there, walking on that soil, breathing the warm air, that felt calming and recognisable to both of us. It hurt to be there without Dad, but at the same time we were proud of ourselves for taking that step on our own. It's now up to us to build the bridges we want to build, to form our own connections to our heritage and what it means to us.

- Natalie Morris is a journalist and author. The paperback version of her book, *Mixed/Other*, is published this week
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The Stephen Collins cartoonRishi Sunak

#GetRishiQuick: start your wealth journey with the chancellor now! – Stephen Collins cartoon

Stephen Collins

Sat 16 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Stephen Collins on Rishi Sunak – cartoon

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2022.04.16 - Around the world

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Donald Trump

Will Trump's 'reckless' endorsements be a referendum on his political power?

Some say his bets on extreme candidates are risky, as losses could threaten his role as king and kingmaker in the Republican party



Donald Trump at a rally on 2 April in Michigan, where he voiced his support for several Michigan Republican candidates. Photograph: Scott Olson/Getty Images



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 16 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 16 Apr 2022 02.49 EDT

He has long held that the true measure of a man is his TV ratings. So perhaps it came as no surprise when [Donald Trump](#) endorsed a celebrity doctor for a US Senate seat in Pennsylvania.

“They liked him for a long time,” Trump said of Mehmet Oz [at a rally in Pennsylvania last week](#). “That’s like a poll. You know, when you’re in television for 18 years, that’s like a poll. That means people like you.”

Trump [stunned](#) his own party by his decision to back Oz, who is struggling in the real polls and far from certain to win the Republican primary.

It was one among dozens of risky bets placed by Trump on extreme candidates. The upcoming primaries – votes in states and districts to decide which Republicans will take on Democrats in November’s midterm elections – are shaping up to be [a referendum on his dominance](#) of the party.

Next month could be pivotal. Defeat for Oz by [David McCormick](#) in Pennsylvania on 17 May, followed by defeat for Trump-backed David

Perdue against incumbent governor Brian Kemp in Georgia a week later, could deal a huge blow to Trump's status as party kingmaker.



A defeat for Mehmet Oz could deal a huge symbolic blow to Trump's status as party kingmaker. Photograph: Joe Marino/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

[Larry Jacobs](#), director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota, said: "Donald Trump is like a reckless gambler that's gone into a casino and put his stack of money on one number. Right now the roulette wheel is turning and, if he's wrong on a number of these, you're going to see increasing defiance."

"It's almost certain that the growing sentiment among Republican leadership that Trump's day has come and gone will be reinforced this year. He's put his political capital on the line in so many races. A more seasoned politician would have been a little more judicious, a little more careful on these close races."

A string of primary losses for Trump's picks could also puncture the aura of inevitability around him as party standard bearer in the race for the White House in 2024, encouraging potential rivals [such as Ron DeSantis](#), the governor of Florida.

Jacobs added: “There are definitely some [Republicans](#) looking at the presidential nomination who are ready to take on Trump, particularly if they see him as weakening. That is the orientation of a lot of the Republican leaders. They would like to see Trump quietly drift off into the past. Like so much about Trump, he’s refusing to go along and wants to still be a player.”

Never before has a US president left office only to continue barnstorming the country [with campaign rallies](#) and insert himself so aggressively into congressional elections. Why Trump is so willing to jeopardise his brand – and how he would respond to being given a bloody nose by Republican voters – remains a matter of conjecture.

One evident motive is to install loyalists who pass the litmus test of supporting his false claim that the 2020 presidential election was stolen by Joe Biden. Trump is laying the groundwork for [purveyors of “the big lie”](#) to take control of election machinery across the country.

[Allan Lichtman](#), a distinguished professor of history at American University in Washington, said: “He’s interested in shaping the party, endorsing those who he thinks support him and his approach to politics, and he’s also trying to put into place in some key swing states like Michigan, Arizona and Georgia folks that he thinks can help him steal the next election if he runs.”

There are also financial incentives. Trump’s Save America group, responsible for countless fundraising events and emails, netted a massive \$124m between November 2020 and March 2022 while spending only about \$14m, or about 11%, to support midterm candidates, according to an [analysis by the Reuters news agency](#).

[Wendy Schiller](#), a political science professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, said: “This has become a business for Trump. As his other businesses either get sold or dry up or are subject to lawsuits or criminal investigation, he’s still continuing to raise a lot of money and he gets to support his lifestyle through all of these activities.”

She added: “Second, he’s trying to build local bases of support in swing states. If he does decide to run, these are all people who will be part of county and state political organisations. They’ll be people who are going to

vote in those primaries in the Republican party, so the more contacts he makes at the local level, the better positioned he will be.”

A procession of Republican aspirants have beaten a path to Trump’s luxury [Mar-a-Lago estate](#) in Palm Beach, Florida, in the hope of joining the anointed ones. They run the gamut from shoo-ins to too-close-to-call to genuine underdogs.

On Friday evening, Trump announced his endorsement of JD Vance, author of the memoir *Hillbilly Elegy*, for a fiercely competitive Senate primary in Ohio.

“Like some others, JD Vance may have said some not so great things about me in the past, but he gets it now, and I have seen that in spades,” [the ex-president explained](#).

He is also [all-in for Sarah Palin](#), the former governor of Alaska and vice-presidential nominee, who is far from guaranteed to win a vacant House seat in her home state. “Sarah shocked many when she endorsed me very early in 2016, and we won big,” Trump stated. “Now, it’s my turn!”



Trump has endorsed Sarah Palin for a vacant House seat in Alaska.
Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

But perhaps the climactic primary battle will come in Wyoming in August when congresswoman Liz Cheney, who has come to personify the party's anti-Trump resistance, is challenged for a House seat by pro-Trump Harriet Hageman. Cheney has huge name recognition in the state and is raising vast sums of money.

Some of Trump's endorsements have already backfired. In the Pennsylvania Senate race – potentially critical to determining which party controls the chamber – he initially backed Sean Parnell, only for the candidate to drop out amid spousal abuse allegations.

Trump's subsequent decision to support Oz, reportedly encouraged by Trump's wife, Melania, and Fox News host Sean Hannity, carries liabilities of its own. The host of the syndicated The Dr Oz Show is described by critics as a snake oil salesman. In 2014 he admitted to Congress that some of the products promoted on his show lacked "scientific muster".

Another setback occurred in Alabama, where Trump retracted his endorsement of congressman Mo Brooks in a Senate race, claiming that Brooks "made a horrible mistake" when he told supporters to put the 2020 election behind them. Most observers suspect the real reason was that polls show Brooks heading for defeat.

Trump's win-loss record is sure to be studied hard by pundits. Yet if past is prologue, it would not be hard to imagine him dismissing defeats in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Wyoming and elsewhere as the fault of weak candidates or rigged elections, while claiming primary victories as his own.

Frank Luntz, a pollster and political consultant, said, "I don't think it's risky for him because he doesn't acknowledge losing: if they win, they win because of him; if they lose, they lost because of their own failure."

He added: "He's not as popular today as he was a year ago. The sheen is not as bright but he's still the most impactful Republican by far and his endorsement does mean something. I understand why candidates really want it, but they have to think about it: what gets you the nomination in Pennsylvania will cost you the election."

Trump has been written off countless times before. But at February's Conservative Political Action Conference, he received more votes [in a straw poll](#) for the 2024 nomination than all other Republicans combined.

So would a sprinkling of primary defeats truly break the fever?

[Reed Galen](#), cofounder of the Lincoln Project, an anti-Trump group, said: "Some people will say that; more people might even want to believe it. The chattering class of both parties in Washington DC, starting with [Senator Mitch] McConnell on the Republican side, will read those tea leaves that way."

"But it doesn't make it true because, ultimately, Trump making an endorsement of someone versus Trump being on the ballot – the majority of those primary voters are going to come back to him if he decides to run again."

DeSantis and other would-be contenders should therefore not leap to conclusions, Galen added.

"I would tend to agree with the idea that there would be a weakness perceived by potential challengers in 2024," Galen said. "It may embolden them. I do not believe that equation adds up to them beating him in a primary."

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[Tunisia](#)

Diesel tanker sinks off Tunisia risking environmental disaster

Ship carrying 750 tonnes of fuel from Egypt to Malta ran into difficulty in bad weather on Friday evening



The Xelo pictured in Russia in 2017. It began taking on water about 7km offshore in the Gulf of Gabes.

Photograph: Dmitry Frolov/Reuters

Agence France-Presse in Tunis

Sat 16 Apr 2022 07.54 EDTFirst published on Sat 16 Apr 2022 05.09 EDT

A tanker carrying 750 tonnes of diesel fuel from Egypt to Malta sank in the Gulf of Gabes off Tunisia's south-east coast, sparking a rush to avoid a spill.

The Equatorial Guinea-flagged Xelo was sailing from the Egyptian port of Damietta to Malta when it requested entry to Tunisian waters on Friday evening owing to bad weather.

“The ship sank this morning in Tunisian territorial waters. For the moment, there is no leak,” said a local court spokesperson, Mohamed Karray.

A disaster prevention committee would meet in the coming hours to decide on the measures to be taken, he added.

The tanker is 58 metres (190ft) long and nine metres wide, according to the ship monitoring website Vesseltracker.com.

It began taking on water about 7km (four miles) offshore in the Gulf of Gabes and the engine room was engulfed, according to a Tunisian environment ministry statement. It said Tunisian authorities evacuated the seven-member crew.

The environment minister, Leila Chikhaoui, was travelling to Gabes “to evaluate the situation ... and take necessary preventive decisions in coordination with the regional authorities,” the ministry said.

Authorities had activated “the national emergency plan for the prevention of marine pollution with the aim of bringing the situation under control and avoiding the spread of pollutants”.

Karray said the Georgian captain, four Turks and two Azerbaijanis were briefly hospitalised for checks and were now in a hotel.

The defence, interior, transport and customs ministries were working to avoid a marine environmental disaster in the region and limit its impact, the environment ministry said.

Before the ship sank, it had described the situation as “alarming” but “under control”.

The Gulf of Gabes was traditionally a fishing area but activists say it has suffered pollution from phosphate processing industries based near the city of Gabes.

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[North Korea](#)

North Korea marks founder Kim Il-sung's birthday with mass parade but no weapons



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un waves to crowds during a parade marking the birthday of his grandfather in Pyongyang. Photograph: KCNA/EPA

Kim Jong-un is expected to display advanced weapons at military parade later this month and escalate missile testing

Associated Press

Sat 16 Apr 2022 00.10 EDT

Thousands of North Koreans marched in a choreographed display of loyalty to the ruling Kim family during a massive civilian parade celebrating the birthday of the country's founder attended by his grandson and current leader, [Kim Jong-un](#).

State media images showed Kim waving from a balcony overlooking the vast square in Pyongyang named after his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, as huge columns of people carrying red plastic flowers and floats with political slogans marched below.



North Koreans march in the centre of Pyongyang to celebrate the 110th birthday of Kim Il-sung. Photograph: KCNA/EPA

Ri Il-hwan, a member of the ruling Workers' party politburo, made a speech calling for loyalty, saying that North Koreans will "always emerge victorious" under Kim's guidance. It appeared Kim didn't deliver a speech

during Friday's event and state media didn't mention any comments toward the United States or South Korea.

Kim Il-sung's birthday is the most important national holiday in North Korea, where the Kim family has ruled under a strong personality cult since the nation's founding in 1948. This week's celebrations marking the 110th anniversary of his birth came as his grandson revives nuclear brinkmanship with the US and his neighbours.



People dance on Kim Il-Sung Square in Pyongyang. Photograph: AP



The national holiday celebration included choreographed dances but no displays of North Korea's military hardware. Photograph: KCNA/EPA

Earlier this month Sung Kim, the special representative for North Korea policy at the US state department, [said Washington believed Pyongyang could demonstrate its growing nuclear weapons capacity on Kim Il-sung's birthday](#), but it appeared the country passed its biggest holiday without showcasing its military hardware.

Commercial satellite images in recent weeks have indicated preparations for a large military parade in the capital, which could take place on the 25 April founding anniversary of North Korea's army and display the most advanced weapons in Kim's nuclear arsenal, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

There is also expectation that Pyongyang will further escalate its weapons testing in the coming weeks or months, possibly including a resumption of nuclear explosive tests or [test-flying missiles over Japan](#), as it attempts to force a response from the Biden administration, which is preoccupied with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a rivalry with China.

North Korea has opened 2022 with a slew of weapons tests, including its [first flight test of an ICBM](#) since 2017. South Korea's military has also

detected signs that North Korea is rebuilding tunnels at a nuclear testing ground it partially dismantled weeks before [Kim's first summit with the former US president Donald Trump](#) in June 2018.

Kim's defiant displays of his military might are also likely motivated by domestic politics, experts say, as he doesn't otherwise have significant accomplishments to trumpet to his people after a decade in power.

"Kim Jong-un's stated goal of deploying tactical nuclear weapons, [his sister] [Kim Yo-jong's recent threats toward Seoul](#) and satellite imagery of tunnelling activity at Punggye-ri all point to an upcoming nuclear test," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. "Additional missile launches are also expected for honing weapons delivery systems."

Sung Kim is scheduled to visit South Korea next week for talks on the international community's response to the North's recent missile tests.

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Marine Le Pen

‘Frexit in all but name’: what a Marine Le Pen win would mean for EU

It is feared if far-right candidate becomes French president she will try to destroy the bloc from inside



Marine Le Pen at a campaign rally. One commentator said her EU policy was to ‘stay in the bus but drive it off a cliff’. Photograph: Chesnot/Getty Images

[Jon Henley](#) in Paris and [Jennifer Rankin](#) in Brussels

Fri 15 Apr 2022 06.04 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 12.11 EDT

Campaigning in Burgundy the day after reaching the [second round](#) of France’s presidential elections, Marine Le Pen could not have seemed clearer: “I do not want to leave the EU,” she said. “That is not my objective.”

Much of what the far-right Rassemblement National (National Rally) leader does want to do, however – on the economy, social policy and immigration – implies breaking the EU’s rules, and her possible arrival in the Élysée Palace next weekend could prove calamitous for the 27-member bloc.

Le Pen may have dropped previous pledges to take [France](#) – a founder member of the EU, its second-biggest economy and half of the vital Franco-German engine that has powered it since its creation – out of the euro single currency and the bloc.

In the 2017 election, fears of the economic consequences of that policy, above all among older voters worried about their savings, are widely seen as having contributed to her [heavy second-round defeat](#) against the pro-European Emmanuel Macron.

This time, the EU does not even feature by name among the dozen or so key themes of Le Pen’s electoral programme. Many of her concrete policy proposals, however, blatantly contradict the obligations of EU membership.

Opponents and commentators have called the strategy “Frexit in all but name”: an approach that, while it may no longer aim to remove France from the bloc, seeks to fundamentally refashion it, and that could lead to a paralysing standoff with Brussels.

“Le Pen’s EU policy is: ‘We’re going to stay in the bus but drive it off a cliff,’” [said Mujtaba Rahman](#), the Europe director of Eurasia Group consultancy. It would “try to destroy EU from the inside” and was “a much greater threat to the EU status quo than Brexit”, he said.

Pascal Lamy, who was chief of staff to the former European Commission president [Jacques Delors](#), said a Le Pen victory would be a major shock on a bigger scale “than Trump was for the United States, or Brexit for the UK”.

Her “sovereigntist, protectionist, nationalist” agenda would “totally contradict the French commitment to European integration” and includes “proposals which are in total breach of the treaties to which France has subscribed,” he said.

Key to Le Pen's plans is an early referendum on a proposed law on "citizenship, identity and immigration" that would modify the constitution to allow a "national priority" for French citizens in employment, social security benefits and public housing – a measure incompatible with EU values and free movement rules.



Le Pen's plans include a 'national priority' for French citizens in areas such as public housing. Photograph: Daniel Cole/AP

The same referendum would establish "the primacy of national law over European law" to allow France "not only to control immigration but, in every other area, reconcile its European engagement with the preservation of its national sovereignty and the defence of its interests", the her RN party says.

The aim would be to enable France to benefit from a "Europe à la carte", picking and choosing from the bits of EU legislation it likes and dislikes – a non-starter for the bloc that was forcefully ruled out by the 27 during Brexit negotiations with the UK.

"It's absurd," [said Jean-Louis Bourlanges](#), a centrist MP and president of the French parliament's foreign affairs committee. "As soon as you affirm the primacy of national law, you have no European law. Marine Le Pen has

rejected an official exit, but her programme is not compatible with continued French membership of the EU.”

Le Pen also aims to re-establish border controls on imports and people, violating EU and Schengen rules, and unilaterally cut France’s contribution to the EU budget – when the bloc’s multi-annual financial framework for 2021 to 2027 is already fixed. Further plans to cut taxes on essential goods and fuel would breach EU free market rules.

Big questions may remain about how much of this programme could be implemented, domestically and in an EU context. Le Pen’s ambitions would be thwarted if she failed to win a parliamentary majority in elections in June, and EU legal experts have pointed out that even so much as holding a referendum on the primacy of national law would be in breach of European treaties.

French lawyers also say the country’s highest court, the constitutional council, would throw out Le Pen’s plan for a referendum by presidential decree – avoiding the need for parliamentary approval – precisely because any referendum intended to modify the constitution must have the backing of MPs and senators.

The EU as it exists today, [Le Pen said earlier this year](#), was “neglectful of peoples, and domineering of nations”, an “intrusive and authoritarian” bloc locked into “a globalist, open-border ideology” that was “destroying our identity”.

Her vision, she said, was of an “alliance of nations … respectful of peoples, histories and national sovereignties”, whose members could “favour their own businesses for public contracts” and “re-establish permanent checks” on their borders.

But even if she failed to declare the primacy of French law and establish a national preference, the small print in Le Pen’s programme seems certain to lead France inexorably down the road towards a conflictual relationship with the EU – with political chaos the consequence given France’s indispensable role within the bloc.

“She could totally put [the EU] into gridlock or paralyse it,” said Georg Riekeles, a former European Commission official, who forecast “a dramatic weakening” of the EU’s ability to deal with crises, from security to the climate.

Le Pen has vowed to pull France out of Nato’s integrated command structure, removing troops and weapons from common management. She also wants to dismantle French windfarms, a strike against France’s EU renewable energy targets. “Any topic will just be more complicated,” Riekeles said.

EU insiders worry that a France led by Le Pen would also provide a major boost to national-conservative governments in countries such as Poland and Hungary, potentially allying with capitals that have long challenged the supremacy of EU law and are locked in battle with Brussels.

“It would stop every attempt to change things in Poland and Hungary,” said the French MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, who works on the rule of law. While the Green MEP believes the EU’s institutions and single market would continue under a Le Pen presidency, she thinks it “would be the end of a rule of law, values-based European Union”.

For the EU, a President Le Pen could mean a five-year “empty chair” crisis, Lamy suggested, referring to the events of 1965 when the then French president, Charles de Gaulle, boycotted the European institutions in a row over the budget.

“For certain, it would be a big problem, short term, during the next five years,” he said. “I have a hard time believing that if she was elected with the programme that she has, she would be re-elected.”

[France](#)

Macron wants cap on ‘shocking and excessive’ executive pay

In run-up to the presidential vote, French premier calls for EU-wide ceiling after head of carmaker Stellantis receives €19m



Emmanuel Macron says ‘society will explode’ if CEO salaries are not kept in check in France where executive pay has become a prominent election issue. Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

[Phillip Inman](#)

[@phillipinman](#)

Fri 15 Apr 2022 11.13 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 13.59 EDT

Emmanuel Macron will push for a cap on excessive executive pay should he be re-elected president after he described as “shocking and excessive” the €19m (£15.7m) pay packet handed to the head of carmaker Stellantis.

Macron, [who is campaigning in the run-up to the final vote](#) for the French presidency on 24 April against far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, told France Info radio that he was in favour of an EU-wide ceiling for top executives' pay.

The multimillion-pound payout handed last year to chief executive Carlos Tavares, when French carmaker PSA merged with Italian-US rival Fiat Chrysler to form Stellantis, one of the world's largest carmakers, has emerged as a prominent issue in the election.

Macron and Le Pen are attempting to woo the 7.7 million people who voted in the first round for left-wing candidate [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#), who has described the final run-off as "a choice between two evils".

[A recent poll for France 24](#) showed 34% of Melenchon voters saying they would back Macron against 30% for Le Pen, while 36% were undecided.

"We need to fight at a European level so that remuneration can't be excessive," Macron said. "We need to set ceilings and have governance for [Europe](#) that make these things acceptable. If not, society will explode at any given moment.

"People can't be facing purchasing power problems ... and then see these sorts of sums."

Beyond his base salary of €2m, Tavares is to receive €7.5m in performance-based pay, €2.4m in retirement contributions and a €1.7m bonus related to the success of the merger. In addition, he will also receive €5.6m-worth of company shares, according to Stellantis.

In 2017, PSA chief Tavares acquired the European operations of General Motors, giving it control of several plants, including the Ellesmere Port factory on Merseyside, which saw its last Astra leave the production line last week ahead of a shift to electric car models.

[Stellantis was created in 2019](#) when the boards of [Fiat Chrysler](#) Automobiles and the Peugeot owner, Groupe PSA, approved a €40bn (£35bn) merger to rival Toyota, Daimler, GM and Volkswagen.

“These sorts of sums are astronomic,” Macron said, who was backed by 9.7 million people in the first round against Le Pen’s tally of 8.1 million.

“We need to do what we’ve done with minimum tax rates and the fight against tax evasion. We need to convince our European partners to bring about a reform that will provide a framework for executive pay.”

Earlier this week, French government spokesperson Gabriel Attal characterised Tavares’ renumeration as “obviously not normal figures”.

Le Pen, who is facing off against Macron in the second and final round of the presidential election on 24 April, has also been drawn into the debate.

“It’s shocking, but less shocking than for others,” she said, before appearing to support the bonuses as a reward for the merger deal. “For once he obtained good results,” she said.

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Headlines

- [Imran Ahmad Khan Crispin Blunt quits as LGBTQ+ group chair after comments](#)
- [Live Crispin Blunt apologises for offence caused by his questioning of sexual assault verdict](#)
- [Verdict Tory MP found guilty of sexually assaulting boy, 15](#)
- [Profile Imran Ahmad Khan](#)

Conservatives

Crispin Blunt quits as LGBTQ+ group chair after Imran Ahmad Khan comments

Tory MP quits as chair of parliamentary group and withdraws comment criticising conviction of colleague

- [Today's politics news – live updates](#)



Crispin Blunt attended the defence and summing up in Khan's trial but did not see prosecution witnesses, reporters said. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/PA

Jessica Elgot Chief political correspondent
[@jessicaelgot](https://twitter.com/jessicaelgot)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 04.36 EDTFirst published on Tue 12 Apr 2022 03.58 EDT

The Conservative MP Crispin Blunt has resigned as chair of the LGBTQ+ parliamentary group and withdrawn comments that a fellow MP found guilty of sexual assault was a victim of a “miscarriage of justice”.

After an outcry from MPs across the political spectrum, Blunt deleted the tweet defending convicted MP Imran Ahmad Khan and removed the comment from his website after an intervention from Tory whips overnight.

In a statement on Tuesday morning, Blunt apologised for defending Khan, who was found to have assaulted a 15-year-old boy after plying him with alcohol. “I am sorry that my defence of him has been a cause of significant upset and concern not least to victims of sexual offences,” he said. “It was not my intention to do this.”

He added: “To be clear, I do not condone any form of abuse and strongly believe in the independence and integrity of the justice system.”

On reflection I have decided to retract my statement defending Imran Ahmad Khan. I am sorry that my defence of him has been a cause of significant upset and concern not least to victims of sexual offences.
pic.twitter.com/rzcnJbdT0g

— Crispin Blunt MP (@CrispinBlunt) [April 12, 2022](#)

A Conservative source said: “Crispin’s views are wholly unacceptable” and said there had been “exchanges late last night” that led to the statement being withdrawn.

Blunt, the MP for Reigate since 1997 and chair of the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on LGBTQ+ rights, had said he was certain the Wakefield MP, Imran Ahmad Khan, was innocent and that the trial “was nothing short of an international scandal”.

Khan was [found guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy](#) and has been expelled from the party. Labour called for the government to remove the whip from Blunt after the comments.

James Heappey, the armed forces minister, told Sky News the comments were “not something the government associates itself with” and defended the jury who convicted Khan. He said: “Every one of us who believes in the judicial system and the rule of law has to respect that judgment.”

Asked whether Blunt would have the whip removed, Heappey said that was “for people to look at today as they speak to Crispin, find out what this is all about”.

He added: “Absolutely nobody in Her Majesty’s government is seeking to be critical of the decision of the court. If Mr Khan chooses to appeal, that is for him, but a court of law has found him guilty and that is what the government believes him to be therefore.”

Blunt’s comments triggered the resignation of three MPs from the APPG that he chaired – the Scottish National party MPs Stewart McDonald and Joanna Cherry, and Labour’s Chris Bryant.

Blunt said on Tuesday he would be resigning as chair of the group. “It is a particularly difficult time for LGBT+ rights around the world and my statement risks distracting the APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights from its important purpose I have today offered the officers my resignation so a new chair can be found to continue the work of the group with full force.”

Bryant had earlier told Sky News he had called for Blunt’s resignation. “It is completely inappropriate for a member of parliament to start attacking the judicial process like this,” he said.

Blunt’s deleted statement said he had been prepared to testify in Khan’s defence. “I sat through some of the trial. The conduct of this case relied on lazy tropes about LGBT+ people that we might have thought we had put behind us decades ago,” he said.

Reporters at the trial said Blunt attended the defence and summing up and did not see prosecution witnesses, including the boy’s parents, who reportedly broke down in tears giving evidence.

If Khan is ousted, it will trigger what would be a closely fought byelection in his Wakefield seat, to which he was elected in 2019 as its first Tory MP since 1932.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/12/crispin-blunt-urged-to-apologise-for-comments-on-imran-ahmad-khan-case>

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

Rishi Sunak breaks silence with ‘unreserved apology’; Boris Johnson says he has paid Partygate fine – as it happened

Chancellor and PM’s wife, Carrie Johnson, also said to have paid fines for lockdown breaches

- [Boris Johnson defies calls to quit after he and Rishi Sunak fined](#)
- [How No 10’s alleged parties took place as UK Covid death toll rose](#)
- [75% of Britons think Johnson lied about breaking lockdown rules – poll](#)
- [More than 30 more fines issued over Partygate in past fortnight – Met](#)
- [Tory MP quits as LGBTQ+ group chair after Khan comments](#)
- [Frances O’Grady to retire as TUC general secretary at end of year](#)

Updated 4d ago

[Tom Ambrose \(now\)](#) and [Andrew Sparrow \(earlier\)](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 17.05 EDTFirst published on Tue 12 Apr 2022 03.42 EDT

Boris Johnson offers ‘full apology’ for breaking Covid laws – video

[Tom Ambrose \(now\)](#) and [Andrew Sparrow \(earlier\)](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 17.05 EDTFirst published on Tue 12 Apr 2022 03.42 EDT

Key events

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- [5d ago Sunak has paid his Partygate fine – PA](#)
- [5d ago 'You paid a fine, our loved ones paid with their lives'](#)
- [5d ago Asked if he will resign, Johnson says he will 'get on' with his job](#)
- [5d ago Johnson: I have paid lockdown fine and apologise once again](#)
- [5d ago Johnson reportedly set 'to pay fine without challenging it'](#)
- [5d ago Dorries claims PM has already explained lockdown-busting birthday party that lasted 'less than 10 minutes'](#)

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From 5d ago

[15.19](#)

Sunak issues apology and says he 'regrets frustration and anger caused'

Chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), has issued what he describes as an “unreserved apology” after he received a fine for breaching Covid regulations.

In a statement issued this evening, he said he understands “that for figures in public office the rules must be applied stringently in order to maintain public confidence”.

The chancellor said:

I can confirm I have received a fixed penalty notice from the Metropolitan police with regards to a gathering held on June 19 in Downing Street.

I offer an unreserved apology.

I understand that for figures in public office, the rules must be applied stringently in order to maintain public confidence. I respect the decision

that has been made and have paid the fine.

I know people sacrificed a great deal during Covid, and they will find this situation upsetting. I deeply regret the frustration and anger caused and I am sorry.

Like the prime minister, I am focused on delivering for the British people at this challenging time.



Rishi Sunak Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

Rishi Sunak has paid the fixed-penalty notice he received over the Partygate saga, the PA Media news agency understands.

The chancellor was issued with the fine at the same time as the prime minister, [Boris Johnson](#), and his wife Carrie, both of whom have also paid.

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Updated at 17.35 EDT

[4d ago](#) [17.05](#)

That's it from a busy night in Westminster. Thanks for following along and do join us again tomorrow for Prime Minister's Questions and, inevitably, more on those Partygate penalties.

It's goodnight from me, Tom Ambrose. It seems appropriate to finish the blog tonight on this compilation of denials from the prime minister, following today's confirmation that he and his chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), did break their own laws during lockdown.

All the times Boris Johnson denied and dismissed partygate claims – video

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Updated at 17.33 EDT

[4d ago](#)[15.46](#)

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, has said [Boris Johnson](#) and Rishi Sunak “have to go”, calling them “guilty men” after the two were given fixed-penalty notices over parties held in Downing Street when government rules forbade gatherings during the Covid lockdown.

Johnson and Sunak are 'guilty men' and should resign, says Keir Starmer – video

-
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Updated at 17.34 EDT

[4d ago](#)[15.36](#)

A Tory MP was “factually incorrect” to compare Boris Johnson’s attendance at a birthday bash in Downing Street to nurses having a drink at the end of their shift, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has said.

The prime minister has paid a penalty in relation to the gathering in the Cabinet Room on 19 June 2020 to mark his 56th birthday as it was a

violation of coronavirus rules, PA Media reported.

Lichfield MP Michael Fabricant had earlier told BBC News:

I don't think at any time he thought he was breaking the law... he thought just like many teachers and nurses who after a very long shift would go back to the staff room and have a quiet drink.

Writing to him, Pat Cullen, general secretary of the RCN, said:

We remain at the forefront of pandemic response. Despite political narrative, as health and care professionals we know the Covid-19 context is nowhere near over. While you position yourself with some authority as to the behaviour and actions of nurses during the pandemic, I'd like to inform you of the following facts.

Throughout the pandemic - and still certainly, now - most days, nurses and nursing support workers, when finally finishing a number of unpaid hours well past shift end, will get home, clean their uniforms, shower and collapse into bed.

Throughout the early pandemic, this was often alone, for the protection of others - kept away from family, friends and support networks. These shifts - in communities, in hospitals, anywhere people are - are long, unrelenting, understaffed and intense.

At the end of one of the many hours, days and years we have worked, since recognition of the pandemic, I can assure you that none of us have sought to hang out and 'have a quiet one in the staff room.' There isn't a site in England that would allow alcohol on the premises for any professional to consume during working hours.

As frontline professionals, still dealing with the implications of the pandemic - understaffed, underpaid, overworked, exhausted, burnt out and still holding it together while doing the best we can for our patients. It is utterly demoralising - and factually incorrect - to hear you suggest that our diligent, safety critical profession can reasonably be compared to any elected official breaking the law, at any time.

Fabricant was talking about the incident in which the prime minister took part in a gathering of two or more people indoors, which was banned at the time.

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Updated at 17.34 EDT

4d ago15.33

As you might expect, Boris Johnson's most loyal supporters are continuing to come out in support of the prime minister.

In typical style, Jacob Rees-Mogg has been quick to dismiss Partygate once again and seeks to mind people "there is a war on".

He wrote:

This ought to close this matter. There is a war on and the prime minister, supported by the chancellor, provides the leadership the nation needs.

This ought to close this matter. There is a war on and the Prime Minister, supported by the Chancellor, provides the leadership the nation needs. <https://t.co/vxJgwMjTlM>

— Jacob Rees-Mogg (@Jacob_Rees_Mogg) [April 12, 2022](#)

Meanwhile, transport secretary, Grant Shapps, tweeted:

At end of 2020 I was unable to visit my dad in hospital for 4mths, so share the anger felt about Downing St fines.

But I also recognize [sic] PM has apologised, accepted responsibility & reformed No10. Now, as he leads the West's response to Putin's evil war he has my full support.

At end of 2020 I was unable to visit my dad in hospital for 4mths, so share the anger felt about Downing St fines. But I also recognize PM has apologised, accepted responsibility & reformed No10. Now, as he leads the West's response to Putin's evil war he has my full support.

— Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP (@grantshapps) [April 12, 2022](#)

Echoing his colleagues, the Conservative party chairman, Oliver Dowden, tweeted:

The prime minister has provided a full explanation and apology for what happened in Downing Street.

At a time when we face an energy crisis and conflict in Ukraine, I'm fully behind him in getting on with the job.

The Prime Minister has provided a full explanation and apology for what happened in Downing Street.

At a time when we face an energy crisis and conflict in Ukraine, I'm fully behind him in getting on with the job.

— Oliver Dowden (@OliverDowden) [April 12, 2022](#)

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Updated at 15.41 EDT

[5d ago](#)[15.19](#)

Sunak issues apology and says he 'regrets frustration and anger caused'

Chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), has issued what he describes as an “unreserved apology” after he received a fine for breaching Covid regulations.

In a statement issued this evening, he said he understands “that for figures in public office the rules must be applied stringently in order to maintain public confidence”.

The chancellor said:

I can confirm I have received a fixed penalty notice from the Metropolitan police with regards to a gathering held on June 19 in Downing Street.

I offer an unreserved apology.

I understand that for figures in public office, the rules must be applied stringently in order to maintain public confidence. I respect the decision that has been made and have paid the fine.

I know people sacrificed a great deal during Covid, and they will find this situation upsetting. I deeply regret the frustration and anger caused and I am sorry.

Like the prime minister, I am focused on delivering for the British people at this challenging time.



Rishi Sunak Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

Rishi Sunak has paid the fixed-penalty notice he received over the Partygate saga, the PA Media news agency understands.

The chancellor was issued with the fine at the same time as the prime minister, [Boris Johnson](#), and his wife Carrie, both of whom have also paid.

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Updated at 17.35 EDT

[5d ago](#)**15.05**

Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, has questioned why the chancellor has not yet spoken about receiving a fixed-penalty notice.

Both the prime minister and his wife have issued statements following their fines over Partygate.

But [Rishi Sunak](#) is yet to comment, although the PA news agency understands he has paid his fine. Rayner said:

Rishi Sunak's silence is bizarre.

After a week of torrid headlines for the chancellor, you would think he might have something to say to the British public.

While people made huge sacrifices and followed the rules, Rishi Sunak broke the law. He should resign.



Labour's deputy leader Angela Rayner Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

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Updated at 17.35 EDT

[5d ago](#)**14.52**

Sunak has paid his Partygate fine – PA

Rishi Sunak has paid the penalty he received over the Partygate saga, the PA Media news agency understands.

The chancellor was issued with the notice at the same time as the prime minister, [Boris Johnson](#), and his wife Carrie, both of whom have also paid.

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Updated at 17.36 EDT

[5d ago](#) [14.30](#)

The [Labour](#) MP Chris Bryant has joined David Lammy in arguing against the claim that the UK cannot change prime minister because of the war in Ukraine.

He tweeted several examples of when Britain has changed prime minister during wartime – and it's a pretty extensive list.

The UK changed PM

- UK four times in the war in Afghanistan
- UK in the Iraq War
- UK in the Gulf War
- UK in the Korean War
- UK in the Second World War
- UK in the First World War
- UK in the Second Boer War
- UK in the Second Opium War
- UK in the Crimean War
- UK twice in the Peninsular War

— Chris Bryant (@RhonddaBryant) [April 12, 2022](#)

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Updated at 14.50 EDT

[5d ago](#) [14.21](#)

Boris Johnson's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, has leapt to his defence this evening, claiming he is "delivering for Britain".

She wrote:

The prime minister has apologised and taken responsibility for what happened in Downing Street.

He and the chancellor are delivering for Britain on many fronts including on the international security crisis we face. They have my 100% backing.

The Prime Minister has apologised and taken responsibility for what happened in Downing Street. He and the Chancellor are delivering for Britain on many fronts including on the international security crisis we face. They have my 100% backing.

— Liz Truss (@trussliz) [April 12, 2022](#)

She is coincidentally also the bookies' favourite to be the next Conservative party leader and UK prime minister, as short as 4/1 with some outlets.

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Updated at 14.51 EDT

[5d ago](#) [14.18](#)

'You paid a fine, our loved ones paid with their lives'

The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice have just released an emotional statement criticising [Boris Johnson](#) following his fixed-penalty notice for breaking coronavirus laws.

In an open letter to the prime minister, the group says:

You broke those laws intended to keep us safe. You trampled on the sacrifices we and all the British public made.

You paid a fine. Our loved ones paid with their lives.

If a new variant emerges how will you have the moral authority to impose any measures needed to protect the public?

"You have paid a fine. Our loved ones paid with their lives."

You can read our letter to [@BorisJohnson](#) earlier today in full below.
pic.twitter.com/U4e4Yhm1vE

— Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK (@CovidJusticeUK)
[April 12, 2022](#)

Read the full letter [here](#).

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Updated at 17.36 EDT

[5d ago](#)[14.06](#)

David Lammy has expanded on his view that [Boris Johnson](#) should leave No 10.

Referencing wider issues of populism and the type of politics promoted by the former US president Donald Trump, he says:

If you are found to have breached the law, then of course you should [resign].

I do not want to live in a country where populism is everything, where Donald Trump's set of rules rule the way and where you can break the

rules, apparently say you are sorry but effectively take the British public for fools.

For all of those reasons, it is unconscionable that now Boris Johnson and his chancellor remain in office as if nothing happened.



The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy. Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

Asked if there is any credibility to the Scottish Tory leader Douglas Ross's point that Johnson should remain in post because of the war in Ukraine, Lammy adds:

He has no point at all. In fact, overnight there has been some discussion about whether parliament should be recalled if chemical weapons were used in Ukraine and we in fact find out that there were Tory whips suggesting it should not be recalled because they don't want to discuss Partygate.

Let me just say very clearly; the second world war remains the most major event that affected Europe in the last 100 years and ... Churchill replaced Chamberlain. The Battle of the Somme saw more British soldiers die than at any point over the last century and, at that point, Lloyd George replaced Asquith. Of course we have lost prime ministers

during wartime, in fact in Afghanistan we had changes of prime minister.

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Updated at 14.20 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.55](#)

The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, has become the latest in a long line of opposition politicians calling on the prime minister to resign.

He evoked memories of his own personal experiences during the pandemic, as well as the experiences of “millions” of others across the UK.

The [Labour](#) frontbencher told Sky News:

He says it didn’t occur to him that he had broken the rules. It occurred to millions of your listeners when they couldn’t attend care homes to visit their loved ones, it occurred to them when they couldn’t hold the hands of loved ones in hospital, some of them losing their lives, it occurred to them when they couldn’t attend funerals.

It certainly occurred to me when I did not have birthday parties for my three children or I couldn’t be with my great-uncle, who died at the age of 100 because of the pandemic.

This is taking people for fools. What is clear is that he broke the rules, he breached the law, he has now been subject to a criminal sanction, he broke the ministerial code and he lied to Parliament ... in our system, when you break just one of those rules then you should resign.

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Updated at 14.20 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.48](#)

A number of Boris Johnson's loyalists among his cabinet have come out tonight in support of the prime minister – despite him being found to have broken the laws he wrote.

The secretary of state for Scotland, Alister Jack, said Boris Johnson remained the right person to lead the country.

He said:

The prime minister has, rightly, apologised and accepted responsibility for actions which he knows have angered a great many people.

However, he remains the right person to lead this country at such a crucial time and we need to get behind him so that he can focus on dealing with the appalling situation in Ukraine and on delivering for everyone in this country.

Treasury minister Simon Clarke has give his “full support” to both the prime minister and chancellor.

Clarke said on Twitter:

The PM and chancellor have my full support. Their efforts during the pandemic have ensured the UK is now free of restrictions and avoided economic catastrophe. I for one am grateful to them for everything they have done for our country.

The PM has apologised and accepted the police's decision today. He has accepted Sue Gray's recommendations in full and instituted a comprehensive programme of reform in No 10. It's time to get on with the job of governing at a crucial time at home and abroad.

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Updated at 14.27 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.34](#)

He is now being questioned on the number of denials he has made since the Partygate allegations first emerged.

Johnson insists he was not lying when he denied breaking the law because he spoke in “completely good faith”.

He says:

When I said that, I spoke in completely good faith because, as I've said to you just now, at the time I was standing up for nine minutes in the cabinet room where I work every day, it didn't occur to me that I was in breach of the rules. I now humbly accept that I was.

I think the best thing I can do now, having settled the fine, is focus on the job in hand. That's what I'm going to do.

The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed the prime minister has revised the time he says spent at his own birthday party down from 10 minutes to just nine minutes during this interview.

Asked if he expects to receive more penalties from the police, he says:

You know, I, I ... if there are, I'm sure that you will be the first to know. Or amongst the very first to know.

Despite being obviously uncomfortable answering the question about more fines potentially coming his way, it is worth noting that Johnson shook his head while giving the above answer.

And, with that, the interview is over. I'm sure there will be plenty of reaction from that coming shortly – stay tuned.

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Updated at 17.36 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.27](#)

Johnson is told that of course this wasn't an isolated incident and there have been 50 fixed-penalty notices issued by the police so far.

He is asked if he takes responsibility for a culture at Downing Street where people thought this kind of behaviour was acceptable.

The prime minister replies that he takes "full responsibility". However, due to the square footage of No 10, "he can't be everywhere at once". He says:

Of course I take full responsibility for everything ... but don't forget Downing Street is about 15,000 square feet, it's got a lot of officials working in it, hundreds and hundreds of officials.

I couldn't be everywhere at once but clearly once it became obvious what had been happening, the types of behaviour we had seen, we have taken steps to change things.

Downing Street has been radically transformed, it's a very different organisation and we are focusing 100% on delivering our agenda.

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Updated at 17.37 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.22](#)

Asked if he will resign, Johnson says he will 'get on' with his job

When asked if he will resign after becoming the first prime minister to have broken the law, Johnson says:

I have, of course, paid the FPN and I apologise once again for the mistake that I made and, as I said just now, I want to be able to get on and deliver the mandate that I have but also to tackle the problems that

the country must face right now and make sure that we get on with delivering for the people of this country. That is my priority.

Johnson is reminded by the interviewer that the problem he faces is a lack of trust in him. He is asked if the fact he broke his own laws diminishes his respect among the public.

He says once again:

I believe it is my job to get on and deliver for the people of this country and that's what I'm going to do.

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Updated at 13.51 EDT

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[UK news](#)

Tory MP Imran Ahmad Khan found guilty of sexually assaulting boy, 15

Party expels Khan, 48, who faces time in jail and could be disqualified as MP from his Wakefield constituency

- [Imran Ahmad Khan: Tory MP in sexual assault case had oddball reputation](#)



Imran Ahmad Khan arrives at Southwark crown court in London on Monday. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Mon 11 Apr 2022 11.46 EDTFirst published on Mon 11 Apr 2022 11.24 EDT

The Conservative MP Imran Ahmad Khan has been found guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy after plying him with gin at a party in 2008,

with Labour calling on him to immediately resign his seat and trigger a byelection.

The 48-year-old, whose brother Karim is a prosecutor at the international criminal court in The Hague, was warned he may face time in jail. If he receives a sentence of more than 12 months he will automatically be disqualified from being an MP, prompting a byelection in his Wakefield constituency in West Yorkshire.

The judge, Mr Justice Baker, said he would sentence Khan at a date to be fixed.

On Monday evening the Conservatives announced he had been expelled from the party.

A jury at Southwark crown court in London found Khan guilty of assaulting the boy at a party in Staffordshire in January 2008, 11 years before he became an MP. Khan made no comment as he left court but a member of his legal team said he would be appealing.

The victim said he was not “taken very seriously” when he made the allegation to the Conservative party press office in December 2019, days before Khan was elected as Wakefield’s first Tory MP since 1932.

He made a complaint to police days after Khan helped Boris Johnson win a large Commons majority by taking seats including Wakefield in the so-called red wall that had formed Labour’s heartlands in the Midlands and northern England.

Khan tried and failed to ban press reporting of the case, saying his life could be at risk were the case against him made public.

He argued that as an Ahmadi Muslim, the consumption of alcohol and homosexuality are strictly prohibited within his faith, and the reporting of those matters would expose him to “a risk to his safety both here and abroad”.

The court heard that Khan had plied the boy with gin and tonic before dragging him upstairs to watch pornography and groping him in a bunk bed.

Giving evidence, the victim's parents both broke down in tears as they told how their son was left "inconsolable" and "shaking" after the incident at a house in Staffordshire.

Police were called to the house and the boy reported the incident, telling officers Khan had asked him to "show me some porn" and told him he was a "good-looking boy", the jury was told.

The 15-year-old did not want to take it any further and the allegation was not pursued at the time, but the complainant went back to police when he found out Khan was standing as an MP in the 2019 general election.

Days before the poll, the complainant said he contacted the Conservative party press office to tell them what he claimed Khan had done to him.

"I explained this and said: 'He sexually assaulted me when I was a child, when I was 15.'" He said the woman he spoke to sounded "shocked" and passed him on to someone else who sounded more "stern" and asked if he had any "proof".

"I said 'Yes, there's a police report', and she said 'Well ...', and that was it.

"I said 'I'm going to the police', and she said, 'Well, you do that.'"

A Conservative party HQ spokesperson said: "We have found no record of this complaint."

Mary Creagh, the former Labour MP who lost her seat to Khan, told the Guardian she currently had no plans to win the seat back. A Labour party spokesperson said: "Imran Ahmad-Khan should immediately resign so a by-election can take place and the people of Wakefield can get the representation they deserve."

Khan [was suspended from the Conservatives in June 2021](#) after being charged with sexual assault, and has sat as an independent ever since.

Though he had previously denied being gay, he came out during the trial to defend himself against the allegations from the boy, as well as from two other men who gave corroborating evidence.

He claimed he only touched the Catholic teenager's elbow when he "became extremely upset" after a conversation about his confused sexuality.

But the jury did not believe him. As well as hearing from the complainant, evidence was given by the boy's older brother, then 18, who said Khan lifted his kilt, traditionally worn without underwear, at the same party and asked if he was a "true Scotsman".

The jury also heard evidence from a third man, who said he was sexually assaulted in his sleep by Khan in Pakistan after a party where they were smoking marijuana and drinking whisky.

The man, who was then in his early 20s, told a jury Khan offered him a sleeping pill as they shared a room in a guesthouse in Peshawar, a city in the west of Pakistan. Khan was working on a project for the Foreign Office at the time.

The man said he later woke up to find Khan was performing a sex act on him, having pulled down his boxer shorts, adding: "I pushed him off and told him to stop and said something along the lines of, 'What the fuck are you doing?'"

Khan's QC, Gudrun Young, suggested the man's perception was affected by the alcohol, cannabis and sleeping pill and that, despite being heterosexual, he had consented to sexual activity with Khan.

The man firmly rejected the suggestion. He told the court he had reported the incident to the British High Commission and the Foreign Office, but did not want to go to police in Pakistan because of Khan's "powerful connections" in the military and government.

He came forward as a witness after hearing Khan had been charged with sexual assault, the court heard.

If Khan is sentenced to less than a year in jail, he will probably face a recall petition. If 10% of eligible registered voters sign the petition the seat becomes officially “vacant” and a byelection is required. The recalled MP may stand as a candidate.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/11/tory-mp-imran-ahmad-khan-guilty-sexually-assaulting-boy-15>

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[Politics](#)

Imran Ahmad Khan: Tory MP in sexual assault case had oddball reputation

Complainant says they tried to warn Conservative party before Ahmad Khan won election in Wakefield

- [Tory MP Imran Ahmad Khan guilty of sexually assaulting boy, 15](#)



Though friends knew Imran Ahmad Khan was gay, he tried to keep his sexuality a secret. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters

[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Mon 11 Apr 2022 11.50 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 14.56 EDT

Imran Ahmad Khan liked to be noticed. Wandering around Westminster in a pinstripe suit with a cane, he looked and sounded like a Conservative MP from another era, calling colleagues “old boy” and “dear chap”, despite only being in his 40s – “like a tinpot Churchill”, as one of his colleagues puts it.

He was prone to ostentatious displays of wealth, sometimes parking a Rolls-Royce in the parliamentary car park.

In his 2019 victory speech he paid special tribute to his mother, whom he called “ma-mah”, like a member of the royal family. He is close to his family, particularly his brothers Karim and Khaled, both lawyers, the former a prosecutor at the international criminal court in The Hague.

After becoming Wakefield’s first Conservative MP since 1932, Khan, a keen Brexiter, quickly garnered a reputation as an oddball with a questionable grasp on reality. One Conservative MP recalled an early meeting of the 2019 intake in Downing Street, where the new MPs were being briefed on the Brexit negotiations.

“My overriding memory of Imran is him piping up: is there no chance we could threaten to close the straits of Denmark [which connect the Baltic Sea to the North Sea] as a negotiating position? The Spad there wrote it down and made a note to never trust this man with anything ever again,” the MP said.

Khan had an exhibitionist streak, responding to a criticism that he had been “parachuted” into Wakefield as a last-minute candidate for the 2019 general election by [jumping out of a plane and parachuting](#) into the West Yorkshire city for a public appearance.

Though friends knew he was gay, he tried to keep his sexuality a secret. Shortly after his election win he forced a correction from the Conservative LGBT+ group for saying he was the first openly gay Muslim to be elected in the UK.

“We are incorrect to describe him as an ‘out’ LGBT candidate,” [the group wrote](#), explaining that an “application was made in his name to the LGBT+ Conservatives candidates’ fund”, but Ahmad Khan insisted the application had been made in error. He acknowledged only during his trial that he was in fact gay.

Born in Wakefield to a doctor and nurse at the local hospital, he was not the Tories' first choice to contest the seat. He got the call only when the original candidate had to withdraw a month before polling day after journalists dredged up his offensive Facebook history.

Corners may well have been cut in the vetting process as a result. The main complainant in his sexual assault trial testified he had tried to warn the Conservatives about Khan before his election, saying the prospective MP had abused him when he was 15.

The complainant says he was not taken seriously and so went to the police instead. But delays in the investigation meant Khan was able to win his parliamentary seat with a 3,358 majority and serve 18 months before he was eventually charged, prompting his suspension from the Conservative party.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/11/imran-ahmad-khan-tory-mp-in-sexual-assault-case-had-oddball-reputation>

2022.04.12 - Spotlight

- The long read An ocean of noise: how sonic pollution is hurting marine life
- 'A cultural moment' What Bend It Like Beckham meant for UK women's football
- 'I was enjoying a life that was ruining the world' Can therapy treat climate anxiety?
- Paddy Considine 'I feel like an impostor acting – this is what I love'



Illustration: Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

An ocean of noise: how sonic pollution is hurting marine life

Illustration: Guardian Design

Today's oceans are a tumult of engine roar, artificial sonar and seismic blasts that make it impossible for marine creatures to hunt or communicate. We could make it stop, so why don't we?

by [David George Haskell](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 13 Apr 2022 05.47 EDT

We were whaling with cameras, joining a flotilla of a dozen other tourist boats from harbours all around the Salish Sea. It was one of my first trips to the area, in August 2001. The fuzz and beep of ship radios stitched a net over the water, a blurry facsimile of the sonic connections of the whales themselves. Every skipper heard the voices of the others, relayed by

electromagnetic waves. The quarry could not escape. “Whales guaranteed” shouted the billboards on shore.

We motored on, weaving around island headlands. A sighting off the southwest shore of San Juan Island. Through binoculars: a dorsal fin scythed the water, then dipped. Another, with a spray of mist as the animal exhaled. Then, no sign. But the whales’ location was easy to spot. A dozen boats clustered, most slowly motoring west, away from the shore. We powered closer, slowing the engine until we were travelling without raising a wake and took our place on the outer edge of the gaggle of yachts and cruisers.

A sheet of marble skated just under the water’s surface. Oily smooth. A spill of black ink sheeting under the hazed bottle glass of the water’s surface. *Praaf!* Surfacing 15 metres ahead of the boat, the exhalation was plosive and rough.

The pod of about 10 animals came to the surface. Part of the L pod of orcas, our captain said, one of three pods that form the “southern residents” in the waters of the Salish Sea between Seattle and Vancouver, often seen hunting salmon around the San Juan Islands. Others – “transients” that ply coastal waters and “offshores” that feed mostly in the Pacific – also visit regularly. The L pod continued west, heading toward the Haro Strait. Our engines purred as the U-shaped arc of boats tracked the pod, leaving open water ahead of the whales.

We dropped a hydrophone over the boat’s gunwale, its cord feeding a small speaker in a plastic casing. Whale sounds! And engine noise, lots of engine noise. Clicks, like taps on a metal can, came in squalls. These sounds are the whales’ echolocating search beams. The whales use the echoes not only to see through the murky water, but to understand how soft, taut, fast or tremulous matter is around them.

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Mixed with the staccato of the whales’ clicks were whistles and high squeaks, sounds that undulate, dart, inflect up and spiral down. These

whistles are the sounds of whale conviviality, given most often when the animals are socialising at close range. When the pod is more widely spaced during searches for food, the whales whistle less and communicate with bursts of shorter sound pulses. These sonic bonds not only connect the members of each pod, but distinguish the pod from others.

Today, ocean waters are a tumult of engine noise, sonar and seismic blasts. Sediments from human activities on land cloud the water. Industrial chemicals befuddle the sense of smell of aquatic animals. We are severing the sensory links that gave the world its animal diversity. Whales cannot hear the echolocating pulses that locate their prey, breeding fish cannot find one another amid the noise and turbidity, and the social connections among crustaceans are weakened as their chemical messages and sonic thrums are lost in a haze of human pollution.

Here off the coast of San Juan Island, the whales' voices were like fine silk stitched into a thick denim of propeller and motor sound, clicks and whistles sometimes audible but often disappearing into the tight weave of engines. The dozen boats gave off throbs, whirs and shudders as they tracked the whales, combustion engines swaddling the whales in an inescapable, constricting wrap.

In the distance, I could see a container ship and an oil tanker headed north through the Haro Strait, likely bound for Vancouver, the largest port in the region – two of the more than 7,000 large vessels that, combined, make more than 12,000 transits through the strait every year. These range from bulk carriers to container ships to tankers, many of which are 200 or 300 metres long. Large vessels also ply the waters west of the Haro Strait, headed to ports and refineries in and around Seattle and Tacoma. Each one of these vessels makes sound audible underwater from tens, sometimes hundreds, of miles.

Unlike small pleasure boats that are usually moored at sundown, these large vessels make noise all night and day, and are often most active and loudest at night. The largest container ships blast at about 190 underwater decibels or more, the equivalent on land of a thunderclap or the takeoff of a jet.

The southern resident whale community whose life centres on these waters cannot bear the noise. Their population is in decline, likely headed to extinction unless the world gets more hospitable. In the 1990s, the community numbered in the 90s. Now they've dropped to the low 70s, losing one or two more animals every year without raising new calves. In 2005, they were listed under the US Endangered Species Act. No single factor is responsible, but the interaction of shipping sounds, dwindling food supply and chemical pollution is, for now, closing the door on their future.

These whales are the falcons of the ocean, rocketing down 100 metres or more in pursuit of their nimble and speedy prey, the chinook salmon. Sound frequencies of boat noise overlap with the clicks that the animals use to echolocate and find their prey. Noise raises a fog, blinding the hunters. If a whale is within 200 metres of a container ship or 100 metres of a smaller boat with an outboard engine, its echolocation range is reduced by 95%.

In air, we hear only a low groan from passing vessels. The sound is mostly transmitted down, below the waves, and the aerial portion is quickly dissipated. Under the surface, the sonic violence of powered boats travels fast and far through the pulse and heave of water molecules. These movements flow directly into aquatic living beings. Sound in air mostly bounces off terrestrial animals, reflected back by the uncooperative border of air to skin. Our middle-ear bones and eardrum are specifically designed to overcome this barrier, gathering aerial sound and delivering it to the aquatic medium of the inner ear. Sound, for us, is focused mostly on a few organs in our heads. But aquatic animals are immersed in sound. Sound flows almost unimpeded from watery surrounds to watery innards. “Hearing” is a full-body experience.

For most whales, and for many fish and invertebrate animals, eyes are only occasionally useful. In the abyssal depths, the animals swim in ink. Along coasts, the water is so turbid that animals see, at most, a body length ahead. Sound reveals the shapes, energies, boundaries and other inhabitants of the sea. Sound is also a communicative bond. In the ocean, as is true in the rainforest where dense foliage occludes vision, sound connects you to unseen mates, kin and rivals, and it alerts you to nearby prey and predators.

If salmon were abundant, all this noise might not be a problem. But the chinook salmon that compose most of the whales' diet here are in crisis. Dams, urbanisation, agriculture and logging have cut off or degraded most of the freshwater rivers and streams in which the fish spawn and live out their first months. Chinook salmon numbers in this region [have declined](#) by 60% since the 1980s, and possibly more than 90% since the early 20th century. Under current conditions, models forecast, at best, a fragile southern resident population. Any additional stress will send them to extinction.



A humpback whale and her calf. Photograph: lindsay_imagery/Getty

Since 2017, the Port of Vancouver has enacted a [voluntary slowdown](#) of shipping traffic headed through the Haro Strait. For 30 nautical miles, large vessels slow, adding about 20 minutes to the ships' voyages. Ship noise increases with speed, and so dialling back the throttle lessens the cacophony in a place where the southern resident whales often feed. More than 80% of vessels have complied with the project.

Yet traffic increases yearly in the region, more than eliminating the quiet gained by shaving some noise from each passing ship. In 2018, crude oil exports from Vancouver increased dramatically, mostly destined for China and South Korea. In 2019, the Canadian government approved an expansion that would nearly triple the capacity of the pipeline that supplies much of the

oil from the tar sands region of Alberta. Vancouver's port is seeking approval for a vast [new container terminal](#). In 2021, the nonprofit Friends of the San Juans [catalogued](#) more than 20 other proposals to build new or expanded shipping terminals for containers, oil, liquefied gas, grain, potash, cruise ships, coal and car carriers in the region. If approved, these would increase traffic by more than 25%.

Seven hundred kilometres north of Vancouver, the fjords that lead to the port of Kitimat are home to several species of whales living in relatively unpolluted and quiet waters. Under construction there is a liquefied natural gas terminal that is slated to add 700 new large-vessel transits, a more than thirteenfold increase, not counting the powerful tugs that would accompany the tankers as they navigate rocky fjords.

The US navy also plans expanded exercises in the region, including the use of explosives and loud sonar. By its own estimates, across the Pacific northwest coast, navy "acoustic and explosive" exercises, including those in the waters favoured by the southern residents, will kill or injure nearly 3,000 marine mammals and disrupt the feeding, breeding, movements and nursing of 1.75 million more.

The whales in and around the San Juan Islands and the Haro Strait live in a constriction point for much of the trade that passes between Asia and North America, supplemented with some shipping from the Middle East and Europe. The vast majority of the consumer goods and bulk commodities that move between the continents do so on ships. I look around at my material possessions. Whales, either in the Haro Strait or perhaps off the coast of Los Angeles, heard the arrival of every item made in a country on the Pacific rim: laptop, silverware, watering can, furniture and car.

Whales living along the Atlantic coast were immersed in the sounds of deliveries from Europe and north Africa: office chairs, books, wine and olive oil. Having lived most of my life inland, many hours' drive from the sea, I have seldom seen or heard whales. But the whales hear me. They are immersed in the sounds of my purchases from over the horizon every day of their lives.

The converging shipping lanes around major seaports are focal points for a noise problem that extends across the oceans. In the 1950s, about 30,000 merchant vessels plied the world's oceans. Now [about 100,000 do](#), many of them with much larger engines. Tonnage of cargo has increased tenfold.

Ambient noise on the Pacific coast of North America has increased by about 10 decibels since the 1960s, when the measurements started. By some estimates, noise levels in the world's oceans have doubled every decade since the mid-20th century. The noise is worse around the major shipping lanes that connect major ports across the northern Pacific and Atlantic, for example, but because sound propagates readily in water, the rumble reaches for hundreds of kilometres. When a large ocean-bound ship crosses the continental shelf, its sound shoots to the deep ocean floor, several miles down, then bounces up off the sediment and into the deep sound channel. This channel carries the noise thousands of miles. Across much of the world, it is now impossible to measure the background levels of ocean sound without engine traffic.



An orca. Photograph: sethakan/Getty Images

Near to shore, small-boat traffic adds another, higher-pitched, layer of sound, as I discovered on the deck of the whale-watching boat. The number of recreational boats in the US has increased by 1% a year for the past three

decades. In coastal Australia, the annual rate of increase in the number of small boats has recently reached up to 3%. The sound from these smaller vessels does not travel as far, but for many animals living in coastal waters it is the dominant sound source. At close range, sonar – sounds emitted from shipboard devices to detect the sea floor, schools of fish and enemy submarines – can add to these higher-pitched noises.

Into this global mire of noise comes the loudest human noise of all – the percussive beat of our industrialised search for energy. Prospectors blast sound into the ocean, seeking oil and gas buried under ocean sediments. Ships drag arrays of air guns that shoot bubbles of pressurised air into the water, a replacement for the dynamite that was formerly tossed overboard for the same purpose. As the bubbles expand and collapse, they punch sound waves into the water. These waves spread in all directions. Those that go down penetrate the sea floor, then bounce back when they hit reflective surfaces. By measuring these reflections from the ship, geologists can build a 3D image of the varied layers of mud, sand, rock and oil tens or even hundreds of miles under the seabed. Like a whale guided by the reflective ping of a chinook salmon, oil and gas companies use sound to find their quarry. But unlike the click of a whale, these seismic surveys can be heard up to 2,500 miles away.

The blast of an air gun emerges from a metre-long, missile-shaped canister towed behind the survey ship. The sound can be as loud as 260 underwater decibels, six to seven orders of magnitude more intense than the loudest ship. The guns are typically deployed in arrays of up to four dozen. These batteries go off about once every 10 to 20 seconds. The ship tracks methodically back and forth through the ocean, like a lawnmower, in surveys that can run continuously for months, covering tens of thousands of square miles. In some years in the North Atlantic, dozens of surveys run at once, and a single hydrophone can pick up the relentless sound of seismic surveys off the coasts of Brazil, the US, Canada, northern Europe and the west coast of Africa.

Stand on an ocean shore, and you will not hear the sound of seismic surveys. Take a ship into deep water and, even there, water's reflective boundary and our air-adapted ears shield us. Analogy fails, too. A pile-driver in your house, running without stop for months? That gives an approximation of the

loudness and relentlessness, but we can walk away from the house, and even when we stand next to the machine, the assault mostly affects only our ears. For aquatic creatures, sound is sight, touch, proprioception and hearing. They cannot leave the water. Few can swim the hundreds of miles necessary to escape. The pile-driver is coupled, minute by minute, to every nerve ending and cell, suffusing them with the violence of explosions.

Ocean creatures, especially near to shore or along busy trade routes, now live in a din previously unknown except near underwater volcanoes or during an earthquake. Wind-stirred waves, breaking ice, earthquakes, the motion of bubbles in water columns, and the sounds of whales and snapping shrimp are the sounds to which marine life is adapted. But the blast of air guns, the needling and stab of sonar, and the throb of engines are new and, in most places, far louder than just a few decades ago.

The noise in the ocean today is infernal, but unlike chemical pollution that lingers sometimes for centuries, or plastics that will persist for millennia, sound pollution can be shut off in an instant. Silence from humans is unlikely, since the energy and materials that supply our bodies and economies move largely by ship. Most of our oil, gas and food travels among continents by sea. There is little chance, therefore, that the noise will cease entirely. But quieter oceans are within reach.

It is possible to build almost silent ships. Navies have been doing so for decades. Fisheries researchers seeking to measure fish abundance and behaviours do so from vessels with engines, gears and propellers engineered to reduce noise and thus not alarm fish. The hush from these ships comes at the cost of efficiency and speed. Yet even for large commercial vessels, noise can be greatly reduced through careful design. Regular propeller repair and polishing reduce the formation of cavitation bubbles that are the main source of noise.

Slowing the vessel, even by 10% or 20%, also cuts noise, sometimes by up to half. Many of these changes save fuel, giving a direct benefit to the ship operators, although not always enough to offset the costs of expensive reengineering. More than half of the noise in the oceans comes from a minority – between one-10th and one-sixth – of the vessels, often older and

less efficient craft. Quieting this clamorous minority could significantly reduce noise.

But volume of traffic needs to be reduced: quieter ships might lead to more ship collisions if whales cannot hear approaching danger. For millions of years whales have safely travelled and rested at the water's surface. Now blows from hulls and slashes from propellers are significant risks for whales in ocean shipping lanes and around busy ports.

The most harmful effects of sonar can also be reduced, at least for large marine mammals, by locating navy exercises away from known feeding and calving grounds, tracking whales and shutting down war games when they are close, gradually ramping up sound levels so that animals have time to escape, and reducing longterm exposure by not repeatedly subjecting the same animals to high-amplitude sonar. As with shipping noise, reducing the overall number of ships conducting exercises would have the most significant effect.

Even seismic surveys can be hushed. Machines that send low-frequency vibrations down into the water column yield excellent maps of buried geology while making less noise than air guns. This "[vibroseis](#)" technology is regularly used on land but has yet to be widely adopted in the ocean. Marine vibroseis produces sounds that overlap with animal senses and communicative signals, but does so over smaller areas and in a narrower frequency range.

For now, these changes are mostly experimental, hypothetical or enacted in small corners of the oceans. Regulation of marine noise happens piecemeal by country, with no binding international standards or goals. The noise in the oceans continues to worsen. A [2016 estimate](#) of global shipping noise projected a near doubling by 2030. A review in 2013 found that expenditures on seismic surveys were increasing at nearly 20% a year, more than \$10bn annually, capping two decades of rapid growth. The Covid-19 pandemic briefly slowed this rise, but demand for more surveys will probably surge as oil prices rise. The US military plans to start broadcasting continuous noise into all ocean basins to guide underwater vehicles.

We possess the technology and economic mechanisms needed to reduce our noise. But we lack sensory and imaginative connection to the problem, and thus the will to act. Today a single whale can sometimes be heard from across an entire ocean basin. Imagine millions of these animals giving voice. When some of the whales alive today were young, every water molecule in the oceans continually thrummed with the sound of whales. Vociferous fish formerly sang by the billions on their breeding grounds and added their sounds to the whales' calls. The ocean world pulsed, shimmered and seethed with song. These sounds connected animals into fruitful and creative networks. Given a chance, this could return.

This article was amended on 13 April 2022. The report by Friends of the San Juans (not San Juan) was published in 2021, not 2019.

This is an edited extract from Sounds Wild and Broken: Sonic Marvels, Evolution's Creativity and the Crisis of Sensory Extinction, published by Faber on 21 April and available at guardianbookshop.co.uk

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Women's football

‘A cultural moment’: what Bend It Like Beckham meant for UK women’s football

Twenty years later and on verge of hosting Euros, south Asian players celebrate film and what it meant for the sport



Yasmin Hussain is the coach of Frenford & MSA in east London.
Photograph: Annabel Staff/supplied

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When Yasmin Hussain was a child growing up in Manchester in the 1990s, she was football mad. At first she played the sport with boys, but when she turned 13 her parents told her she needed to find a women’s team to continue. The problem was, there wasn’t one.

At that time, women's football was a niche sport rarely depicted on screen. When Bend It Like Beckham came out in 2002 – telling the story of Jesminder and her battle to play football against the wishes of her parents – Hussain was left thinking: "She's lucky, she had a team to join. I didn't have one."

Twenty years later, fans are celebrating the anniversary of the groundbreaking film on Tuesday and looking forward to the biggest ever year for women's football in the UK as England host the Euros this summer.

Sign up for our weekly women's football newsletter, Moving the Goalposts.

When Bend It Like Beckham came out, women's football was not a professional sport and rarely appeared on television. This year, tickets for the final at Wembley sold out within an hour.

But the film ignited an early spark for many women, and especially British Asians, who saw their own experiences of wanting to play the game but struggling to find a way to reflected for the first time.



Parminder Nagra and Keira Knightley in Bend It Like Beckham.
Photograph: Bskyb/Allstar

The landscape has since changed dramatically. In 2020, the Football Association reported that 3.4 million girls and women [now play football](#), and a 54% increase in affiliated women's and girls' teams since 2017. Football is now the most popular sport among women and girls in the UK.

These figures are partly due to the FA's aggressive "gameplan for growth", which includes the "let girls play" campaign aimed at encouraging all schools to offer women's football on the curriculum.

Hussain's experience mirrors the trajectory of women's football: after giving up the game, she trained as a coach five years ago, aged 33, reluctant to abandon "the only thing that gives me joy".

She now coaches Frenford & MSA, a recently setup team of 80 female players, many of whom are of south Asian heritage and have gone from worrying that "nobody else looked like us" to feeling "part of the family" in their grassroots league in east London.



Parminder Nagra as Jess Bhamra. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy

Role models and representation are an important theme of the film, and are the focus of a new documentary from BBC Sport to mark its anniversary. It is a passion project for the journalist Miriam Walker-Khan, who examines the legacy of the film for a generation of female athletes.

“I’d never seen a film about a young British south Asian woman, let alone one who did sport. It meant so much to me in so many ways because it was representation I’ve never seen before or since. It’s more of a cultural moment than a film for me,” she said.

Although considerable progress has been made in women’s sport since the film came out, Walker-Khan said stigma and stereotypes still hold back many south Asians, who are underrepresented in the Women’s Super League. There are misconceptions that traditional religious or family values stand in their way or that Asians “aren’t good at sport because they eat curry, they’re too weak or too small”, she said.

Visibility has been a key driver of the sport’s rapid growth in popularity in recent years, said Stacey Pope, an associate professor of sport at Durham University. This started in 2011, with the creation of the professional Women’s Super League, and reached a turning point in 2015 when the Women’s World Cup garnered widespread, serious media coverage for the first time.

This created role models and inspiration for women, and helped shed the sport’s image as a “bastion of masculinity”, which had been reinforced by a ban on women’s football that lasted until 1971, she added.



When Bend It Like Beckham came out, women's football was not a professional sport. Photograph: RONALD GRANT

Sophie Downey, who runs Girls On the Ball, which has promoted women's football since 2012, said that, as well as the professionalisation of the game, the biggest changes in recent years have been at grassroots level.

"It's about young girls having the knowledge they can play for fun and join in, and that access just wasn't there 20 years ago," she said.

"I think we're at the tip of the iceberg, we've got the Euros this summer and that will be the biggest moment in history for the sport in this country. There's a lot of room for it to grow but it's looking really positive at the moment."

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[Climate crisis](#)

‘I was enjoying a life that was ruining the world’: can therapy treat climate anxiety?



‘Until a few years ago, I felt invincible’ ... Pete Knapp. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

People are increasingly looking for help to deal with feelings of fear, helplessness and guilt amid the climate crisis. But can therapists make a difference and is seeking treatment just a form of denial?

Moya Sarner

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Pete Knapp, 36, who lives in London, has visited North Korea, travelled overland from Kenya to Cape Town, motorcycled through Japan and Cambodia and trekked by horse through China. Until a few years ago, “I felt invincible,” he says. He had never experienced anxiety, or worried about the climate crisis.

Then, in 2019, he went to Borneo. “I remember flying in one of those small planes over a part of Borneo that used to be rainforest but is now a palm oil plantation. The whole landscape was this monoculture,” he says. He spent days trying to find orangutans in the wild, and, when he finally found the primary rainforest that remained, he saw “such depth, character, colour and variety” that he felt horrified by the “quiet, dead, grey, nothingness” replacing it. “It hammered home how our lifestyles and diets had caused so much destruction to this part of the world that is so precious. When you go to a supermarket and buy food, you don’t see the cost of it. That was the first time I saw the cost.” It marked the end of his travels and feeling of invincibility, and the beginning of what he now calls climate anxiety.

When you go to a supermarket and buy food, you don’t see the cost of it

Pete Knapp

This emotional state includes feelings as varied as fear and helplessness, guilt, shame, loss, betrayal and abandonment, and it can take different shapes in each individual. [Anouchka Grose](#), a psychoanalyst and the author of A Guide to Eco-Anxiety, How to Protect the Planet and Your Mental Health, says some patients describe staying awake all night thinking of coral reefs, bush fires and ice caps melting. Some might “walk into a shop and freak out because they suddenly see it as it is,” how “all the things in front of

you are in damaging forms of packaging, freighted from goodness knows where, covered in pesticides". In her book, someone describes looking at a friend's take-away coffee: "It makes me sad and alarmed, imagining millions of people out there, just like him, with one throwaway plastic cup, millions of times over every day."

For Knapp, it was the feeling of having "the rug pulled from under my feet; that I was enjoying a life that was ruining the world". For Natasha James, 33, a training manager in Portsmouth, it was reading article after article in a paralysing spiral: "It would get to the stage where I would freeze." Their climate anxiety began at 12, when their science teacher spoke about the hole in the ozone layer and global heating. "I remember my stomach dropped, and I thought, 'Oh, my God! I've never heard about this before; why are people not talking about it? Why are we not doing anything about it?'".

Molecular biologist Abi Perrin, 32, describes the physical sensations she experienced after reading the 2018 report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): "My heart was pounding. My chest felt tight every time I thought about it – and I couldn't not think about it. I'd often burst into tears because it felt overwhelming. It's like a pit in your stomach – you feel weirdly empty. It's not always the same, but it sometimes takes the form of feeling very sad, hopeless and alone."

The biggest ever scientific study on climate anxiety and young people, [published last year in the Lancet](#), found that nearly six in 10 people aged 16 to 25 were very or extremely worried about climate breakdown, nearly half of them reported climate distress or anxiety affecting their daily lives, and three-quarters agreed that "the future is frightening". All the therapists I spoke to reported seeing a significant increase in climate anxiety in their consulting rooms. So, can therapy help?



‘You feel weirdly empty’ ... Abi Perrin. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

There is a danger, in suggesting that therapy might help, of pathologising climate anxiety; turning it into a mental health problem that needs to be cured – medicated or spirited away with mindfulness or talking therapy . Many people I interviewed were faced with such reactions from friends, family, colleagues, GPs, and, occasionally, even therapists.

This is not how the author of Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis [Sally Weintrobe](#) thinks. “It is important to say that anxiety is a signal that there is something wrong. It’s a perfectly normal healthy reaction to a worrying situation. We mustn’t pathologise climate anxiety. Obviously it can get very extreme – but I would say that government inaction on the climate crisis is pretty extreme, so it’s hardly surprising that people are very worried.” What Knapp, James and Perrin said helped them most was having their emotions validated in therapy – and understanding that their feelings were meaningful and valuable.

My chest felt tight every time I thought about it. I’d burst into tears because it felt so overwhelming

Abi Perrin

[Caroline Hickman](#), a psychotherapist, climate psychology researcher and board member of the [Climate Psychology Alliance](#), says, “I would worry about people who aren’t distressed – given that this is what is happening, how come?” She believes that people are using psychological defences such as denial “as a way of coping and reducing the fear that they feel”. This can leave the climate-anxious with a sense of isolation, frustration and abandonment, as others tell themselves, “Oh, well, the government will save us; technology will save us; if it was that bad, somebody would have done something,” she says. “Those are all rationalisations against existential terror of annihilation – and that’s the reality of what we’re potentially looking at.”

To face this reality is to come out of what Weintrobe calls “the climate bubble”, which, she says, “has been supported by a culture of uncare, a culture that actively seeks to keep us in a state of denial about the severity of the climate crisis”. She explains: “The bubble protects you from reality, and when you start seeing the reality, it’s hardly surprising that you’re going to experience a whole series of shocks.” She prefers the term climate trauma over anxiety because “it is traumatising to see that you are caught up in a way of living, whether you like it or not, that makes you a victim and a perpetrator of damaging the Earth, which is what keeps us all alive”. We are living, she says, “in a political system that generates a mental health crisis, because it places burdens on people that are too much to bear, as well as burdens on the Earth”.

The thing about trauma is that it can reignite earlier, individual trauma. That experience of coming out of the climate bubble and having your worries dismissed, of realising that you have been abandoned by people who were supposed to look after you, can be particularly triggering. For Weintrobe, this is where therapy can have a role to play, “in helping people to disentangle what is personal to them and their own individual histories, from what is hitting them from the outside”.



‘It would get to the stage where I would freeze’ ... Natasha James.
Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Perrin describes how speaking to her therapist helped in ways she didn’t expect. She says: “Having that space to have those conversations and be honest about how I felt was really valuable. I went into it thinking I wanted practical advice about how to solve this, but that was not what I got and not what I needed. It helped me to understand that what I was feeling was not wrong.” It also helped her to get a better sense of her anxiety: “I think it might come from feeling lots of things and not actually understanding what they are.” She still experiences anxiety, but it doesn’t escalate in the way it did before. “I know that it’s rooted in something real, and that even if the situation doesn’t change, the intensity of that feeling can, and will, pass.”

As a climate-anxious pupil at school, James was told that this feeling was “irrational” by the therapist they saw at the time. It was while reading article after article late at night that James landed on one about climate anxiety, and recognised their own experience. They decided to try treatment again, and contacted [Patrick Kennedy-Williams](#). First, they say, he told them their fears were valid and rational. Then they discussed how to get a better balance of climate news by also reading positive stories about people who are taking action, as well as limiting internet access on their phone.

Can we make it normal that we are very disturbed and bothered by what is going on, and help each other?

Sally Weintrobe

This brings to mind how, in her climate-aware therapeutic work, Hickman draws on her experience, in the 1990s, of treating young people, who were HIV positive, with about a year to live. A significant number were, through therapy, “able to change their relationship with their diagnosis and not just live in fear of death, but learn to live their lives wholeheartedly, with death as part of it,” she says. They left relationships that were unsatisfactory, left jobs that they hated, and “they learned to live their lives fully and with meaning, not in denial that their lives might be shorter, but that that didn’t have to define their lives – it was just part of it”.

It is perhaps surprising to hear Weintrobe – a psychoanalyst – say that while there is a role for therapy in addressing climate anxiety, it is limited. We need to normalise this distress, she says, but not by pretending it’s not there, or shouldn’t be. “It’s very perverse that normalising has come to mean getting rid of anything that’s disturbing. Can we make it normal that we are very disturbed and bothered by what is going on, and help each other?” She recommends meeting to talk in groups about climate anxiety, such as at the climate cafes run by the [Climate Psychology Alliance](#). Hickman runs psycho-educational groups with youth activists to address the impact of the climate crisis on mental health, where they discuss ways to support themselves and each other.



Biodiversity is important because the more complex an ecosystem is, the more stable it is ... Elouise Mayall. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Elouise Mayall, 24, and living in Canterbury, is a master's student in ecology and a climate activist with the UK Youth Climate Coalition who has taken part in Hickman's groups and workshops. Her climate anxiety began when she left university and realised how unconcerned others were – what she calls leaving the “green bubble”. In her 20s, she felt intense pressure, guilt, shame and anxiety to produce less and do everything to make up for what others were not doing. After joining UKYCC, her anxiety started to improve, through being part of a community. She says that Hickman's workshops have helped her and her colleagues to recognise “the emotional strain” of the work they do, and to learn to rest. They are now far more “mindful of each other's mental health”, and people don't feel guilty when they need a break, so are less likely to “crash and burnout”.

Mayall has also developed a different relationship with her climate anxiety. Previously, she says, “I was very dismissive and grumpy about having it. I wanted to suppress it or get rid of it – I thought it was an indulgence because people are dying, so why was I fussing around with feelings?” She felt she should be happy all the time. Now, she recognises that “it isn't bad, wrong, or inconvenient for me to have climate anxiety, because it ultimately means that I care about the climate crisis”. She uses an ecological metaphor to

describe how she relates to her feelings now: “Biodiversity is important because the more complex an ecosystem is, the more stable it is, and the more resilient it is to any disturbances or damage that comes along”. A monoculture, such as the one Knapp saw from that plane in Borneo, makes for a very fragile ecosystem; the same is true of an emotional monoculture. Allowing herself to experience whatever emotions she is feeling, including guilt and shame, has brought her a kind of emotional biodiversity, and a more sustainable way of life.

It isn’t bad, wrong, or inconvenient for me to have climate anxiety – it ultimately means that I care

Elouise Mayall

Since starting therapy James has attended a climate cafe, signed up to workshops, written to their local MP and published articles online to spread awareness.

Perrin says therapy has helped her support herself and other activists. She is now researching microscopic algae, and their potential to help us live more sustainably.

After what he saw in Borneo, and his research into the apocalyptic impact of climate breakdown, Knapp’s view of the world and of his future collapsed. He felt betrayed by the government, and despairing of the inaction of those around him. He became increasingly isolated and, for a time, suicidal. He found a way out of this by joining [Extinction Rebellion](#), where friends recommended a therapist. He has since changed his life, becoming a researcher in air quality and a climate activist, giving up his beloved Mini, going vegan and making [a podcast with fellow activists](#) about how they cope with climate anxiety and what inspires them . He hasn’t been on a plane since.

These stories recall a comment from Grose, that the word “anxious” has two definitions: one can feel anxious due to a nebulous fear, or one can be anxious to do something – to be willing to act, with urgency.

As I researched this article, I noticed an intensifying feeling of unease and tension. Last week, the [IPCC reported that it is “now or never”](#) if we are to stave off climate disaster, and the UN secretary general, [António Guterres](#), warned: “Some government and business leaders are saying one thing – but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. And the results will be catastrophic.” I know I need to read the report, to see the scientific reality of where we are, but I am not, yet, able to. I am frightened to leave the climate bubble. I tell Weintrobe about my anxious feelings, and she says reporters often phone her and say, “I feel overwhelmed, being a climate journalist.” I find her next words strangely hopeful. “I feel overwhelmed, too. Sometimes, I find myself lying on the sofa, unable to move because it’s all so worrying. But you get out of it, and you carry on.”

- *In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](#). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.*
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Interview

Paddy Considine: ‘I feel like an impostor acting – this is what I love’

[Emine Saner](#)



Fret not ... Paddy Considine. Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

He's an acclaimed actor and director, but Paddy Considine's first and enduring passion is music – and on his band's new album he's confronting the ghosts of his childhood



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Were you to pass a small house on an estate in Burton upon Trent some time in the early 80s, you may have seen a young boy standing at the top right-hand window, singing and dancing with all he had. “I’d put Adam and the Ants on a record player,” remembers [Paddy Considine](#), “and perform Stand and Deliver.” Occasionally, someone passing would look up and acknowledge him. “That’s all I wanted. Some sort of validation. I wanted to be seen.” Considine smiles. “I wasn’t a showoff – it sounds contradictory, but I just wanted to be seen, you know.” Years later, he would become an acclaimed actor, but music is where it all started.

Considine’s band, Riding the Low, are about to release their third album. Even some 16 years and numerous pub gigs in, Considine is still wary of it being perceived as the vanity project of an actor known for indie greats such as Dead Man’s Shoes, a few Hollywood films, the lead in the TV drama [The Suspicions of Mr Whicher](#), and the show that should surpass them all, in terms of mainstream attention, the forthcoming Game of Thrones prequel,

House of the Dragon. “I knew that there’d be a sort of cynicism around it.” But he doesn’t care, and he doesn’t need anyone’s permission, he says. “I’m doing it because I love it.”

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It has become, he says, more vital to his happiness than his acting career, which is something, he says, “that I almost fell into. I’m never fully comfortable with acting, I’ve never fully embraced the fact that I’m an actor. I still feel like an impostor.” One of his challenges, he says, is that he’s interpreting someone else’s work. “I’m always second-guessing myself: is this OK? Am I doing a good job?” But his songs – he writes the lyrics and some melodies – are his. “They’re unfiltered, they go through me.”

Considine didn’t intend to become a songwriter, and didn’t even know he could do it until his wife bought him a guitar one Christmas in his late 20s. He wrote a song that morning. “And I didn’t stop,” he says. “I don’t know where that came from, but I could just do it, so I carried on doing it.” Later, when he hooked up with some childhood friends – now musicians – with the idea of recording some of these songs, “I was blown away. It was so exciting hearing something you’ve written come to life like that.”



Paddy Considine with Riding the Low performing at Coventry Cathedral ruins in 2021. Photograph: Katja Ogrin/Alamy

We meet in a guitar showroom in central London, and Considine – black denim, stubble, glimpses of tattoos, sunglasses – looks the part, but his manner is far from rock star swagger. He is about the most unstarry actor I have ever met: unguarded, quick to laugh, and with a gentleness to him. But then he wouldn't necessarily call himself an actor. He knows he didn't always come across like this – in old interviews he could be prickly, and didn't try to distance himself from the intense and often violent roles he played. On one of his songs from the new album, *Carapace of Glass*, he sings: "I'm so many different people, but I don't recognise that guy at all." It was inspired by his own experience, he says, of creating a persona, "that I'm some kind of tough guy, and it's not true, really. The root of all that is just fear."

In his 30s, he was diagnosed with what was then called Asperger syndrome (now part of autism spectrum disorder), which helped him make sense of some of the difficulties he'd had since childhood: misinterpreting things, and feeling detached from other people. "This don't-fuck-with-me exterior was my way of keeping people away from me. And it sort of worked." He woke up one day with the song in his head, and wrote it down quickly. "It's

dealing with that masking, being all these different characters, and I'm in the middle of it going, 'Who am I?'"

It is a particularly personal album, dealing with Considine's childhood in the Winshill area of Burton. He still lives in the town with his wife, whom he has been with since he was 18 (they have three children, all of whom he has encouraged, creatively, and especially in music). "There are a lot of ghosts on the record," he says, smiling. Not just long-gone family, and the local legends that loomed large in childhood – people you realise, as an adult, "were messed up, but we looked at them like they were heroes" – but the places, too.

He is the second youngest of six children, "a working-class kid", he says, "but my parents didn't even work". His father was volatile and could be violent, not at home, but had a reputation on their estate as someone with a short fuse – he once threw a wheelie bin through the window of the benefits office and would get into fights in pubs.



Olivia Colman and Peter Mullan in Paddy Considine's 2011 film *Tyrannosaur*. Photograph: Optimum/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Considine made his Bafta-winning short film [Dog Altogether](#), which he developed into the 2011 feature film [Tyrannosaur](#) that he wrote and directed,

as a way of exploring his father's anger. The album's title track, The Death of Gobshite Rambo, was written about the day his father died (Gobshite Rambo is the name Considine gave to the darker part of his own psyche, though it might just have easily described his dad, who died in 2006). "He was lying in the bed getting more translucent. Everyone's having a cup of tea and a fucking chat. I looked at my family and I [realised] we're all just trying to cope with this, everyone going through their own private emotions. It was a complex relationship we all had with our father, so everybody was dealing with that in a very different way." Considine's way, with all the self-protection of detachment, was to wonder how he would shoot the scene if he were making a film.

As teenagers, Considine and his friend Richard Eaton – now the guitarist in Riding the Low – formed a group with another friend, Nick Hemming, who is now in the band the Leisure Society. Considine had a go on another friend's drum kit and, just like that, became a drummer. At college, where he took a drama course, he met Shane Meadows – who would go on to become a director and screenwriter and cast Considine in his first roles – and they had a band for a while. When he went to university, to study photography, he joined a Britpop-era band, who had a bit of success supporting better known indie groups.



Paddy Considine on stage with Riding the Low in Coventry in 2021.
Photograph: David M Bennett/Dave Bennett/Getty Images for Coventry UK
City of Culture

Considine left when the band were becoming more serious and he didn't think his drumming was up to it. Anyway, he didn't really think of music as a career, and at that point he wanted to explore photography (newspapers such as this one and the Independent had started running his photo essays). He was happy pursuing that when Meadows offered him a role in the film he was making, [A Room for Romeo Brass](#). "Then I had to sort of learn how to act. Acting was fine until it became my living, and I'm going: 'I don't really know what to do, I don't really have the tools to do this.'" In certain films, he says, "lightning would strike, but I still didn't really understand it as a craft. It's always something that I'm learning more about, the more I do it." He smiles and says: "I think there's still time for me to become a good actor." It was only fairly recently, he says – when he was in the 2017 play [The Ferryman](#) – that he started to get it. (I saw it; he was electrifying, with no hint of the inner turmoil he'd felt for much of the run.) "All this pressure that I'm putting on myself to perform. I went: 'All you've got to do is tell the story.' And a massive weight lifted."

Considine loves directing but was bruised by the experience of his 2017 film, [Journeyman](#), about a boxer who suffers a head injury. Despite the success of Tyrannosaur, which starred Olivia Colman and Peter Mullan and picked up several prizes at Sundance, and despite positive reviews, he found it hard to find festivals to show Journeyman. "I'm not sure if the things I want to do will find a place any more," he says. "I didn't expect a free pass, but I thought there'd be some slight interest, and there was none. I just went: 'You know what? I haven't got time to do this shit with my life.'"

Music was somewhere he could express himself, make sense of his life and thoughts, with immediacy. "I found that in other parts of my life, I was fearful, especially around things like acting." It wasn't the same with writing music, or playing a gig. "And I had a little gang with me, I felt like I belonged to something. That was something I think I was looking for as well, that I could say: 'These are my people.'"

Considine doesn't have any expectations, or concern, about where it goes – "I wouldn't call it a career," he says, though the next album is already written and they're booked for a 2am slot at Glastonbury – in the same way he didn't have a particular plan for photography or acting or directing. But he does like to look back. A few times a year, he will drive around his old estate. "I'll pull up outside my house and think about ... all the things that went on under that roof – all the heartache and all the laughter, everything that made it what it was." The memory of the boy in the upstairs window, sometimes struggling to connect, but finding joy and escape in music.

Riding the Low's album *The Death of Gobshite Rambo* is out now.

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Herd immunity now seems impossible. Welcome to the age of Covid reinfection

[**Devi Sridhar**](#)



The virus is now embedded in our world. But there are steps we can take to keep it at bay while we continue to live our lives



A woman holds a negative Covid test at the Faraday Community Centre, Bedford, in May 2021. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Tue 12 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 14.33 EDT

What do I wish I had known in early 2020? Other than to buy shares in toilet paper, Zoom and vaccine companies, I wish I had known that a safe and effective vaccine against severe disease and death from Covid-19 would arrive within a year – and that reinfection would nevertheless become a major issue in managing the disease. These two facts would have shifted the UK government’s response, and allowed for a more unified scientific front in advising them.

At the very beginning of the pandemic, several governments – [including in Sweden, Netherlands and the UK](#) – believed the best path through this crisis was to allow a controlled spread of infections through the population, especially the young and healthy, in order to reach some static state against the virus. The idea was that “the herd” who got infected would protect a more vulnerable minority.

This concept came from our approach to other vaccines, in which we inoculate the majority of children against, for example, measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) in order to protect those who cannot be vaccinated due to

health conditions. If Sars-CoV-2 only infected people once, or vaccinated people couldn't catch Covid (ie if infection or vaccination resulted in lifelong immunity) then herd immunity would be possible. By now, we would have eliminated Covid completely in the richer world where seroprevalence – estimates of antibody levels – are more than 90%, and in Britain as high as 98%.

However, this is far from the position we're in. The [rising number of documented reinfections](#), sometimes occurring relatively quickly after the initial infection, as well as the high number of infections with the Omicron variant [among the fully vaccinated](#), means that herd immunity is [likely impossible](#) – even if seroprevalence hits 100%. Relying on herd immunity to manage Covid-19 rather than on the strategies of east Asian countries to suppress it until a vaccine was available [was a gamble that Britain took early](#) in March and unfortunately lost. Especially given the presence of variants, Sars-CoV-2 will just keep circulating and reinfecting people.

It's not all bad news, though. Vaccines have largely blunted the virus's ability to kill, and its destructive impact on health services. However, the problem we face has shifted from mass mortality to a question of how to keep essential services and workplaces running. Covid-19 is not yet mild enough to be treated like the common cold because it makes people so ill that they cannot work. This has created widespread disruption for airlines, border control, supermarkets, schools, hospitals, police forces and even [Apple stores](#). And it's worth pointing out that while Omicron is milder than Delta, it is still hospitalising and killing people, especially those who are unvaccinated, the clinically vulnerable (including some for whom vaccines are ineffective), and elderly people. [Waning immunity is also an ongoing concern](#), as is making sure boosters are provided at the right time.

So governments are in a tricky situation. It's clear that it's better that no one is infected with this virus. Increasing evidence has been produced that shows the [negative impact Covid-19 infection has](#) on the lungs, heart and brain or even the development of diabetes. Long Covid prevalence estimates are [eye-wateringly high](#).

On the flipside, how does one avoid infection while also wanting to be part of society and mix with others? Humans are social creatures who enjoy

being around other people and participating in group activities – whether dancing in nightclubs or singing in church. Asking people to restrict this for a certain period of time made sense in order to allow vaccines to be rolled out, and for clinicians to develop better protocols for treatment and understand the disease better. But now we face a variant in Omicron that is incredibly transmissible to the point that even South Korea has abandoned test and trace, and China is struggling with incredibly strict lockdowns to bring cases down. Where does this leave us?

As a group of fellow scientists and I suggest in a new paper for Nature Medicine (REF), several steps can help manage this seemingly intractable situation.

First, governments must use the triad of testing, therapeutics (in particular, rapid antiviral pills) and vaccines to manage Covid-19 and replace the cruder non-pharmaceutical interventions of 2020 with scientific progress. Testing is particularly important given lateral flow tests are excellent at quickly detecting infectious individuals and preventing outbreaks in workplaces. The end of free testing is a major concern in managing this disease and avoiding future lockdowns. It is better for one person to be off work isolating than be forced into work where they infect dozens of others, leading to staff shortages and preventable illness. Meanwhile, vaccines must be rolled out to all parts of the world to reach the 70% target across all countries. This will have a substantial effect in reducing the disability and deaths that Covid-19 waves cause.

Second, rapid response plans must be prepared in order to react to a gamechanging new variant which could alter the trajectory of the pandemic, just as Alpha, Delta and Omicron did. This is now scientists' main fear, and as we've seen, governments may only have days to pull together data and respond.

Third, rapid testing to detect infectiousness and one-way masking should continue to be used to protect those most at risk of infection (healthcare workers and social care workers), as well as those most at risk of severe health outcomes (people in care homes and in vulnerable groups).

Finally, long Covid hasn't received the attention it deserves. An increasing number of people who are unable to return to work, or suffering from chronic illness, will be a major burden on healthcare services as well as the economy; and of course there is the core issue of the loss of a healthy and active life in terms of daily happiness and living free of suffering. Developing treatments for this condition is imperative given that avoiding Covid-19 infection is increasingly difficult. We must support those suffering and find ways of reducing their pain.

Just as avoiding Covid-19 infection must be balanced against the importance of socialising, our response to the pandemic shouldn't overshadow other major health issues on the horizon. These include the cost of living crisis; the number of children going hungry and living in cold, damp conditions and in poverty; the rise in child obesity and physical inactivity which has an impact on the development of chronic health issues; the mental health toll the pandemic has taken on adolescents in particular; the educational recovery needed after widespread school closures; and finally addressing the burnout of healthcare workers in the NHS. Entering the age of reinfection means Covid has truly embedded itself in our world, and it must be viewed as part of the wider picture of human wellbeing and public health.

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh
- Join Devi Sridhar for a Guardian Live online event on Monday 25 April. She will talk to Nicola Davis about Covid-19 and the lessons we can learn from our handling of the pandemic. Book [here](#)

OpinionLabour

Labour has shelves of winning policies. Now the party must get people to listen

Polly Toynbee



As Johnson's cabinet flounders, Starmer's team has some brilliant ideas to improve this country. But voters also want a clear vision



Keir Starmer at Bridgend college during the launch of the Welsh Labour local government campaign, 5 April. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

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Ripe plums fall into Labour's lap. Without the opposition lifting a finger, each day brings another revelation that tells wavering voters all they need to know about what these bumptious ministers think of the little people for whom they set the rules. The world of golden wallpaper, 3am Downing Street karaoke parties and £335 trainers might have provided vicarious glamour in normal times, but not when living standards are plunging and so many people have raw memories of lockdowns and lives lost.

I was recently sent the words of the chair of a local Conservative association. With shameless cynicism, his “political overview” opened by referencing war: “The Russian invasion of Ukraine has taken the headlines away from Partygate. The absence of a vote of no confidence in the leadership means we now have the opportunity to stabilise the leadership and rebuild trust with the electorate and of course our lead in the polls.” As it is, recent polls put Labour at 39%, the Tories on 35%. “Rebuilding trust” looks a bit herculean right now.

A newly “serious” Johnson-of-Ukraine could revive party loyalties. If not, Labour could win as the capable, clean and decent alternative to this corrupt, arrogant and politically tin-eared crew. But I am taken aback by people I meet – keen followers of politics – who struggle to define what Labour stands for. “On your side” is OK, but Labour still fumbles for what George HW Bush once clumsily called “the vision thing”.

Oppositions struggle to be heard. Labour is brim full of policies, more radical than it gets credit for, more radical than Tony Blair’s in 1997, but often lost in the government’s noisy command of the news agenda. Some do land with impact, That windfall tax on North Sea oil companies awash in profits – to help recompense hard-pressed bill-payers and extend the [warm home discount](#) – hit home against the chancellor’s mean austerity. Rachel Reeves, who has promised to be “the first green chancellor”, mapped out a huge £28bn-a-year green investment to kickstart the economy with battery “gigafactories”, insulating 19m homes, and massively increasing wind power; but Labour hasn’t yet received the credit its ambitious plans merit. The same goes for Reeves’s promise to abolish small business rates – replacing them with a 12% tax on big tech – to restore high streets.

As Reeves reviews an estimated £175bn worth of tax reliefs, she has already committed to equalising tax rate on earned and unearned incomes, as well as targeting landlord rents, private equity and “carried interest” loopholes. It makes a strong contrast with these non-dom, tax-minimising ministers, never straight about their money until half-truths are dragged out of them. Sajid Javid’s [former non-dom status](#), because his father was born in Pakistan, defies any notion of tax fairness: if it was morally OK, why drop it when you enter politics? Labour’s radical tax clean-up needs to be heard, and to yield richly for the Treasury.

While the government’s promised employment rights bill has vanished, Labour – true to its name – would revolutionise the power balance in the workplace. Reeves has promised “radical insourcing” to bring services back into the public sector from profiteering contractors. Labour policies would have made P&O’s disgraceful abuse impossible, by banning zero-hours contracts, “fire and rehire” and [bogus self-employment](#). It would ensure employment rights started on day one, and that all workers enjoyed the

benefits of sick pay, parental leave and protection from unfair dismissal, with flexible hours the default. These policies would transform millions of working lives. A new right for unions to recruit in every workplace, and fair pay agreements in every sector, would reset decades of rewards unjustly flowing backwards from workforce to shareholders, turning the tables on bad employers not just in sectors such as care, deliveries, warehouses and retail, but higher up the scale as well. Yet here too, Labour struggles to be heard.

As voters would expect from Labour's successes on schools and the NHS whenever it has been in power, the party has convincing priorities for repairing the damage done to both since 2010. It has pledged a renewed emphasis on early years, permanent mental health support in every school, universal breakfast and after-school clubs, and a youth drop-in mental health hub in every area. "Excellence" plans are not all Gradgrind: they include a guarantee for every child on arts, sport and expeditions – funding that was stripped out by Tory cuts. An eye-catching pledge to charge VAT on private school fees would raise £1.7bn to spend on state schools, and is in stark contrast to Rishi Sunak's personal £100,000 donation to Winchester college.

The need to clean up Westminster – with its tainted donations and lobbying by MPs with second jobs – hardly needs mentioning. Levelling up, too, is natural Labour turf, in its DNA, from restoring the £20 cut to benefits to introducing a genuine national living wage. The party has pledged not to "balance the books on the backs of working people" as George Osborne and Sunak have done. While the government fails on its impossible northern promises (not one spade is in the ground for its proposed local rail projects), Gordon Brown is producing local devolution plans. At local elections in May, crime will be home territory for former chief prosecutor [Keir Starmer](#). On Monday, he promised to create "victim payback boards" for local communities to settle antisocial behaviour. These may sound like small potatoes – but many complain about being powerless to act in their neighbourhoods.

The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, recently made a speech calling for a radical rethink of foreign policy, and laying out what "make Brexit work" should look like, swivelling back to European security, reversing

army cuts and escaping Britain's fuel dependency on autocrats. He promised to restore the country's soft power against what he fears is the "age of authoritarians", with full foreign aid and a strong BBC World Service and British Council.

In two years, Starmer has turned Labour into a force that is now well beyond its initial "permission to be heard" stage. Now, people need to know what Labour will do. The policy samples I've mentioned are random: I could list shelves-full of others, each costed under Reeves's grip, her fiscal rules underpinned with a new "office for value for money". For the first time in recent years, Labour is starting to lead on the economy. But it's still not trusted on defence, where Labour is on 19% and the Tories 38%. Put out more flags and talk loudly of security, for defence now tops Ipsos Mori's list of public concerns. Labour can't let Boris Johnson's posturing occupy this ground.

But policies on their own are not enough. A few chosen beacons need to illuminate the way. This shadow cabinet barely needs lift a finger to discredit this self-disgracing government, but Labour has yet to crystallise its meaning. It takes time to implant an idea in the public mind, and time may be short, if Johnson's fortunes ever momentarily look up and he dashes for an election.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Diets and dieting](#)

I've already wasted too much energy calorie-counting – pass the chorizo!

[Zoe Williams](#)



Pork belly at 2,500 calories, with a side of cauliflower cheese at nearly 500? Printing calories on menus forces people to either stay at home or stop caring



‘People are confronted with a system that suggests their every choice is scrutinised.’ Photograph: Hispanolistic/Getty Images (posed by model)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 08.54 EDT

It was a sunny Saturday and my first experience of calories on menus. I can now tell you that prawns are low in calories, chorizo is high , and salt and pepper squid is surprisingly energy-rich – though this is not surprising to me because I am a woman of a certain vintage, and we can all tell you how many calories are in absolutely everything, so long as it was in common usage by 1985, in other words, not seitan.

The calories in/calories out model – the fitness industry now calls calorie counting “If It Fits Your Macros”, which conveys something huge about modern life – tyrannised my youth. Even if you pretended not to care, or actually didn’t care, you could still rate any given food item at 50 paces. You could name everything that looked healthy but was highly calorific, everything that was more or less calorie neutral, all the miracle foods that did high satiety for low energy load, all the foods that were discreetly low calorie (cottage cheese was so *obvious*). There were so many numbers and properties all neatly filed away in millions of brains.

I hate to think how much other, more useful information was displaced by this nerdy, self-hating food-spotting, though I have a fair idea. Years later, I used to do a quiz for hen nights with one round called The Wonderful World of Men; you had to point north, throw a ball of paper into a bin, correctly identify a Sten gun and down a can of Foster's under timed conditions. All of those skills had been lost by a generation fixated on getting to the bottom of whether or not celery took more calories to digest than it delivered to the body.

Anyway, at some point in the intervening million years, people started to ask, if this was so damn simple, and all you had to do was use more energy than you ate, why didn't calorie counting work? In quiet corners of the world, ignoring the cacophony of "it's all about willpower, stupid", scientists working on the obese mouse model discovered the hormone leptin, which led to a much deeper understanding of appetite and lethargy.

First meal out since calories on menus... and ohhhh boy □
pic.twitter.com/AhaDE9xIjB

— Sophy Ridge (@SophyRidgeSky) [April 10, 2022](#)

A clearer picture also emerged of the role of protein, and the relative hormonal impacts of glucose and fructose. For brevity, your body doesn't care about your bookkeeping, your appetite doesn't care whether you're beach-ready, and the main driver of obesity is not your pathetic lack of backbone, but rather, food manufacturing processes that add a load of sugar to everything for the purposes of longer shelf life. If that completely upends your natural ability to regulate your intake, well, so be it and ker-ching!

So, I want to say that this government initiative of [printing calories on menus](#) is a pointless move that will have no impact. Yet, that's not quite true – it is disastrous for people with eating disorders, who are already working full tilt to overcome their anxiety just by coming to the restaurant, and are now confronted with a system that reinforces calorie fixation and creates a sense that their every choice is exposed and scrutinised. It is quite a useful insight into just how bad policy can be, when it's not interested in the problem, only in appearing to be interested.

While I was choosing prawns *and* chorizo *and* salt and pepper squid, because I genuinely don't care, the broadcaster Sophy Ridge was sharing a menu on Twitter, where the calorie counts were head-spinning: pork belly came in at 2,500, a side of cauliflower cheese at nearly 500; you could only energy-neutralise this meal with 10 solid hours of weight training, and you would still have change for a Wordle (another youth fixation: exactly how many calories were used by thinking). A theory: restaurants, knowing this new rule is stupid, are subverting it by rounding up, to create a world in which you either have to go home, or stop caring. Hospitality is smart and imaginative, in piquant contrast to the rules that govern it.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionRishi Sunak

Sunak's wealth is not the only problem – it's how he uses his privilege to make others poorer

[Frances Ryan](#)



The perverse reality is that the cost of living crisis is being overseen by a chancellor whose wife is richer than the Queen



‘Sunak’s mini budget was remarkable even by Tory standards in its indifference in tackling the suffering facing much of the public.’
Photograph: Uk Parliament/JESSICA TAYLOR/Reuters

Tue 12 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 12.50 EDT

Politics is in many ways a game of contrasts. Just days after the chancellor Rishi Sunak’s controversial [national insurance hike](#) kicked in this month, it emerged that his multimillionaire wife, Akshata Murty, has been using non-domicile status to potentially avoid paying [tens of millions of pounds in tax](#), while Sunak himself had a US green card while he was chancellor of the exchequer. Murty has now said she will [pay tax in the UK](#) on her worldwide income after pressure, but the message from the chancellor is clear: tax is very much for ordinary people.

That the Sunak family are said to have sacrificed their trip to their California home this Easter in order to lay low in their Yorkshire mansion ([soon to have](#) a swimming pool and tennis court) is hardly better optics. While the chancellor chooses between homes to relax in, the anxious British public are turning off the heating and putting on another jumper.

This growing story is about ethics and accountability, and the delicate matter of when a politician’s family becomes fair game (clue: when it involves

HMRC and you are the one that sets tax policy). Following pressure from both Labour and the Liberal Democrats, Sunak has [requested an independent review](#) of all his declarations since becoming a minister. And yet, in a nation grappling with plummeting living standards, the storm also brings home the perverse reality this country is facing: the worst cost of living crisis in a generation is being overseen by a chancellor whose wife is richer than the Queen.

It is hardly a new phenomenon for Britain to be ruled by the wealthy. It is practically in our democracy's DNA; just look at Eton's direct tunnel to No 10. It's not as if Boris Johnson has ever appeared a man of the people, and it has not harmed him electorally. But elitism that can be rationalised away in easier times becomes hard to ignore in times of economic crisis, just as Sunak's extreme wealth feels uniquely alien even to comfortably off voters. Besides, extreme wealth has a habit of bringing up other issues the public cares about – namely how you came to have it, including adopting questionable tax arrangements.

The pictures of Sunak last month struggling to use a card machine to [pay for some petrol](#), and the report that the “[average car](#)” he used in a photo op had to be borrowed from a supermarket worker, did not gain traction just because they were a funny sideshow, but because they go to the heart of a question that feels suddenly relevant. Does the man in charge of the country's finances as prices soar understand the problems facing my family? As one of his constituents [put it to the Guardian](#): “The cost of everything is going up. It costs me £30 a week to drive to work now – that's three hours wages for me. Sunak hasn't got a clue.”

Those who lament that critics are obsessed with Sunak's money miss the point. It is not Sunak's family's wealth per se that most people object to – it's what he chooses to do with it, be it limiting the amount of tax his family pays or using his privilege to make other families poorer. His mini budget last month was [remarkable even by Tory standards](#) in its indifference in tackling even the edges of the suffering facing much of the public. This failure was only exacerbated by Sunak's quip that his household “[all have different breads](#)” while other families worried about needing a food bank. Overnight, the man who rode high throughout the pandemic with “eat out to help out” may as well have been opining, “eat less to help the bills out”.

The thing about entitlement is that Sunak – highly ambitious and previously praised for his slick PR – is not even trying to hide it. Just days after he refused to bring benefit rates in line with inflation to protect children from going hungry, he publicly [donated £100,000](#) to his old private school. Sunak has similarly gone on the offensive in recent days, finding the nerve to spin his current troubles as a leftwing attempt to “[smear my wife](#)”. Tellingly, he turned to the Sun – itself a [tax-minimising entity](#) owned by a billionaire – to [blame Labour](#) for his problems. The rich really do protect their own.

If Sunak appears like a man who thinks he’s untouchable, it may be because he typically would be. It is notoriously difficult to have a real discussion about inequality or excess wealth in Britain. As Matthew Parris put it for [the Times](#) this weekend, “Wealth envy shouldn’t bar Sunak from No 10.” This narrative has long worked: as I have [written before](#), focus groups show that voters can be hostile to what they perceive as “attacks on people who have done well”. But just like political careers, opinions that once rode high can sink if conditions change. YouGov polling shows that Sunak’s [popularity fell](#) by 24 points after the spring statement, and that was before news broke of his family’s use of a [tax haven](#) and green card. Much like Partygate, when it comes to tax voters do not take kindly to the feeling of “one rule for them, another one for us”.

Protests about living standards have already been held across the country this month, and it’s not hard to imagine the chancellor’s image gracing placards in the coming months. These are the trials that come with money and power. Sunak may well end up as the face of Britain’s cost of living crisis – just not in the way he intended.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist
- [Guardian Newsroom: The cost of living crisis](#)

Join Hugh Muir, Larry Elliott and Anneliese Dodds MP in a livestreamed event on the cost of living crisis and the effect on the poorest households, on Thursday 14 April 2022, 8pm BST | 9pm CEST | 12pm PDT | 3pm EDT

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/12/rishi-sunak-wealth-privilege-cost-of-living-crisis-wife>

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Dozens killed in Philippines landslides and floods as tropical storm Megi hits

More than 17,000 people flee their homes as landslides engulf villages, cutting off roads and power

Tropical storm Megi leaves dozens dead and thousands displaced in the Philippines – video

Agence France-Presse

Tue 12 Apr 2022 07.55 EDTFirst published on Mon 11 Apr 2022 19.25 EDT

Rescuers hampered by mud and rain have used their bare hands and shovels to search for survivors of landslides that smashed into villages in the central [Philippines](#), as the death toll from tropical storm Megi rose to 42.

More than 17,000 people fled their homes as the storm pummelled the disaster-prone region in recent days, flooding houses, severing roads and knocking out power.

At least 36 people died and 26 were missing after landslides slammed into villages around Baybay City in Leyte province – the hardest hit by the storm – local authorities said. More than 100 people were injured.

Three people were also killed in the central province of Negros Oriental and three on the main southern island of Mindanao, according to the national disaster agency.

Most of the deaths in Leyte were in the mountainous village of Mailhi , where 14 bodies were found, army captain Kaharudin Cadil told Agence France-Presse.

“It was a mudflash that buried houses. We recovered most of the bodies embedded in the mud,” said Cadil, a spokesperson for the 802nd Infantry Brigade.

Drone footage showed a wide stretch of mud that had swept down a hill of coconut trees and engulfed the community of Bunga. At least seven people had been killed and 20 villagers were missing in Bunga, which was reduced to a few rooftops poking through the mud.

“It’s supposed to be the dry season but maybe climate change has upended that,” said Marissa Miguel Cano, the public information officer for Baybay City, where 10 villages have been affected by landslides.

Cano said the hilly region of corn, rice and coconut farms was prone to landslides, but they were usually small and not fatal.

Apple Sheena Bayno was forced to flee after her house in Baybay City flooded. She said her family was still recovering from a super-typhoon in December. “We’re still fixing our house and yet it’s being hit again so I was getting anxious,” she said.

Rescue efforts were also focused on the nearby village of Kantagnos, which an official said had been hit by two landslides.

“There was a small landslide and some people were able to run to safety, and then a big one followed which covered the entire village,” the Baybay city mayor, Jose Carlos Cari, told the local broadcaster DZMM Teleradyo.

Some residents managed to escape or were pulled out of the mud alive, but many were still feared trapped.

A Philippine coastguard video on Facebook showed six rescuers carrying a mud-caked woman on a stretcher. Other victims have been piggybacked to safety.

Four people were confirmed dead in Kantagnos, but it was not clear how many were still missing. “We’re looking for many people, there are 210 households there,” said Cari.

The military joined coastguard, police and fire protection personnel in search and rescue efforts. Bad weather hampered the response and the search was suspended late in the afternoon as it was too dangerous to continue in the dark, Cano said.

A national disaster agency spokesperson, Mark Timbal, said landslides around Baybay City had reached settlements “outside the danger zone”, catching many residents by surprise.

“There were people in their homes that were hit directly by the landslide,” Timbal told Agence France-Presse.

Tropical storm Megi – known in the Philippines by its local name Agaton – is the first major storm to hit the country this year.

Whipping up seas, it forced dozens of ports to suspend operations and stranded more than 9,000 people at the start of holy week, one of the busiest travel periods of the year in the mostly Catholic country.

The storm came four months after super-typhoon Rai devastated swathes of the archipelago nation, killing more than 400 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless.

Scientists have long warned typhoons are strengthening more rapidly as the world becomes warmer due to climate change. The Philippines – [ranked among the most vulnerable nations to its impacts](#) – is hit by an average of 20 storms every year.

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan was the strongest storm to have made landfall, leaving more than 7,300 people dead or missing.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/tropical-storm-megi-philippines-deaths-landslides-floods>

New Zealand

Black Ferns report favouritism, body-shaming and cultural insensitivity in scathing review

Review involved interviews with 50 current and former players, managers and coaches of New Zealand women's rugby team



The Black Ferns review was instigated after Te Kura Ngata-Aerengamate (C) posted on social media about her mental health problems after a tour in 2021. Photograph: Catherine Ivill - RFU/The RFU Collection/Getty Images

[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington

[@evacorlett](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 01.28 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 02.16 EDT

New Zealand's governing rugby body has failed to properly support women's high performance rugby, with some players reporting favouritism,

ghosting, body-shaming and culturally insensitive comments, a scathing review of one of the world's top women's rugby teams has found.

The more than [30-page review](#), which came with 26 recommendations, was instigated after a senior Black Ferns player – Te Kura Ngata-Aerengamate – posted on social media that she had suffered a mental health breakdown following the Black Ferns' 2021 end-of-year tour to England and France.

“What became clear during the review was that Te Kura’s concerns were not isolated and some other players (particularly Māori and Pasifika players) had either experienced similar behaviour by a number of members of management (of ‘favouritism’, ‘ghosting’, cultural insensitivities), or had witnessed it, or had been told about it contemporaneously,” the review said.

When asked why players did not complain, they cited being worried it would affect their chance of selection, they did not know how to raise a complaint, or it had been mentioned to management but nothing was done.

Ngata-Aerengamate’s post included claims that the coach, Glenn Moore, had made a number of comments to her during her eight years in the team, including: that she had been selected but “didn’t deserve to be in the team”; that he was “embarrassed” for her; and she was “picked only to play the guitar”. She also revealed feeling low self-esteem, like she was walking on egg-shells, and that she was sworn at and made to feel like everything she did was wrong.

Moore has not directly addressed Ngata-Aerengamate’s claims.

At the time, New Zealand Rugby said it was taking the social media post seriously and would assign an independent panel to conduct the review, which was not to ascertain if the allegations were true but to provide an opportunity to make comments about the culture and environment.

More than 50 current and former players, managers and coaches were interviewed.

The reviewers highlighted a lack of support, unity, and communication gaps between players and management.

“New Zealand Rugby structures have not sufficiently supported women’s high performance rugby in New Zealand,” it said, and went on to make key recommendations about the high-performance environment and culture.

It said while New Zealand Rugby had done a “great deal of positive work” to move the Black Ferns into a professional era, it had not created a high-performance vision, and that needed to be addressed.

It said the group needed to place greater focus on the rights and welfare of its players and management, and there was room to build cultural competency.

The review also cited a lack of cultural diversity and women within the Black Ferns’ management structure, noting that the team itself is “an elite female team of which 50% are Māori, and 25% are Pasifika”.

New Zealand Rugby’s chief executive Mark Robinson said in a statement: “This report highlights that we haven’t got everything right and we apologise for not having provided all the tools for our people to succeed.”

“The Black Ferns have been great ambassadors for rugby; they have won five of seven Rugby World Cups since their inception and have added considerably to the mana and legacy of New Zealand Rugby in that time; the current group of players and management are part of this,” said Robinson.

Moore has retained his role as coach, and will lead the team into this year’s World Cup. In a statement he said he has accepted the review’s findings, but that participating in high-performance sport presented unique challenges. “There are learnings from the review. I am committed to ensuring those are taken on board.”

Women in Rugby Aotearoa chair Traci Houpara [told RNZ](#) she was surprised Moore was keeping his role. “It does send a message to say they are retaining the status quo... [New Zealand Rugby] needs to think about what that sends to the players and to the rugby community,” she said.

“I think the report tells us in many ways what we already knew, that these are long-time long-term systemic issues that have been affecting and

impacting women who want to play rugby in Aotearoa.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/black-ferns-report-favouritism-body-shaming-and-cultural-insensitivity-in-scathing-review>

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Global development

Quarter of a billion people now face extreme poverty, warns Oxfam

Charity calls for debt cancellations for poorest countries to counter ‘worst collapse into poverty and suffering in memory’



People queue for paraffin in Sri Lanka. Indebted governments are cutting public spending to meet the rising cost of importing fuel and food.
Photograph: Rebecca Conway/Getty

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 13 Apr 2022 00.17 EDT

The [rising price of food](#) caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and [increased energy costs](#) could push a quarter of a billion more people into extreme poverty, Oxfam has warned.

The charity said these new challenges had piled on to the economic crises created by Covid, and called for urgent international action, including cancelling debt repayments for poorer countries.

"Without immediate radical action, we could be witnessing the most profound collapse of humanity into extreme poverty and suffering in memory," said Oxfam's international executive director, Gabriela Bucher.

Oxfam's briefing, released on Tuesday ahead of [World Bank and IMF spring meetings](#) next week, said indebted governments could be forced to cut public spending to meet the rising cost of importing fuel and food.

Oxfam said cancelling debt repayments for this year and next could free up \$30bn (£23bn) for dozens of the countries facing the biggest debts.

The World Bank had already estimated that 198 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year as a result of the pandemic. But Oxfam estimates that 65 million more people are at risk if the invasion of [Ukraine](#) and rising energy prices are taken into account. It also estimates that 28 million more people will be left undernourished as a result.

Oxfam called for more taxes on the wealthiest and also on companies that profit from crises such as the pandemic or the Ukraine war. It also called for the G20 to earmark \$100bn of an existing austerity fund for poor countries to draw on, and protect the poorest from inflation through subsidies and cutting taxes on goods and services.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization reported last week that the war in Ukraine had made [food commodities more expensive than ever](#), costing more than a third in March than at the same time last year.

The [Middle East and parts of Africa](#) are expected to be particularly affected because of [disrupted grain imports](#) from the Black Sea region, which have compounded existing economic and climate crises.

Oxfam said rising costs could see food account for 40% of incomes in sub-Saharan Africa.

Bucher said lack of action from governments to tackle rising poverty was “inexcusable”.

She said: “We reject any notion that governments do not have the money or means to lift all people out of poverty and hunger, and ensure their health and welfare. We only see the absence of economic imagination and political will to actually do so.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/12/quarter-of-a-billion-people-now-face-extreme-poverty-warns-oxfam>

The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

China requested heavily armed security team be sent to Solomon Islands, leaked documents reveal

The 10-person detail was to be armed with pistols, rifles, two machine guns and a sniper rifle to protect Chinese embassy

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The Chinatown district of Honiara, Solomon Islands after three days of violence in November, 2021. China requested a heavily armed security team be allow entry to the country to protect the Chinese embassy. Photograph: Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

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Tue 12 Apr 2022 04.40 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 04.42 EDT

China requested that a plainclothes 10-person security detail armed with pistols, rifles, two machine guns and a sniper rifle be dispatched to [Solomon Islands](#) late last year, leaked documents reveal.

The Guardian has received a copy of the documents, dated 3 December 2021, in which China requested security personnel be allowed to enter the country to secure the Chinese embassy in Honiara, in the wake of the [riots there in November](#).

In a leaked memo in response to the request, also obtained by the Guardian, Solomon Islands' permanent secretary for foreign affairs said he had “no objection” to the request from [China](#), as the Pacific nation had not been able to guarantee the safety of Chinese embassy staff during the riots.

In its diplomatic note, China said the deployment of the security team was necessary in light of “the current security situation in Solomon Islands”.

“The government of the People’s Republic of China has decided to send a plainclothes security team (10 personnel) with necessary light weapons and equipment to the Chinese Embassy in Solomon Islands. The team will be responsible for internal security and necessary escort missions outside of the Chinese Embassy,” the diplomatic note said.

The security team were to hold diplomatic passports and travel with the official status of “Attache of the Chinese Mission”.

The diplomatic request informed Solomon Islands that Chinese personnel would be bringing with them weapons and equipment including 10 9mm pistols, 10 rifles, two machine guns and a sniper rifle, as well as other equipment including radios, satellite phones, infrared thermal cameras, 10 daggers, 10 electric batons, an electronic listening device, gas masks, and metal detectors.

According to the leaked memo from Solomon Islands’ foreign ministry, permanent secretary Collin Beck said he had “no objection” to the security team’s presence in the country for a “six to twelve-month period”, though the Guardian has not been able to confirm whether or not the security team arrived in Honiara.

“The request stemmed from the recent three days of from [sic] 24-26 November riots of which Solomon Islands Chinese community faced the brunt of the looting and violence amongst other business houses,” Beck wrote.

Solomon Islands suffered days of rioting and violence [in November](#), fuelled in part by anger over prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare’s, decision to switch the country’s diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to China. However, other issues, including tensions between two of the largest provinces in the country and economic hardship were also at play.

Chinese-owned businesses were targeted in the riots and many buildings in the capital of Honiara’s Chinatown were burnt down.

“My Ministry during the period could not guarantee the safety of the Embassy and staff. As host country we had an obligation to protect all Embassies including [the] Chinese Embassy, In this regard, we have no objection to the request,” Beck wrote in the memo.

Beck added that while “sadly this sets a precedent”, that “China is a special case noting public debate was and remains directed against China’s interests in the country from certain quarters of our country’s population.”

During its deployment, China offered riot equipment to Solomon Islands including 1,500 of each of the following: bulletproof vests, bulletproof armour plate, riot helmets, riot shields, stab-proof vests, electric batons, glare lights, teargas spray and first aid kits, as well as raincoats and uniforms.

The Solomon Islands government confirmed the veracity of the documents in a statement issued late on Tuesday, as it cautioned the public “to be alert against fake news or misinterpreted commentaries on social media forums following leaked documents containing official correspondences between the Solomon Islands Government and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Embassy in Honiara”.

“There is nothing to be concerned about,” the government statement said.

Solomon Islands has been at the centre of a geopolitical storm in recent weeks after a draft security agreement between China and Solomon Islands was leaked, which outlines the process by which the Pacific country would request assistance from Chinese police, armed police, military personnel and other armed forces.

According to the draft text, the agreement would allow China to “make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands”, leading to fears that China could secure a naval base less than 2,000km from Australia’s east coast.

Since the draft deal leaked, Sogavare has sought to allay concerns by saying his country has no intention of allowing a Chinese naval base. He added it is

“very insulting to be branded as unfit to manage our sovereign affairs”.

In a sign of Canberra’s worries about the deepening security cooperation between the Solomon Islands and China, an Australian government minister was set to fly to Honiara late on Tuesday for two days of talks.

The minister for international development and the Pacific, Zed Seselja, said he would raise concerns about the proposed security agreement.

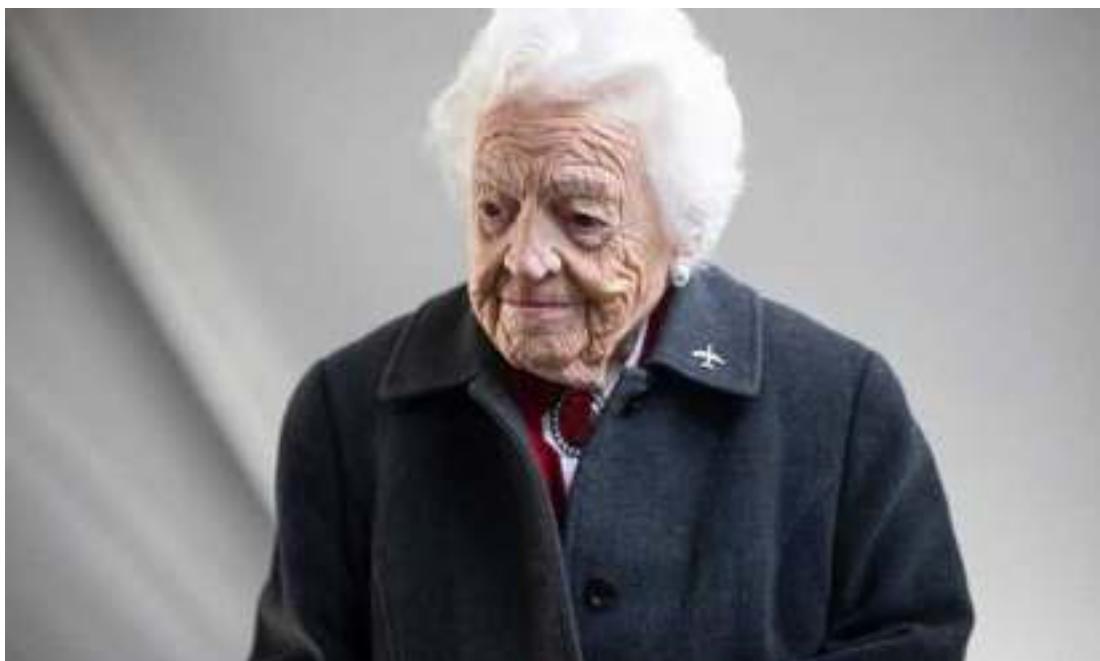
He said Australia had “stood strongly as a partner and a friend of Solomon Islands” for many years and believed “the Pacific family will continue to meet the security needs of our region”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/china-requested-heavily-armed-security-team-be-sent-to-solomon-islands-leaked-documents-reveal>

[Canada](#)

‘Hurricane Hazel’: Canada political icon, 101, still flying high as airport director

Hazel McCallion retired as mayor of Mississauga after 36 years in 2014 but the ‘pragmatic populist’ has shown little sign of easing up



Ontario’s premier, Doug Ford, called Hazel McCallion the ‘icon of Canada’ at a celebration of her 100th birthday. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Tue 12 Apr 2022 09.20 EDTFirst published on Tue 12 Apr 2022 05.30 EDT

When Hazel McCallion retired in 2014 as the mayor of the Canadian city of Mississauga, she was 93.

But while most people her age typically retreat from the spotlight of public life, “Hurricane Hazel” has shown little interest in slowing down. At 101, she recently accepted an offer to extend her role as a director for the greater Toronto airport authority, a contract that will last three years.

Omar Alghabra, Canada’s transport minister, [congratulated the centenarian](#), commending her four decades of community service and her future “overseeing and guiding Canada’s largest airport”.

The job extension was announced last week, less than a month after she renewed her role as special adviser to the University of Toronto Mississauga, with the school praising her “encyclopaedic knowledge of politics”.

Known for her blunt demeanour and pugilistic style of governing, McCallion has loomed large over Ontario civics for decades, despite her diminutive height. A school, library, parade and baseball team all bear her name. A light rail project dubbed the Hazel McCallion Line was announced in February.

“She looms very large in Ontario politics, far beyond what one would expect simply by reading the statutes about the powers of a mayor,” said Tom Urbaniak, a professor of political science at Cape Breton university and author of a book about McCallion. “One former premier remarked, ‘She’s the one politician in Ontario who scares the bejesus out of me.’ So whenever she wants to pronounce on an issue to this day – whenever she wants to wade into something – it gets noticed.”

Ontario’s premier, Doug Ford, described McCallion as the “icon of Canada” at a celebration of her 100th birthday last year. “I love her, she’s a mentor and she’s taught me so much and she’s always there for everyone,” he said.

Ford arrived at the event wearing an Ontario Women’s Hockey Association jersey with the name “Hazel” on the back and the number 100 – a nod to her stint as a professional hockey player earlier in her life.

Born in Port Daniel, Quebec, in 1921, McCallion was the youngest of five children during the Depression. She later found work at an engineering firm

in Montreal and played professional hockey, making C\$5 per game – a figure worth nearly C\$100 today.

The engineering firm relocated her to Toronto, where in middle age she developed a keen interest in local politics.



The current mayor, Bonnie Crombie, right, sits with McCallion in December. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

McCallion held various municipal roles before running for mayor of Mississauga in 1978 – defeating an incumbent who suggested during his campaign that her gender was a political weakness.

“She was a pragmatic populist and she has an incredible ability to feel the public pulse, even before the public feels it,” Urbaniak said. McCallion shopped at different grocery stores each week to better understand the frustrations of constituents. She would then carefully place those grievances into stump speeches. “That’s a knack that she never lost.”

McCallion stayed on as mayor for the next 36 years as the city grew from a patchwork of farmland west of Toronto into Canada’s seventh-largest city.

She finally stepped down in 2014 with her political instincts intact: she endorsed the eventual winners of Ontario’s two most recent provincial

elections, as well as Justin Trudeau before his successful bid for prime minister in 2015.

Despite her influence, or because of it, McCallion has brushed up against allegations that she breached conflict of interest rules. In 1982, a court determined she had failed to abstain from council discussions over a planning decision in which she had an interest.

In 2009, she faced accusations that a proposed convention centre and luxury hotel would have benefited her son, whose company had a financial stake in the project worth millions.

A judge involved in the inquiry concluded her actions amounted to “real and apparent conflict of interest”. McCallion insisted she had done nothing wrong and the case was thrown out in 2013.

Urbaniak says he laughed when he heard that McCallion had renewed her contract with the region’s airport authority.

“She will stay active as long as she can,” he said. “But she was famously in a years-long running battle with the former head of the airport authority. He thought he would get the better of Hazel McCallion. And he didn’t.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/hazel-mccallion-101-canada-mississauga-airport>

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[France](#)

France faces bruising runoff after Macron and Le Pen top first-round vote

Projected results in first part of presidential race put centrist leader on 27.6% and far-right candidate on 23.4%

- [France election: calls begin for voters to block far-right Le Pen](#)
- [Live results tracker](#)



Emmanuel Macron salutes the crowd as he arrives at the poll station on 10 April in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, France. Photograph: Franck Castel/NewsPictures/Rex/Shutterstock

[*Angelique Chrisafis in Paris*](#)

[*@achrisafis*](#)

Sun 10 Apr 2022 17.47 EDTFirst published on Sun 10 Apr 2022 14.57 EDT

France faces a brutal two-week campaign over the country's future, as the centrist incumbent, [Emmanuel Macron](#), faces the far-right Marine Le Pen for the presidency, positioning himself as a pro-European "progressive" against what he calls her anti-Muslim, nationalist programme and "complacency" about Vladimir Putin.

Macron topped Sunday's first round of the French presidential election with 27.6% of the vote, ahead of Le Pen's 23.4%, according to initial projected results by Ipsos for [France Télévisions](#).

He scored higher than his result in the first round five years ago, and clearly gained support in the final hours of the campaign after his harsh warnings to voters to hold back the far right and protect France's place on the international diplomatic stage amid the war in Ukraine.

But Le Pen's score was also higher than five years ago. She had steadily gained support after campaigning hard on the cost of living crisis and inflation, which had become voters' biggest concern.

All major candidates, except for the far-right TV pundit Éric Zemmour, immediately called for French people to vote tactically to keep out Le Pen in the second round.

Macron told reporters: "When the far-right, in all its forms, represents that much in France, you can't consider things are going well, so you must go out and convince people with a lot of humility, and respect for those who weren't on our side in this first round."

He told supporters: "Don't be mistaken, nothing is decided, and the debate we'll have in the next two weeks will be decisive for our country and for Europe".

In her own triumphant speech, Le Pen sought to capitalise on anti-Macron feeling after the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) anti-government protests and styled him as divisive and polarising. She said the final round would be "a fundamental choice between two opposing visions of society", which she saw as Macron's "division and disorder" or her promise for "social justice"

to protect “society and civilisation”. She called on “all those who did not vote for Macron” to join her.

The hard-left Mélenchon came in third, with a higher-than-forecast 22% of the vote, cementing his leading position on the left after campaigning on the cost of living and transforming the presidential system.

As the contest began on Sunday night for both Macron and Le Pen to vacuum up support from the smaller candidates, the choice of Mélenchon’s voters is now key. Mélenchon immediately gave a speech in Paris shouting three times: “Do not give a single vote to Marine Le Pen!” to huge cheers.

The majority of his leftwing supporters five years ago opted to vote for Macron in the second round simply to keep out Le Pen. But polls this time have suggested that a number of them may be tempted to vote Le Pen in protest against Macron.

Zemmour – who holds convictions for incitement to racial hatred and ran as an outsider on an inflammatory, anti-immigration platform – came fourth with 7.1% of the vote – lower than he had hoped. He immediately called for his voters to back Le Pen.

The biggest shock of the night was the very low score of Valérie Pécresse, the candidate for Nicolas Sarkozy’s traditional rightwing party Les Républicains. She was projected to take less than 5% – a poor showing that is likely to lead to the implosion of her party in favour of its hardliners. This could leave France in a unique position in Europe of not having a traditional mainstream right.

In a speech to supporters, Pécresse said: “[Le Pen’s] historical proximity with Vladimir Putin discredits her from defending the interests of our country in these tragic times. Her election would mean that France would become irrelevant on the European and international scenes. Therefore, and despite my strong disagreement with Macron … I will vote for him in order to stop Marine Le Pen.”

The decline of the traditional parties of government was confirmed by the Socialist party’s candidate and mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, who took only

2% of the vote. The Greens' Yannick Jadot scored 4.4% despite the environment being among French voters' top concerns.

The second round on 24 April will now be a replay of Macron and Le Pen's last bruising election encounter in 2017. But the stakes are much higher than when Macron easily beat Le Pen with 66% of the vote, which was seen as a victory against populist politics after Donald Trump's election to the US White House and Britain's vote to leave the EU.

Macron conceded on the campaign trail he had not managed to calm voters' concerns about immigration or hold back the "fears" that led people to vote for extremes. Polls over the last week have shown Le Pen as high as 49% for the potential runoff. For the first time, the figures are in the margin of error and give Le Pen the mathematical chance of winning.

For the first time, Le Pen is able to benefit from a reservoir of transferable votes in the second round. About 80% of the votes for Zemmour are now expected to transfer to Le Pen.

Turnout was lower than five years ago, but higher than the record low in 2002 – with abstention forecast at about 26%.

Macron is now seeking to be the first French president to win a second term in 20 years despite a mood of pessimism and disillusionment with politics in France. He entered the race late and said repeatedly he did not have the ability to campaign fully because he was occupied on diplomacy over the war in Ukraine and phonecalls to Putin and the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Macron's election platform includes gradually raising the retirement age to 65, which is unpopular and controversial, as well as centralising the benefits system and making unemployed people on certain forms of benefits undertake 15 to 20 hours of activity a week.

He has defended his in office record saying unemployment was at its lowest in 15 years, and promising he could bring full employment. He argued he was the European leader who had done the most to lessen the impact of

inflation on households, but on campaign walkabouts he was greeted with angry shouts from people complaining they could not make ends meet.

Le Pen's radical, far-right anti-immigration platform would involve banning the Muslim headscarf from all public places, including the street. But by focusing on families' difficulties in making ends meet she managed to neutralise historical fears about her party. This month she became France's second favourite political personality, behind the former prime minister Édouard Philippe.

Le Pen's campaign material, which was printed before the war in Ukraine, still featured a picture of her smiling with Putin who she met in 2017. But her swift condemnation of the invasion succeeded in drawing voters' attention away from her previous pro-Russia stances.

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French presidential election 2022

French election 2022: full live results

Projected results in the presidential election show Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen going into a tight run-off after topping the first round. Follow all the official results as they come in, department by department

- [Report: Macron and Le Pen top first-round vote](#)

[Antonio Voce](#) and [Seán Clarke](#)

Sun 10 Apr 2022 17.05 EDTFirst published on Sun 10 Apr 2022 15.52 EDT

Updating ...

Summary results

35080 of 35080 domestic communes reported

The top 2 candidates advance to a run-off



27.9%

Macron

The incumbent president upturned French politics to win in 2017 without the backing of a major party



Macron 27.9%

The incumbent president upturned French politics to win in 2017 without the backing of a major party



23.2%

Le Pen

Leader of the far-right National Rally; she lost to Macron in the 2017 run-off election



Le Pen 23.2%

Leader of the far-right National Rally; she lost to Macron in the 2017 run-off election



22%

Mélenchon

A former Socialist who ran in 2012 and 2017 as a leftist, EU-sceptic candidate



Mélenchon 22%

A former Socialist who ran in 2012 and 2017 as a leftist, EU-sceptic candidate



7.1%

Zemmour

Far-right columnist who has convictions for inciting racial hatred



Zemmour 7.1%

Far-right columnist who has convictions for inciting racial hatred



4.8%

Pécresse

Candidate of the main centre-right party, Les Républicains



Pécresse 4.8%

Candidate of the main centre-right party, Les Républicains

Other candidates

Jadot (4.6%)

Lassalle (3.1%)

Roussel (2.3%)

Dupont-Aignan (2.1%)

Hidalgo (1.8%)

Poutou (0.8%)

Arthaud (0.6%)

Pécresse (4.8%)

Jadot (4.6%)

Lassalle (3.1%)

Roussel (2.3%)

Dupont-Aignan (2.1%)

Hidalgo (1.8%)

Poutou (0.8%)

Arthaud (0.6%)

Second round projection

The centre is increasingly squeezed

About France's presidential election

The French president is elected by a direct vote. There is no electoral college, and no involvement of parliament. A candidate who wins more than 50% of the popular vote is elected. If, as seems likely, no candidate wins that majority in the first round, the top two candidates go through to a run-off election two weeks later, on April 24.

Although the French interior ministry reports the results by commune, department and region, only the overall national result counts. The breakdowns are interesting because they often show regional patterns in voting - Le Pen has in the past done well in the south and the north-east.

Polls close at 1900CEST in most districts, but at 2000CEST in Paris and other large cities. French departments in the Pacific, Atlantic and Caribbean voted on Saturday. French citizens living overseas can also vote, and 1.4m of them are on the electoral register this time.

The interior ministry said it was expecting some results from rural areas as soon as polls closed in Paris, with a majority of communes reporting by about midnight.

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French presidential election 2022

Macron v Le Pen: who are the candidates in the French election runoff?

Will it be the first re-election of a president in 20 years, or third time lucky for his far-right opponent?



Emanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen. Photograph: various

*Angelique Chrisafis in Paris
@achrisafis*

Mon 11 Apr 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 00.13 EDT

Centrist [Emmanuel Macron](#) and the far-right Marine Le Pen are through to the second round of the French presidential election. Who are they and what do they stand for?

Emmanuel Macron

Macron, 44, came to power in 2017 as France's youngest president, pledging to redraw the political landscape with a pro-European, pro-business platform described as “neither left nor right”.

He loosened strict labour laws and began what was seen as the biggest overhaul of France's social model and welfare system in modern history, starting with tightening unemployment benefits.

Macron, campaigning to become the first French president to win re-election in 20 years, says he has reduced unemployment to its lowest level in 15 years and that he could now bring France to full employment after decades of joblessness. He says that for the first time in 30 years, France is opening more factories that it is closing.

He has promised to gradually raise the pension age from 62 to 65, an unpopular measure. Macron argues that it is necessary to keep the pensions system afloat. He has said he would raise minimum pensions to €1,100 (£920) a month and continue cutting taxes for businesses and households, including scrapping the licence fee for public service broadcasting. He would also centralise the benefits system. His promise that unemployed people on certain benefits must undertake 15-20 hours of activity a week has also sparked controversy.

Macron began campaigning relatively late, saying he was instead engaged in diplomacy on the war in Ukraine. He is viewed in polls as trustworthy on handing crises. During the Covid pandemic, he turned to state interventionism and vast public spending to protect companies and households, boasting of “nationalising wages”, which the public backed.

But although Macron has attempted to highlight his past social measures such as halving class sizes in primary schools in deprived areas or increasing paternity leave, he has struggled to shake off his image as aloof and a “president of the rich” – a label that has stuck to him since his first moves to transform the wealth tax into a property tax and cut corporate taxes.

Marine Le Pen

Le Pen, 53, is a far-right member of parliament for part of the Pas-de-Calais, in north-east France. This is her third attempt to become president; she lost to Macron in the final round in 2017.

In 2011 Le Pen took over the anti-immigration, far-right Front National from her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen. She set about trying to sanitise its image from the jackbooted overtones of the past, though her political opponents argued that the party remained racist and xenophobic. In 2018 Le Pen renamed the party the National Rally, seeking to get rid of the martial imagery and broaden its appeal.

Le Pen has focused her campaign on the cost of living crisis, which is voters' top concern. She has vowed to lower VAT on fuel and energy from 20% to 5.5%. She would scrap income tax for everyone under the age of 30. She has promised to renationalise motorways, scrap the TV licence fee and privatise public service broadcasting.

Le Pen has vowed to ban the Muslim headscarf from all public spaces, including the street, calling it a "uniform of totalitarian ideology". She said: "People will be given a fine in the same way that it is illegal to not wear your seatbelt. It seems to me that the police are very much able to enforce this measure."

She has promised a referendum on immigration, which she says would lead to a rewrite of the constitution to ensure a "France for the French" – where native French people would be prioritised over non-French people for benefits, housing, jobs and healthcare. She would remove the right of children born in France to foreign parents to obtain French nationality in their teenage years.

She has dropped her previous promise to leave the euro and quit the European Union, but has vowed to cut French EU budget contributions and renegotiate treaties in a way that her opponents say would lead to France being isolated or cut out of the bloc.

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French presidential election 2022

How Le Pen tried to soften image to reach French election runoff

Centrist Macron may find it hard to make criticism of far-right opponent's racist, anti-Muslim platform stick in next round



Marine Le Pen stops for a coffee during a campaign trip in Narbonne, southern France, on Friday. Photograph: Lionel Bonaventure/AFP/Getty

[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

@achrisafis

Sun 10 Apr 2022 15.02 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 00.13 EDT

When the far-right [Marine Le Pen](#) posed for a selfie with a smiling teenager in a Muslim headscarf in Dunkirk on the northern coast, it was a turning point in the presidential campaign.

Le Pen wants to ban the Muslim headscarf from all public places, including the streets, calling it a “uniform of totalitarian ideology”. So after posing

happily with a girl in hijab, she was attacked for going soft by her far-right rival, the TV pundit [Éric Zemmour](#). “Let me teach you about humanity,” Le Pen shot back at one of Zemmour’s lieutenants in a TV debate that went viral. “What would you have done? Pulled her veil off and mistreated her?”

One analyst called Le Pen’s tactic of appearing softer in person than her policy proposals a “masterclass”. She also sought to present herself as less dangerous than Zemmour’s extremist newcomers on France’s tense and fractured political scene. It was mid-March; her poll ratings took off and kept rising.

Le Pen, 53, who has been a member of parliament for five years, has created a distance between her smiling persona – posing with her pet Bengal cats or being mobbed by teenagers for selfies in the street – and the radical reality of her far-right, anti-immigration manifesto to keep France for the French.

She has promised a referendum to change the constitution in order to curb the rights of immigrants and foreigners. She aims to prioritise natives over non-natives for housing, benefit jobs and healthcare. She would scrap nationality rights for children born and raised in France by foreign parents.

Her [success in reaching the runoff against Macron on Sunday](#) is not just about her long-running drive to sanitise her party’s image and move it away from the jackbooted and antisemitic imagery of the past. That Le Pen is now closer to power than ever before is in part the result of her own rethink of political strategy.

Le Pen’s analysis of Emmanuel Macron’s five years in power – which have included the [gilets jaunes](#) anti-government protests – was that Macron was a polarising figure who had angered and divided the country, and was out of touch with people’s everyday concerns. Unlike her two previous populist presidential campaigns – in which she furiously sought to harness people’s anger – this time she decided voters were exhausted by years of demonstrations and wanted calm. She positioned Macron as the divisive one, and herself as someone who could unite.

Instead of holding big rallies, Le Pen went under the radar to visit markets in small towns and villages, listening and posing for selfies. Instead of pushing her anti-immigration platform – which remains just as radical as before – she focused on the cost of living crisis that risked being worsened by the war in Ukraine. She condemned the Russian invasion outright and played down her visit to Vladimir Putin five years ago.

To advance her position, Le Pen put forward her own personal narrative of suffering. Five years ago, her supporters had been horrified when she performed so badly in the 2017 presidential TV debate against Macron – mixing up names of companies, getting dossiers wrong — that it was described as “political death live on air”. She was written off as finished.

But she believed that voters would identify with a personal story of picking herself up after defeat. “People who have lived through painful moments can better understand the suffering and distress of others,” she said. She talked about her difficult childhood as the child of a demonised political figure, Jean-Marie Le Pen, like her a far-right presidential candidate, describing how aged eight she woke in her nightdress amid shards of glass and a blown-away bedroom wall following a bomb attack aimed at killing her father. She talked about her teenage embarrassment at her parents’ public divorce battle, during which her mother posed nude in Playboy.

The *gilets jaunes* protests had highlighted the difficulties of single mothers; Le Pen described raising her own children alone. When her niece, Marion Maréchal, abandoned Le Pen and joined rival Zemmour, Le Pen was emotional on TV, saying she had helped raise Marion as a baby. Le Pen rose in the polls while Zemmour dropped, damaged by his previous admiration of Putin and initial refusal of Ukrainian refugees.

Ultimately, Le Pen knew that to have any chance of winning the final round, she must neutralise the nation’s fear of her. Supporters of traditional parties on the left and right had in the past voted tactically to keep her out because she was seen as dangerous, divisive and unable to govern the country or run the economy. But Le Pen reasoned that those parties, the Socialists and Les Républicains, were shrinking on the national stage.

By focusing on fears over the cost of living, Le Pen began to turn public opinion around. In September 2021, Le Pen was the 11th most popular political figure in France – already a high position. This month she rose to become the nation's [second favourite political personality](#), behind the former prime minister Édouard Philippe.

Last week, the pollster Brice Teinturier of Ipsos found that if Le Pen were elected president tomorrow, more people expected an improvement in their own situation and the situation of the country than if Macron were re-elected. Just as many people [trusted](#) Le Pen to fix cost of living crisis as trusted Macron. An [Odoxa](#) poll for L'Obs found that in a second-round vote, 19% of people would vote to stop Macron, more than the 18% who would vote to stop Le Pen.

The think-tank Fondation Jean-Jaurès last year set out the factors that could facilitate a Le Pen win. She would need to win over large numbers of voters from the traditional right. She would need to have normalised her image to the point where voters no longer found her so dangerous that they voted tactically to keep her out. Macron would have to be viewed with the same general level of mistrust as Le Pen herself to make voters refuse to vote for him.

Macron's tactic so far has been to remind voters of the details of Le Pen's manifesto, slamming it as a racist, anti-Muslim platform that would wreck the economy and create mass unemployment. But Macron's camp has found it harder to make criticism stick to Le Pen.

Le Pen argues that catastrophising against her no longer works. She said French people no longer see her "as the big, bad wolf".

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2022.04.11 - Spotlight

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- 'It feels like the end of the world' Taiwan civilians practise for war as Ukraine revives China fears
- Horace Andy 3D is a brilliant young man. But Massive Attack work slow
- 'The anxiety and distrust will never go away' How financial infidelity can hurt more than an affair
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[The G2 interview](#)**Jack White**

Interview

‘I thought I’d end up running an upholstery shop’: Jack White on the White Stripes, bar brawls and fame

[Dave Simpson](#)



Jack White ... ‘Seven Nation Army might be the biggest multicultural hit of all time.’ Photograph: Paige Sara

As one half of the White Stripes, the Detroit musician conquered the world. He has since played in other bands, opened record shops and worked with country legend Loretta Lynn. After a busy lockdown, he is back with two new solo albums

Mon 11 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 12 Apr 2022 07.25 EDT

When [Jack White](#) was 14, he was all set to become a priest. “I’d been accepted at the seminary and everything,” he grins, and it’s not too hard to imagine Father Jack White preaching with missionary zeal, even with his hair dyed blue, as it is today. “But something happened to me in that summer. The priests seemed really old and I thought, ‘Who’s gonna speak for my generation?’”

White was raised a Catholic, and his conversation is still peppered with words such as “sinner” and “judgment” – but that didn’t stop him changing his mind about holy orders. “To be fair, they don’t turn anyone into a priest unless they really want to be one,” he says. “I never got the calling.”

Instead, of course, he found music.

Born Jack Gillis in downtown Detroit, to a Polish mother and Scottish Canadian father who both worked for the church, he was the youngest of 10 siblings. They would subject him to the usual indignities, such as knocking down the card houses he liked to build, “because that’s how brothers and sisters are”. But his brothers had a drum kit, which he played from the age of five, before graduating to other instruments in his mid-teens when most of the siblings had left home and his father unexpectedly brought home a piano. “That piano, which I have in front of me now, changed my life.” He never thought he could make a living out of music, though. Even when he joined bands and was on “so many bills people were sick of me”, he would hear musicians talk about going in the studio and think: “Is your dad a millionaire or something?” [His expected career was furniture](#). “When I was 16 I would have bet \$1,000 that I’d only ever have an upholstery shop.”

Within a decade, however, his supercharged garage rock duo the White Stripes was a global phenomenon, and he's barely paused since. He fronted the Raconteurs and played drums in the Dead Weather, and has been a producer and video-maker, while his eclectic Third Man operation takes in everything from a record label and record shops to a publishing imprint. His three solo albums have all been US No 1s. A fourth, *Fear of the Dawn*, arrives this month with another, *Entering Heaven Alive*, following in July. He has 12 Grammys. "I also made a good cup of coffee once," he chuckles.



The White Stripes performing in Madison Square Garden in New York in 2007. Photograph: Stephen Lovekin/WireImage

He is the first to admit that he isn't always in control of what he calls a "compulsion" to create. "It's more in control of me," he says, "but it's always been like this. When I was 19, I was a drummer in two different bands. I had the upholstery apprenticeship and a business in the basement. I was recording music in my bedroom, but nobody ever came up and said to my parents, 'Wow, this kid's interesting.' Nobody patted me on the back for any of it." But that didn't stop him, or slow him down.

Today, wearing a Batman T-shirt, White, 46, is video-calling from another project, the bowling alley on his Nashville estate, which he designed himself. It's decked out in dazzling orange stripes, which make for quite a

combination with his blue hair. He puts much thought into minor details. Where the White Stripes presented in red and white (inspired by peppermint candy), orange and blue is a homage to the multitude of movie posters, notably Star Wars, that used “supposedly the most attractive colours to boost ticket sales, hyuk, hyuk”.

He was still at school when he met Meg White, the woman who would become the other half of the White Stripes. They married in 1996 and he took her surname. One day, he recalls, “to help me out while I was setting up a microphone or something”, Meg got behind the drums. “And what she was playing was so cool. I thought, ‘Oh wow, please keep doing that,’ never thinking, ‘Oh we’re going to write songs or form a band or play on stage or anything.’” But they did all that, and after two under-the-radar albums they suddenly exploded during a 2001 visit to the UK, when DJ John Peel said they were the most exciting thing he had heard since Jimi Hendrix.

“We were staying on the drummer from [Billy Childish’s band] Thee Headcoats’ floor that whole trip,” White remembers. “We thought we’d just play with a couple of garage rock bands and go home. That’s not what happened.” White Blood Cells, released in July 2001 and featuring the breakthrough single Hotel Yorba and the riotous Fell in Love With a Girl, saw them become one of the hottest bands in the world. The follow up, Elephant, released in 2003, was a UK No 1, and reached No 6 in the US, triggering an imperial period lasting almost a decade. Having divorced before the breakthrough, the couple pretended to be brother and sister to deflect intrusive questions (continuing the misdirection even after some sleuth produced their marriage certificate). “To get famous, especially in duos, whether it’s Sonny and Cher or whoever, everything is up for grabs to be exploited,” White says. “You have to explain your relationship to everybody. We were never interested in that.”

Similarly, no reason was given when the Stripes ceased performing in 2009 and in 2011 announced a split that was subsequently attributed to Meg’s stage fright. “She’s so delicate and such a sweet person that you’d never think she’d go up on stage,” White says, warmly. “But she did and conquered it in her own way. Eventually, it just got too much.”

Never one to dawdle, White had already formed the Raconteurs and diversified into producing the country singer Loretta Lynn. But he still professes amazement at his career and insists he follows instincts, rather than business acumen. “The smartest thing I ever did was having a lawyer as manager.” That is Ian Montone, who met the Stripes in 2001 and asked to manage them six months later. “People said, ‘Oh, you shouldn’t do that – this guy will rip you off.’ But I’m very grateful that he’s never tried to change me or stop me doing things.”



In 2009, with Dean Fertita, Alison Mosshart and Jack Lawrence in The Dead Weather. Photograph: Andy Willsher/Redferns

White doesn’t like people taking liberties. In 2003, a row over production credits with fellow Detroit band The Von Bondies exploded in a bar brawl with singer Jason Stollsteimer. White was fined and sent on an anger management course. “I was raised with consequences, and that if someone says something in a bar it’s fighting talk,” he says with a shrug. “But everybody gets older and wiser, right?” Since then, his spats have all been verbal. In 2015, he was accused of “gentrification” after opening a record shop in Cass Corridor, Detroit. “I said, ‘Motherfucker. I went to school right there. I played my first show in that club. This is my neighbourhood!’”

White's second marriage, to the model and musician [Karen Elson](#), lasted from 2005 to 2013 and produced two children, but he guards his privacy and shuns the way modern celebrities live their lives on social media. He did, however, surprise fans at his Detroit homecoming show on Saturday by [marrying his partner, Olivia Jean](#), also a musician from Detroit, on stage. He cackles with laughter at the mention of Madonna's recent picture of herself on the loo, because it reminds him of something his father said when he got mad at the TV. "He yelled, 'It's only a matter of time before we'll see a celebrity on the toilet,'" he says. "And that's sort of 'Old man yells at clouds' but it's true now that you can get on stage or a magazine cover and not be any good what you're doing, just good at selling it. Some people are fearless, but that's not necessarily a compliment. They're just stupid enough to think they deserve to be in front of a mic."

White wasn't involved in his own marketing miracle – how the riff from the White Stripes' [Seven Nation Army](#) has become a global football and political chant (most famously "Oh, Jer-emy Corb-yn"). "It might be the biggest multicultural hit of all time," he laughs. "Because nobody is singing any words, they're just chanting a melody. Who would have thought it? Certainly not Meg or I. We recorded the song quickly and moved on."

He says he doesn't understand British politics or what Corbyn represents, but – despite being "neither a Republican or Democrat" – enthusiastically backed Corbyn's US equivalent-ofsorts, Bernie Sanders, at the last election. "He tells the truth and he's never said anything I disagree with. Same with AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez], whereas Nancy Pelosi, for example, said congressmen should be able to buy stocks and I'm like, uh-oh."

White angrily called out Donald Trump for adopting Seven Nation Army and produced "[Icky Trump](#)" T-shirts (a pun on the White Stripes song and album Icky Thump) criticising the then president's policies on Mexican immigration. Did he lose fans for speaking against Trump?

"God, I hope so. I see a Trump rally and think, 'Do I want people like that at my shows?' It's so different to being a Republican in the 1980s. This is racist, derogatory, divisive and hateful."

He has called time on another of his crusades – analogue sound – admitting that digital isn't as “plastic and fake” as it was 20 years ago and that, anyway, he had made his point – “to make people think about where their sound is coming from”. The music industry has changed massively, but, he says, not always for the worse, pointing out that young artists can generate a profile online, whereas he remembers “having to go to a town several times and put flyers on telephone poles”.

The flipside is the collapse of recording income, which White fears devalues music. When he got involved with the artist-owned streaming company Tidal, he was told that paying artists just one cent per stream would bankrupt it. “I still don’t understand that conversation, but I do know that there’s humungous payouts to the major labels to stream their entire catalogue. When you sign up to Netflix nobody expects to see every fucking movie, but on Spotify we expect every song in the history of humankind.”

White calls himself an “interdisciplinary artist” and he shows the same flexibility in his social life. After 20 years of stardom, his friendships stretch from 90s furniture partner Brian Muldoon (with whom he quietly revived Third Man Upholstery in 2008) to, at least reportedly, Bob Dylan. “I can’t claim to be friends with Bob, and maybe that’s an impossibility,” he shrugs. “Or maybe that is the case but it’s hard to define. He has the holy spirit around him. He’s sort of not from here, but if people would just talk about music with him he’d be a lot more receptive because he is an encyclopaedia. He knows exactly what’s going on in music at any given time.”



Jack White ... ‘I can’t claim to be friends with Bob Dylan ... maybe that’s an impossibility.’ Photograph: David James Swanson

So, it seems, does White. The two new albums are the result of what he calls “incredibly inspiring” lockdowns, during which time he initially played and recorded all the instruments himself for the first time in his career, bringing other musicians in later for the “swing” of playing live. “Although it was – and is – a shame that so many people got hurt by the pandemic, the seclusion helped me re-evaluate artistically and refocus on things I hadn’t had time for in years,” he says. “So many different tunes came out that the two albums started to emerge on their own. I pushed myself to new areas which I’m really proud of.”

Thus, *Fear of the Dawn* hurls together raucous guitars, dub, hip-hop, synths and a [Q-Tip collaboration](#) featuring a sample of Cab Calloway’s *Hi De Ho Man*, from 1934. Entering Heaven Alive is gentler, more country rock. The 2021 smash [Taking Me Back](#) appears on both albums, as a digital metal stomper and “Django Reinhardt-type jazz version” respectively.

“I grew up with a Polish grandmother in my house,” White says. “My parents were in their 60s when I was in high school. I lived in a Mexican neighbourhood and went to an all-black high school. It would make just as much sense for me to play in a Polish polka band or a hip-hop act, or a

Mexican mariachi band under a sombrero. It would be nice to know exactly who I am or what I'm doing – but I don't.”

Perhaps this explains his compulsions. He reveals that the new song *Shedding My Velvet* was inspired by footage of stags, which “shed the mossy velvet on their antlers every year and just start again. I was really taken by that idea of rebirth.”

Fear of the Dawn is out now on Third Man. *Entering Heaven Alive* follows on 22 July. White plays the Eventim Apollo, London, on 27 and 28 June

This article was amended on 11 April 2022 to correct the concert dates from July to June.

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[Taiwan](#)

‘It feels like the end of the world’: Taiwan civilians practise for war as Ukraine revives China fears

Community groups use US army training videos to rehearse for disaster, yet the government is reluctant to support a civilian defence force

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



A community group trains in first aid and combat fitness drills at Da'an Park in Taipei. People in Taiwan have grown increasingly keen for civilian defence training in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Photograph: Helen Davidson/The Guardian



[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

On a muggy night in a Taipei park, its concrete pavilion lit by the glow from nearby lampposts, a dozen people spread yoga mats and plastic bags on the floor.

The atmosphere is convivial and relaxed as they warm up, taking turns to lead the group through exercises copied from US army basic training videos online. They practise drills, dragging each other as injured deadweights, out of the way of a fictional harm.

The scene, inside the charming Da'an Park, is made all the more incongruous by the pavilion's other visitors: young people on dates or in study groups, a couple practising bachata dancing to tinny Latin music.

But there is a seriousness among those here. The group is preparing for, well, anything. Taiwan has been under the threat of invasion for decades, but the ratcheting up of Chinese military missions and government rhetoric in recent years, and last month's attack on [Ukraine](#) by Xi Jinping's key ally

Vladimir Putin, have set nerves on edge. Beijing claims Taiwan as a Chinese province and has sworn to “unify” it, by force if necessary.



A group of volunteers trains for disaster in Da'an Park, Taipei. Photograph: Helen Davidson/The Guardian

Those gathered on this night – a mix of men and women of various ages and occupations including market researchers, tour guides, landlords and digital designers – joined the group months ago, but membership has tripled since the Ukraine invasion.

They are learning first aid, self-defence and military fitness, but others practise firearms drills with airguns.

“It feels like the end of the world,” says 34-year-old Lin. (Few participants opt to give their full names.) “It was just fitness [when we started], but then we added first aid ... A lot of people want to learn these skills but don’t have access, so this is a start.”

The invasion of Ukraine has provided a powerful lesson for people in Taiwan: that a smaller party can resist, and even fight back against a mightier invading force. Residents who spoke to the Guardian said [Taiwan](#) shouldn’t rely on others for its survival, pointing to the lack of international

boots on the ground in Ukraine, and early delays in coordinating sanctions and other responses.

Before the war, a [2021 survey](#) found public support for better training, longer national service and even conscription of women across demographic and political groups. Anecdotally there is an even [greater hunger for civilian defence programs](#). Existing community groups and courses have reported three- to 10-fold increases in inquiries, and new grassroots initiatives have sprung up across cities.

Enoch Wu, the founder of one of the more high-profile and professional civil training courses, says the undercurrent of demand was there for some time, but “the events in Ukraine gave us an opportunity to express that desire more urgently, and drove more people to take immediate action”.



Taiwanese protest against the war in Ukraine during a rally in Taipei in March. Photograph: Sam Yeh/AFP/Getty Images

Calls for a citizens' army

Taiwan has spent billions on weapons purchases from the US and has [strengthened its international relationships](#) and partnerships. It is reforming its reservist program, and last week the defence minister flagged a [return to a](#)

full year of conscription for young Taiwanese men and the abolition of a non-military public service alternative that many had sought out as an easier term. Domestic polling found the proposals were welcomed by the community, who also showed an increased willingness to fight in Taiwan's defence.

But Taiwan's military is no match for China's, with well-reported issues with its resources and training and troop levels reportedly as low as 60-80%. Despite this, the government appears resistant to the growing calls for training civilians.

Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, the former navy chief and chief of the general staff, is among those who have called for a government-backed territorial defence force. Lee's proposal, written with Michael Hunzeker, a military expert at George Mason University, suggested Taiwan should develop a force made up of civilians of any age and gender. The force could be deliberately decentralised, trained in small but powerful arms such as javelin missiles and small drones, with hyper-local leadership and access to weapons and first aid caches.

"They can conduct guerrilla warfare, hit and run – they can be kinds of logistical force," Lee tells the Guardian.

He acknowledges the proposal would require a dramatic and unlikely shift in the government's current stance and direction, including changes to gun laws.

"The Territorial Defence Force in Ukraine destroyed a lot of tanks and armoured cars," he says. "It's time for the leadership to change [its thinking]."

Huang Kwei-bo, a professor of diplomacy at the National Chengchi University and former deputy director of the KMT opposition party, doesn't think a European-style civilian force would work well in Taiwan.

"A territorial defence force [TDF], all voluntary and part-time, is not impossible in Taiwan, but if not trained and equipped well, it will become

both a branch and a burden for the armed forces,” Huang says.



Taipei protests in March against the Ukraine invasion. Photograph: Ritchie B Tongo/EPA

Both Admiral Lee and the creators of, and participants in, existing civil groups stress they are not just about preparing for war.

Taiwan is a land of frequent disasters, both natural and manmade. A year ago this week, 49 people were killed and more than 200 injured in a [horrific train derailment in Hualien](#). Unable to access crushed carriages, first responders were luckily able to rely on communication with some uninjured passengers who had trained or served with the military and fire departments. People like Enoch Wu want to broaden these skills out to everyone.

But the government, which recently [drew up a civilian defence handbook](#) instructing people on evacuation routes, does not appear supportive yet of any level of civilian combat force.

The defence minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, has fended off calls from fellow legislators, saying he was unaware of desires for a “citizen army” and needed more time to examine it. He told reporters last week the existing system of reservists and armed forces was the priority. “If you want to be

included in the training, you need to join the whole process, not just two days,” he was quoted by local media as saying.

‘You have to prepare’

Not everyone who wants more training believes in a formalised citizens’ army. One of the Da’an Park group’s organisers, Tân Lê-i, is adamant that the benefit of their program is its volunteerism, and any government involvement – even support – would diminish it.

“The spirit of our program is autonomy. People need free will to realise what they want to achieve,” Tân says. Some other members say they would relish weapons and tactical training.

Chen, a middle-aged woman in North Face activewear, is sweaty and laughing after the drills but sombre when asked about her reasons for being here.

She spent a decade as a carer for family members and knows being healthy and safe is not guaranteed. “My job was dealing with life and death, and I understood how things can change in a short time,” she says.

Chen joined the group several months ago and felt vindicated after Russia’s invasion, when she saw videos of older Ukrainians “saying if they hold a weapon it lessens the burden on young people”.

“Maybe one day I can use this – the preparation isn’t perfect but you have to prepare.”

Additional reporting by Chi Hui Lin

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Interview

Horace Andy: ‘3D is a brilliant young man. But Massive Attack work slow’

[Garth Cartwright](#)



‘I’m ready to get busy again’ ... Horace Andy. Photograph: Michael Moodie

At 72, Horace Andy has made one of his finest albums. The golden-throated reggae star talks drinking pints, vanishing royalties – and why his Bristolian comrades need to get a move on

Mon 11 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 10.05 EDT

On a call to Horace Andy in Kingston, [Jamaica](#), it appears that reggae's sweetest voice is out and about – motorcycles roar past, dogs bark fiercely, children shriek and incoming calls interrupt our chat. “It’s hot here. And it nice,” says Andy. “Covid hit Jamaica but not like it hit London – less people here – so I been safe.”

I almost expect Andy to say “safe from harm” as, on [Midnight Rocker, his first official album of new recordings in almost a decade](#), he covers the Massive Attack song of that name. Andy, 72, is now best known as the Bristol group’s reggae singer, a constant touring member who has contributed to all five of their albums after his long solo career immersed in rocksteady, dancehall and other Jamaican styles. That’s him delivering the unforgettable call of “loveyouloveyoulove...” in Massive Attack’s Angel, and giving long notes his wondrous, low-frequency vibrato.

On Blue Lines, Massive Attack’s 1990 debut, Shara Nelson sang Safe from Harm. Had Andy long been wanting to sing it? “I always like it and I cut my version a few years back. Adrian Sherwood, he hear this and he want me to voice it again when we work together – he has his idea of how he wants the bass to be.”



Horace Andy at Tottenham Town Hall in 1985. Photograph: David Corio/Redferns

Midnight Rocker is produced by Sherwood and it is the first time Horace has worked with the British dub legend. Andy re-versions three of his own songs alongside new material penned by UK-based artists LSK, Jeb Loy Nichols and George Oban. “Adrian choose the songs and I happy with that. He a really good producer and a lovely man. Like me, he likes to take his time, not rush things. He lives by the sea and I thought it would be too cold for me but his studio is warm. And when I’m with him I do things that are your culture – go to the pub ... have a pint!”

Andy mentions not having left Jamaica for the past three years, and Midnight Rocker has indeed not been rushed. From the headquarters of his On-U Sound studio and label, Sherwood explains: “We were determined to make this record as good as it possibly could be so I would send files to Horace in Jamaica, who would add vocals at his studio there, and send the tracks back to me to do more work on.

“Kingston’s home, but I’m ready to get busy again,” Andy adds. He is touring solo in April, then with [Massive Attack](#) the following month. “I like the challenge of singing with Massive Attack, no reggae producer allow me to sing like that. They use samplers – which I don’t like, I prefer when

musicians make music – but they create interesting sounds. And 3D” – AKA their linchpin Robert Del Naja, 57 – “is a brilliant young man. But they work slow! It’s coming 10 years now since Massive Attack release an album and I think I record some six songs for them. I’m looking forward to them putting out the new tunes.”

Andy is now one of the few active veterans of reggae’s golden age. “As a youth, at first I would listen to American music – Stevie Wonder, Patti LaBelle, James Brown, Otis Redding, the Impressions – and then I get to hearing the Jamaican singers. Alton Ellis, he would let me play his guitar, gave me tips on how to sing. Ken Boothe, Justin Hinds – when they used to play him on the radio I’d boast to everyone: ‘He my cousin!’

“I didn’t know I was going to be a singer but when we would sing together [on Kingston’s streets] people would say, ‘Sleepy [his nickname], your voice is nice.’ So I gets to thinking perhaps I can be a singer. Then I audition at Studio One and Mr Dodd” – that’s studio owner Clement “Coxsone” Dodd – “he pick me out. He name me Horace Andy [Hinds is his birth surname] and Studio One become my school, my college, my university. I learn everything there.”



Massive Attack ... on stage with Robert Del Naja and Angelo Bruschini in Barcelona in 2014. Photograph: Xavi Torrent/WireImage

It was Dodd who produced Andy's 1971 breakthrough hit *Skylarking*, and it remains his signature tune. Horace has only positive things to say about Dodd – who ran Studio One as his personal fiefdom – having worked with Jamaica's top producers and musicians. About the late bassist [Robbie Shakespeare](#) he observes, “He play on plenty of my tunes. He and Sly just the best.” But when I mention [Bunny “Striker” Lee](#), the producer who died in 2020, Andy's mellifluous voice sharpens. “Bunny Lee not a producer but a financier. And he never pay me! Not a penny! And he sell all my recordings to Trojan Records in England and I never see a royalty statement after all these years, yet they issue my songs on CD and vinyl and in boxes.”

Trojan Records, after being sold on several times since its founder Lee Gopthal went bankrupt in 1975, is now owned by BMG and thus part of the world's fourth largest record label. I approach it with Andy's accusation. “While it's true that Bunny Lee struck an agreement for various recordings featuring Horace Andy with Trojan back in the 1970s, these have long expired and rights reverted to Bunny,” replies a BMG representative, who adds that none of those recordings have appeared on Trojan during BMG's tenure (though a best-of compilation was in fact released via BMG in 2016). The company points him towards the executors of Bunny Lee's estate, but says it will also contact Andy “to clarify these issues”.

However hard done by he might be, Andy's voice remains more beautiful than ever. Not wishing to end on a sour note, I ask him to pass on some wisdom. “Practise equal rights and justice for every person. Respect your elders. Do good,” he says. “Jah bless.”

Midnight Rocker is released on 8 April on On-U Sound Records.

This article was amended on 11 April 2022 because an earlier version omitted to mention that a best-of compilation was released via BMG in 2016.

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‘The anxiety and distrust will never go away’: how financial infidelity can hurt more than an affair



Composite: Alamy/Getty Images/Guardian Design

Whether you lie about how much you owe, how much you earn, how much you spend or what you spend it on, sooner or later your partner will likely

find out. And it won't be pretty



[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

When Kirsten was in her early 20s, she and her then boyfriend, later husband, were saving to buy a house. They had been together four years, and had enough that they were ready to see a mortgage adviser. But, she remembers: “He was avoiding me even going to the appointment, saying: ‘I can go on our behalf – it doesn’t need two of us.’” He had a good job, he was earning a decent salary, he had a nice car, they went on holidays. The first she knew of his £20,000 personal debt was when the mortgage adviser said: “There’s no point even applying for this: you’re not going to get it.”

A survey in January by [US News & Report](#) sketched out how widespread so-called “financial infidelity” is. Some 30% of couples questioned by researchers described lies they had experienced or told in their relationship, the main one being secret purchases (31%), followed by hidden debts (28%) and dishonesty about income (23%). This is by no means a post-pandemic phenomenon, nor is it peculiar to the US. British research by Money Advice

Service from 2015 also found [one in five people lied to their partner about their earnings](#) and one in four lied about their debt.

The deceit can be a form of coercive control, as one person seeks to dominate the decisions of the relationship by hiding key information. It can also just be poor communication around money, combined with the powerful shame of debt, corroding trust inch by inch. And it can, of course, be driven by other lies, other humiliations; a gambling or sex addiction is incredibly hard to disclose, and neither comes cheap. But more frequently, says Susanna Abse, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist who often works with couples, the cash is just “dribbled away”.

“In my experience, you generally can’t get to the bottom of what happened to the money,” she says. How often it leads directly to divorce is hard to say, for a number of reasons, including but not limited to the fact that separating couples always end up fighting about money one way or another.

I’m still liable for the mortgage. I can’t ring the lender and say: ‘My husband hasn’t got his half this month’

The way couples deal with money has changed radically over the past 25 years, Abse says. Feminists in the 70s and 80s tried to make joint bank accounts and money sharing the absolute norm because most women gave up work when they had children. “Now, because women mainly work, there is much more autonomy around money and no idea of sharing whatsoever. I see couples with two children saying: ‘I paid for the shopping and you haven’t paid me back.’”

In the absence of any commonly held baseline assumptions about what is normal, couples are left negotiating from scratch what levels of autonomy and transparency they want and need. But that makes it sound quite easy. In fact, that intersection of money and feeling is intense and vexed.

Sarah, a thirtysomething from Surrey, explains: “One of the things about this particular kind of deception is that it undermines everything. Every photo that pops up, everything you think back to, you think: ‘Could we really

afford that? Was that holiday the reason he was in a really bad mood a month later and mean to me over nothing?’ If he’d had an affair for six months, those months would be a bit of a sham. But this feels like the entire relationship.”

After that meeting with the mortgage broker, Kirsten was baffled, as she knew her partner didn’t gamble, didn’t smoke and didn’t drink much. He said he had built up debts when he was in his late teens, got into arrears and been too embarrassed to mention it, and she understood all that. They agreed they would have a joint account from then on and be honest with each other in the future.

“I then became very intrusive about money,” she remembers, “which was fine when he was penitent. But later, when I was on maternity leave, it flipped. I would just catch him out in lies all the time but, by then, everything was my fault. His line was: ‘You made me lie to you. You were judgmental, you were intrusive, I knew how you would react if I told you.’”

After clearing that first debt a decade ago, the couple bought a house, got married and started a family. Kirsten then found her husband had taken out another £40,000 in loans, as well as borrowing from friends, which had torpedoed their social life. “It literally is a web. He would find any reason for me not to come into contact with the people he knew. There are friends of his who still blame me for the money he owes them.” When they split up a few years ago, he hadn’t paid towards the mortgage for months. “I don’t think the anxiety and distrust will ever go away,” she says. “You might think you understand the concept of marriage, but it was only when he said: ‘I can’t afford to give you my half of the mortgage,’ that I realised, I’m still liable for the full amount. I can’t ring the lender and say: ‘My husband hasn’t got his half this month.’ I thought I was going to lose my home. I am still unbelievably embarrassed about the lies I believed.”

Daniel Coombes, a director at the London divorce lawyers [Family](#) Law in Partnership, says: “I have to spend a bit of time explaining to people that they shouldn’t feel stupid, or guilty, or embarrassed, because it’s very common.” And that’s not just about hidden debt, that’s about finances across the board. It is not at all unusual for one person in a couple to know a lot more about the marital books than the other. But when it comes to divorce,

“buildups of debt are a really sad situation. The court can only work with what exists. If someone has spent all the money, then it’s gone.”

If you’re stashing money away, you’re not really in the relationship entirely. You’ve got one foot out

There is an exception, called the [Norris add-back](#), “where you’re effectively trying to say: somebody has spent money inappropriately and I want you, Judge, to add that back to the pot so it comes out of their share of the assets,” Coombes says. But it’s not enough that the spending was done in secret; it has to have been “reckless and wanton”, and the threshold is comically high. Coombes recalls one case where the husband was shown to have spent a large amount of money on cocaine and sex workers, but because he had a serious problem with addiction, that wasn’t considered recklessness. “If it had been recreational, then maybe it would have been,” Coombes speculates, adding (with lawyerly caution): “It’s very hard to say; it would come down to the discretion of the judge.”

Very often financial infidelity, or the extent of it, is not discovered until a divorce is already under way, and couples have to disclose their spending to each other. A lot of people don’t realise this is non-negotiable and that secrecy in the other direction – hiding earnings, building up a savings pot with the intention of separating – is a mug’s game, since it will come out in the divorce. People don’t always think rationally about money. Hoarding money secretly if you have no intention of splitting up is also a bit pointless, since you have to explain where it’s come from in order to spend it. You would effectively have to launder it back into your marriage. “I think if you’re stashing money away, you’re not really in the relationship entirely,” Abse says. “You’ve got one foot out.”

Sarah first realised there was something awry with the family finances during lockdown, when she had the headroom to examine them. “Previously I just thought: ‘Gosh, we never seem to have that much left for saving.’” The couple had been together since university and had two children. Again, there had been a blip early on in the relationship where his personal debt came to light, and they figured out a plan to repay it together. But, more than a decade in, Sarah assumed that was in the past. It wasn’t until they were

divorcing that she got a really forensic look at his spending. “At the moment, he’s about £40,000 in debt. It’s weird, it’s basically on nothing. It’s on excessive amounts of takeaways, coffee-shop spending. He’d go out for what I thought was a couple of pints with his mates – it was actually quite a few people and he was buying all the drinks.”

“Sympathy” would be a strong word, but there’s definitely pathos in Sarah’s description of her ex. “We earned a good wage between us. We had a nice life. I feel like he’s sunk himself over Deliveroo.” What she doesn’t regret is the end of the relationship. “Just living with him became stranger and stranger. Our conversations made no sense, because I wasn’t party to all the information. Fifty percent of his brain was going on: ‘How do I get the result that I need out of this without her finding out X?’”

So many things can drive secretive or impulsive spending: it can be an act of defiance, self-assertion, display, insecurity or retaliation. Often with couples who are mutually secretive, “it isn’t the money in the end”, says Abse. “It’s what the money symbolises about their fear of depending on each other.” Security is quite a nebulous concept, with many tributaries, but it feels very real when you lack it – so people attach it to money, which at least you can count, and end up “trying to earn more and more”, Abse continues, “with the idea of the magic figure: one day you’ll have this amount and then you’ll be safe”.

Before we got together, I could cut my spending if I wanted to save. I never found a way to do that with someone else

Equally, though, you can get into debt because you just don’t have enough, and then find the shame so catastrophic that you can’t admit it. Alan, a fortysomething from Warwickshire, has been divorced for five years. He and his ex had always been quite aligned on their finances and bought a house that was “well within our means”. But then his wife stopped working due to an illness, at the same time as they started a family. He started putting basics, such as food shopping, on a credit card. “We weren’t splurging. There was nothing flash about our lifestyle, we weren’t spending on fancy cars, we didn’t have foreign holidays, we didn’t go out to eat three times a week. We were living a normal lower-middle class life, spending £200 a

month more than we had. I just never felt strong enough to say: ‘We need to change the way we’re spending.’”

It spiralled fast, with Alan applying for new credit cards and balance transfers as the 0% deals ran out. When they bought a buggy for their first daughter, he paid for it, panicking that she would look over and not recognise the card he was using. “It was terrifying for me if she did the food shop, because I was trying to tighten our belt without her noticing.” Things finally came to a head when he went to work having forgotten his packed lunch. “I had all these cards in my wallet and there was none of them that I could feasibly use to buy myself a sandwich.”

When they finally had the conversation, this secret debt was £14,000. “It’s the value of a family car,” he says. “People take out a loan for 14 grand all the time and buy a Golf.” It wasn’t the money that sunk them, in other words, it was the fact, he says, that she felt completely betrayed. But even that isn’t a standalone fact. It’s underpinned by a lack of communication that itself feeds back to a lack of trust. “Before we got together, I could cut my spending if I wanted to save for something. I just never found a way to do that with someone else.”

Lying about money is similar to having affairs only in the broadest sense that all dishonesty is alike. But even if the spending is irrational, the lies tend to be experienced as calculated, so may be harder to forgive than the weakness of the flesh. “In some ways,” Abse says, “it might be even more painful for people than sexual infidelity.”

Some names have been changed

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The ObserverMoney

Calls to end needless bureaucracy adding to agony for bereaved families

A new report reveals the onerous tasks, insensitivity and long delays when people try to close the accounts of deceased relatives



Grieving families also have to face the needless bureaucracy of sorting out the deceased's finances. Photograph: Alamy



[Anna Tims](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 15 Apr 2022 12.27 EDT

Bereaved families are facing bureaucratic barriers, unsympathetic customer service staff and lengthy delays when trying to close the accounts of a deceased relative.

The Cost and Bureaucracy of Dying, a report by campaign group [Fairer Finance](#) and the death notification portal [Life Ledger](#), found that some customers' accounts were accruing charges for weeks after their death. And some investment firms were continuing to apply platform charges until the account closure had been completed.

Meanwhile, banks – including Halifax, Barclays and Bank of Scotland – charge unspecified fees that can exceed £500 for settling self-invested personal pension agreements, claiming they reflect administrative costs. Billions of pounds of assets remain stuck with banks, insurers and pension funds because of baffling red tape and a vested interest in stalling claims, the report claims.

Of the 49 savings providers surveyed, 22 require relatives to queue on a phone line, or in a branch, to notify them of a death.

The findings are borne out by readers who contacted the *Observer* after attempts to wind up a loved-one's estate were thwarted by red tape and incompetence.

When Ron McDowall's wife died of a heart attack, he sent a copy of the death certificate to her credit card provider Virgin Money, but received no response.

A follow-up call required him to negotiate numerous voice recognition prompts and a lengthy wait before he was connected to the bereavement team, which asked him to email the death certificate.

Weeks later, the bank sent a statement declaring that the account was in arrears and would incur default and interest charges.

When he contacted the bereavement team on the email address it had provided, he received an automatic reply informing him that the inbox was no longer monitored.

"The lack of responsiveness and empathy from Virgin caused me great distress," says McDowall. "The bank presented itself as an uncaring organisation which is difficult to communicate with, and does not follow up on requested actions."

After involvement from the *Observer*, Virgin Money admitted the charges had been made in error, apologised and issued a refund and compensation.

Fairer Finance is urging regulators to simplify and harmonise protocols for after a customer dies, and to ban fees for closing accounts.

Currently, there is no maximum timescale by which banks are required to respond to a request to close the account of a deceased customer. Companies differ widely on what processes they follow, and when a grant of probate is required to release funds – some may request it when there is £30,000 in the account, for example.

[A survey by consumer group Which?](#) last year found that four in 10 respondents reported waits of more than three months for a deceased's account to be closed.

When Richard Sheldon requested information about the balances in his late father's six bank accounts in order to apply for probate, he says going through needlessly complex procedures compounded his grief.

"Each bank has a different process," he says. "Most involved several lengthy telephone calls, but Marcus by Goldman Sachs insisted on a seven-page form, including a series of irrelevant declarations about indemnity and insolvency, and signatures from all three executors, which was a problem as one lives abroad."

Marcus says the form is designed to gather, in one go, the information needed to wind up accounts once probate is granted. It revealed the balance, and promised to simplify its procedures.

In 2018 the [Death Notification Service](#) was launched by the financial sector to allow organisations to be notified via a single online form. Firms then respond with details of next steps.

However, only 26 are signed up and those that are still require executors to follow their individual, sometimes onerous, verification procedures.

Madeleine Farbrother used the service to notify Clerical Medical Insurance Group (CMIG), part of Lloyds Banking, of her mother's death. "I was told they couldn't find the policy, and was referred to the Lloyds bereavement team which advised me it only deals with policies less than 10 years old," she says.

"My three emails received automated replies stating they were very busy. I repeatedly rang to be informed that it would take 157 working days to provide me with an estimate of the policy's value. Meanwhile, I was unable to apply for probate, couldn't sell my mother's flat on which I was incurring service charges, and faced having to pay council tax again."

After the *Observer* intervened, CMIG admitted a series of errors, including the claim that policies more than 10 years old could not be handled by its bereavement team. It apologised for Farbrother's "unacceptable" experience, paid her £300 in compensation, and offered to reimburse any costs caused by the delays.

Two other websites offer a one-stop notification service which goes beyond financial firms, and extends to banks, charities, subscription services and utilities.

Life Ledger was set up by Ruth Blakemore, the chief executive of a charity, after it took nearly a year to close the accounts of her late mother. “I found my dad crying, surrounded by all the paperwork, after he’d spent two days trying to sort my mother’s affairs,” she says. “There couldn’t have been a worse time for him to climb this complex mountain of admin.”

[Settld](#) offers a similar service. However, there is no obligation for firms to sign up to either portal.

Fairer Finance is calling on the government to streamline the process by launching digital death certificates, and a digital identity for consumers to which all their accounts would have to be registered.

“In today’s digital age, it should be possible to reconcile someone’s affairs after they die by completing nothing more than a single online form,” says Fairer Finance’s founder, James Daley.

It also wants the financial sector to sign up to its dignity after death charter, which commits companies to minimising bureaucracy and closing accounts within 48 hours of receiving the necessary documentation.

The Home Office says there are no plans for a digital death certificate.

Financial services trade body UK Finance says it encourages members to abide by core principles to support bereaved families, including rapid, empathetic responses.

The Financial Conduct Authority has issued [guidance](#) on the treatment of vulnerable customers, and says it will be carefully considering the recommendations of the Fairer Finance report.

This article was amended on 15 April 2022 to clarify that a reference to there being no obligation for firms to sign up to a death notification service applied to both Life Ledger and Settld (although firms do not necessarily

need to be signed up in order for users to notify them of a death via such portals).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/apr/11/calls-to-end-needless-bureaucracy-adding-to-agony-for-bereaved-families>

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‘Enjoy it while you can’. Is there a more gloomy phrase to hear while pregnant?

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Strangers are so keen to tell me my life as I know it will be over soon – thank goodness for those who have told me it will be OK



‘I’ll confess that I’ve been shocked by the negativity surrounding parenthood.’ Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Mon 11 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 12.51 EDT

“Enjoy it while you can”: how I’ve come to dislike these five little words, which have followed me everywhere since my pregnancy became obvious. Suddenly, they are applied to anything pleasurable – sleep, holidays, a meal in a restaurant. “Enjoy it while you can,” people say (because when the baby comes, your life as you know it will be over).

They mean well, I think, but I’ll confess that I’ve been shocked by the negativity surrounding parenthood. People seem to feel that they simply must tell you how hard it is, warts and all, maybe because no one told them, and they do it with the zeal of missionaries: they have seen the truth, and it is terrible to behold. Hollie McNish has a book of poetry about parenthood called *Nobody Told Me*. Mine would be called *Everybody Told Me, All the Time, Until I Had to Ask Them to Stop*.

Before I had the baby, it’s not that I thought parenthood was going to be a breeze – I just wanted to hear a tiny bit of positive feedback about it.

During pregnancy you realise pretty quickly that, for your own sanity, you will need to avoid certain subjects. In the early months, tales of miscarriage seemed to be everywhere (and this is after all the tales of fertility woe, which, in my case anyway, led to the belief that it would be near-impossible to get pregnant). If you get to 12 weeks, suddenly stories about foetal anomalies seem to spring up. And after that it's stillbirths, traumatic labours, sepsis, death. I found myself desperate to read a story along the lines of: "Woman conceives child naturally, only to carry and give birth to said child without complications."

This is not to be flippant about the very real suffering of many women, which for decades was cloaked in shameful silence. [Pregnancy](#) and birth can be dangerous and traumatising, particularly for women but also for men. Part of the reason that we are seeing these stories now is because the cult of motherhood positivity felt so suffocating. Among my friendship group are women and their partners who have suffered traumatic births, pregnancy loss and postnatal depression. Some people have become parents during the pandemic, with all of the unique challenges that poses. I have listened to their testimonies and, I hope, supported them. These conversations are often long and nuanced, and feature moments of joy as well as pain. They perhaps reflect better the experience of parenthood than many articles are able to.

No, it is the strangers who seem to present the most negativity. It is as though they think pregnant women are wandering blindly into parenthood and must be shown the light. The implication is that before embarking on this journey, we lived carefree existences without responsibility. But this is not the reality for everyone: for example, when I was a child I was a carer for my brother. Others will have nursed loved ones through illness and death, or supported them through periods of mental illness. It may not be an identical experience to that of being a parent, but there are many ways to care, and to express that care. Others who are childfree exercise their caring impulses through their family and community networks, through fostering, volunteering, political activism. Or perhaps, [snotty as the pope](#) has been about this, they care for animals. We are all a part of a collective of which caring is a crucial part.

At least, that's how I see it. Some frame parenthood as a dividing line – on the one side those who embark upon it, on the other those who don't. But I've never seen it that way: I prefer to choose solidarity.

People often say that when you are pregnant, you become public property. In Making Babies, Anne Enright writes of how, during her pregnancy, she felt she became a sort of vessel for other people's projections. "Everyone's unconscious was very close to their mouth," she writes. "Whatever my pregnant body triggered was not political, or social, it was animal and ancient and quite helpless."

Perhaps, in all the parenting negativity, we are seeing an overcorrection. An attempt to be more honest about the challenges that has spilled over into a tide that, at times, can feel overwhelming, especially to those who are prone to anxiety or have suffered from mental illness. I found myself clinging to the stories of those few strangers who smiled at my news and told me of their parenting joys: the cabby who picked me up from my first midwife appointment and told me how much he loves being a dad; the woman on holiday who vividly described nursing her son, how his little dark eyes would lock with hers so that they felt like the only two people in the world. Whenever I heard another "Enjoy it while you can", I held on to these snippets and tried not to panic.

What is working: I read in Philippa Perry's excellent The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read about some studies showing the benefits of eating chocolate in pregnancy. Not only does it apparently reduce the likelihood of pre-eclampsia, but women who ate chocolate daily during pregnancy had babies that smiled and laughed more than those who hadn't. This makes me feel even better about my near-daily trip to the nearby brownie stall.

What isn't: Packed off to triage with high blood pressure that turned out to be caused by [white coat syndrome](#), I see a woman's waters break in the waiting room. "Oh shit," she says, "my trackies." She's put in the bay next to mine. "This is the most pain I have ever been in," she yells, ensuring my blood pressure remains as high as ever. "They do say that labour is painful," her partner says, as we each contemplate ways in which we would kill him. "I mean, that shouldn't come as a surprise. They do tell you that, babe."

Birth partners: just because you're thinking it doesn't mean you should say it.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionMental health

I'm a woman with ADHD – here are all the reasons why I'm proud of it

[Mim Skinner](#)

Thanks to a flourishing ADHD positivity movement, women like me who once hid their neurodivergence are finding ways to celebrate it



Simone Biles performing in the Gold Over America tour in Los Angeles, California, September 2021. Photograph: Katharine Lotze/Getty Images

Mon 11 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 12.33 EDT

On any given day I will spend a considerable amount of time tensing my muscles to the rhythm of the national anthem. I might be driving, in a meeting or writing to a deadline, but my muscles will be sending our gracious Queen victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us. Other times, I breathe in sync with the sound of traffic going past, bite my nails or pinch myself when I'm trying to complete a task, so that if my brain decides to abandon its instructions, the sensation will serve as a reminder of them. I

often forget to buy food or take my medication, and often can't recall whether I've showered or not. My email inbox currently has 18,485 unread messages.

Still, I am luckier than most women with ADHD. I received a diagnosis at the age of seven after a school referral. But many women come to be diagnosed later, after decades of being called scatty or disorganised, plagued by guilt and anxiety. The latest [NHS figures show](#) that while more than 100,000 men were diagnosed with ADHD in 2019-20, just 33,000 women received a diagnosis. With diagnostic standards set by studies of boys and men – who tend to show symptoms such as hyperactivity, as opposed to the introverted and inattentive presentations more common in women and girls – we are often forgotten.

That is changing – thanks in part to a growing ADHD positivity community online. There's [@the_adhd_femme_collective](#), [@female_adhd](#) and my favourite, [@Iampayingattention](#). The latter is run by Jess Joy and Charlotte Mia, two young professional women with ADHD and autism who founded the account and its wider members' platform because they wanted to create a space where people could get to know themselves, and find a community who are trying to do the same. Users share advice on strategies to help them thrive, and on how to find treatment routes. They run online body-doubling sessions where you can log on and complete a frustrating task alongside others with ADHD. Women suggest coping mechanisms for concentration, such as the Pomodoro technique, which splits up work time into smaller bursts of focus. Their positive narratives around ADHD help you to train yourself out of the guilt that comes with the inability to concentrate. The BBC radio DJ Phoebe Inglis-Holmes credits the account with helping her “unpick [her] incorrect, preconceived notions about being neurodivergent”.

In contrast to the young women I see online now, I tried to conceal my ADHD for years. My sisters were sworn to secrecy at school, and I have spent much of my life in conflict with my brain, forcing myself into 9-to-5 productivity rhythms, chastising myself when my brain doesn't comply. I did freelance jobs to avoid difficult office environments. The heart of the ADHD positivity movement though is about creating a shift away from

seeing neurodivergence as a problem that needs curing, to seeing it as an asset.

Trying to see my mind as an ally is a long-term goal for me: I still feel very guilty claiming ADHD as a label. As someone who's co-founded a successful social enterprise and is publishing my second book this year, I secretly wonder whether people will think I'm making a fuss, claiming a stake in an identity that I don't deserve when other people have it worse than me. I still catch myself wishing my brain would "work properly". I'm having a baby this summer and worry that my attention-deficit will let them down too. My husband helps keep track of my prenatal appointments and is in charge of lists.

When I catch myself thinking like this, I counter it by listing the ways I benefit from ADHD, which are many and varied. For starters, I don't have the attention span for long-held grudges or neuroses. In contrast to obsessive compulsions, I often leave my door open with the keys in the lock and don't think twice about it. This ends badly less often than you'd think and is quite a relaxed way to live.

Being very aware that my brain cannot perform all the necessary tasks means I'm never too self-reliant. I'm good at celebrating those in a team who have skills that I don't. I'm able to have multiple interests and have a go at anything. Because I'm bad at planning, my coping mechanism is to be really good at troubleshooting. Knowing my flaws makes me a good team player; it can be fun and positive being impulsive.

Because I rarely feel wedded to a plan, I'm flexible – and am very happy to be guided by the enthusiasm and skills of others, which is quite an empowering way to be. Neglect of detail and structure means I find it easier to see the big picture, sweeping trends and new ideas. It also means I'm not able to comprehend some of the barriers and am comfortable challenging them. It makes me great at handling a crisis and working under pressure.

My life is quite interesting because I don't have a particularly thorough outworking of consequences. I'll attempt things that are audacious without

much thought. Last year, we bought two train carriages from a scrap yard to eventually live in. I [helped to found](#) RRefUSE, a company that has challenged unjust food systems. This year I'm staying in communes, co-living spaces and eco-villages to write about non-nuclear living. Often my ideas fail, but I can easily move on as I don't over-focus on failure.

Narratives around neurodiversity are changing. Just as we're realising that having all-white male boards in business and politics has led to weaker, uncritical governance, we're realising that neurodivergence is an asset too. The gymnast [Simone Biles](#) has spoken publicly about her diagnosis and her use of medication, tweeting "it's nothing to be ashamed of"; will.i.am has credited the condition with fostering the creativity that has helped him write music. Michael Phelps talks about how he used swimming to help him concentrate after his [diagnosis aged nine](#).

Those of us who had whispered these combinations of letters behind hands are now claiming them back – and if not quite holding them proudly now, then at least trying to.

- Mim Skinner is the author of the book *Jailbirds: Lessons from a Women's Prison* and co-founder of [RRefUSE](#). Her second book *Living Together, finding community in a fractured world* will be published later this year
 - Additional reporting for this piece by [Ashleigh Dick](#)
-

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Viewpoint columnEconomic growth (GDP)

Sunak faces calls to do more to tackle UK slowdown – much to his frustration

[Phillip Inman](#)

Chancellor resists demands for more subsidies despite cost of living crisis

- [UK economy slows more than expected](#)



Lorries queueing in Kent have everything to do with Boris Johnson's decision to pursue a hard Brexit. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Mon 11 Apr 2022 05.26 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 17.13 EDT

What is the chancellor going to do when figures charting Britain's economic growth in February show [the recovery from the pandemic was almost at a standstill](#) before the invasion of Ukraine had started?

Shopping and eating out became popular again after the restrictions put in place to deal with the Omicron outbreak were eased. Bookings at arts and entertainment venues increased. And the banking, insurance, legal and accounting sectors experienced another month of solid expansion, no doubt allowing City firms to repeat in 2022 the stellar bonuses paid to staff last year.

However, manufacturing shrank and so, too, did the wider production sector as energy-hungry businesses cut back on their use of gas and electricity to leave GDP only 0.1% higher in February.

Consumers were also beginning to feel the pinch from rising heating bills. The better-off might have ventured out to restaurants or to catch a show but [separate figures from the Bank of England](#) show many families were ramping up their borrowing on credit cards in February just to keep their heads above water.

Trade with Europe increased modestly month on month, which some analysts said was a welcome sign of a return to more normal times post-Brexit.

That was not the view of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), which said a broader view of imports and exports with EU countries showed UK firms continued to struggle with the red tape left in place after the decision to quit the EU single market and customs union.

Clearly, queues of lorries at Dover, some with rotting meat and vegetables on board, has nothing to do with the cost of living crisis or the war in Ukraine and everything to do with [the prime minister's decision to push for a hard Brexit](#).

Rishi Sunak, meanwhile, is frustrated that demands for him to take further action fail to recognise all the subsidies he has put in place over recent months.

There is £22bn of support from the government, he says, ranging from the 5p cut in fuel duty, at a cost of £2.4bn, to the freeze on alcohol duty that will

knock £3bn from government revenues over five years.

Of course, most of the £9bn energy subsidy to households is in the form of a loan and will be clawed back by the exchequer. Nevertheless, he argues the whole package does enough to keep the economy afloat.

Business groups are clear that the severity of the situation means he needs to go further, especially now that Russia's invasion is on course to be prolonged, bringing with it further sanctions on the aggressor.

Not only should there be a cap on household energy bills, there should be a cap for small businesses as well, the BCC said.

The Confederation of British Industry said there should be more generous allowances to boost investment in new plant and machinery and a revised apprenticeship levy, to get round the red tape created by Theresa May's failed plan to boost workplace training.

Sunak, still coping with revelations about his personal finances, is expected to sit tight. Meanwhile, inflation is soaring and the Bank of England has signalled its response will be to increase interest rates again in May.

All that adds up to an even bigger cost of living crisis in the months to come.

Business counts the cost of scrapping Covid rules

The business community appears to be caught in a bind over post-Covid-19 restrictions. In January, most of the main business groups welcomed the scrapping of mask wearing and an end to social distancing, but have come to regard the heightened levels of sickness among employees as a costly burden.

One of the main lobbyists against any further pandemic health support has been the chancellor. For instance, Sunak resisted calls throughout the pandemic to raise the level of sick pay by more than a few pounds, arguing it was too costly. But costly for which part of the economy?

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Last week the weekly amount workers receive in statutory sick pay increased from £96.35 to £99.35. As one HR firm put it, the money equates to an hourly rate of just £2.83 for a standard 35-hour week.

NHS officials say Easter in many hospitals will be chaotic due to the easing of restrictions and heightened infection rate. More people will be harmed or die due to a lack of staff and facilities, they say.

Surely this is yet another instance of the Treasury passing a cost to industry to save itself from paying the bill. But the bill must still be paid by somebody, somehow.

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[Opinion](#)[Global development](#)

Women are expected to keep their mouths shut here in Somalia. But not any more

Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim

Somalia's first woman to head a media house explains how she beat the odds to become a journalist and why Bilan was set up

- [All-female newsroom launched in Somalia to widen media's scope](#)



The pioneering Somali journalist Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim. 'I have had to fight many battles as a female journalist,' she says. Photograph: Bilan
Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 02.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 13.18 EDT

I really do not care whether men are interested in our stories or not. They are already well provided for by hundreds of other Somali media outlets if their only interest is politics and the endless, unproductive squabbling it involves.

Bilan's target audience is society as a whole, not just middle-aged men.

Our media's obsession with politics is like a disease. It contributes to [Somalia's everlasting conflict](#) because so many journalists take sides, provoking hatred and deepening divisions.

It is sad that our country needs a women-only media house but that is the reality here. [Women](#) are expected to babble all they like in the kitchen but to keep their mouths firmly shut in public.

For the first time, we have a space where we feel safe, physically and mentally. Never before have Somali female journalists been given the freedom, opportunity and power to decide what stories they want to tell and how they want to tell them.



Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim conducts an interview to throw light on women's lives in Somalia. Photograph: Bilan

I have been a journalist since I was a teenager in secondary school. In the 12 years I have been working, there have been stories I have never been able to tell. At last, we can report on the young girls who are brought from the bush to work as maids in the big houses of Mogadishu, where they are abused and beaten.

We will address taboo topics such as postnatal depression and child abuse. We will tell the untold stories of the remarkable women in rural areas who set up businesses to feed their families after their men go off to fight.

One reason why women's stories are rarely told in the Somali media is that most reporters are men. Bilan will change that. Women will speak to us because we too are women. They will allow us into their homes, their prayer rooms and their private spaces.

I am a strong woman. I play football, ride motorbikes and manage a gym. But I have had to fight many battles as a female journalist.

One was related to the rape of a child. An eight-year-old girl was brought by her parents from the far north of Somalia to hospital in Mogadishu after she

was raped. This was unusual as such abuse is usually kept secret because of the shame it brings to families and clans.

The minister for women visited the girl in hospital and vowed that justice would be done. This was also unusual as justice sometimes works the other way around in Somalia, where women have been arrested for reporting rape.



‘Women will speak to us because we too are women’: another interview under way for Bilan. Photograph: Bilan

I decided to make this the headline. Male colleagues ordered me to put it at the bottom, saying it was “just a community story”. I refused, I stood my ground and I won. But it was a tough fight.

All journalists are in danger in Somalia. We are targeted by Islamist militants and face the everyday risk of being blown up by suicide bombs.

Female journalists have many other challenges, starting with their families, who often believe journalism is a shameful profession for women. They face sexual harassment in the office and abuse in the streets. The youngest member of our team comes from a rural clan. It tried to force her not to become a journalist but she has courage, and has left home for the first time to join Bilan.

My family did not resist when I told them proudly that I had got a job as a journalist, earning \$50 a month. But my mother told me recently, more than a decade later, that my father had criticised her for supporting me, asking: “Do you want to cry once she is dead?”

Now they admire me. They know I am ready to confront whatever obstacles and challenges come my way.

- Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim is chief editor of Bilan, Somalia’s first all-women media house
- This article was amended on 11 April 2022 to correct the writer’s name

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- [Twitter Elon Musk will not join board after all, company’s chief executive says](#)
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Global development

Women face chronic violence in Syria's 'widow camps', report warns

Conditions drastically worse than in general camps, with some women forced to engage in 'survival sex', says World Vision



Approximately 2.8 million Syrians are living in camps for internally displaced people in the north-west of the country. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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[Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 13 Apr 2022 07.36 EDT

Women and children living in some of the hardest-to-reach camps in north-west Syria face chronic and high levels of violence and depression, with some women forced to engage in “survival sex”, a [new report](#) has revealed.

Children in so-called “widow camps” have been found to be severely neglected, abused and forced to work while mothers are at “breaking point” psychologically. More than 80% of women say they do not have adequate healthcare and 95% expressed feelings of hopelessness.

About 34% of children said that they have experienced one or more forms of violence and 2% said they married young. Child labour is a big problem with 58% of boys and 49% of girls aged 11 or older forced to work.

Of the 419 people interviewed by the NGO [World Vision](#) in 28 camps, home to tens of thousands of single women – including those who are divorced or whose husbands are missing – and their children, approximately one in four women said they had witnessed sexual abuse in the camp on a daily, weekly

or monthly basis. About 9% of respondents said they themselves had been sexually abused.

Women are not allowed to freely leave the camps, said the NGO. Unable to seek paid employment or support their families, some find they have “no choice” but to engage in so-called survival sex with male guards and camp managers.

Alexandra Matei, a lead author of the report, said: “We are seeing the world, rightly, express solidarity with the victims of the conflict in Ukraine and governments generously committed to do whatever it takes to meet the humanitarian needs there. But Syrian widows and their children deserve the same level of empathy, compassion and commitment. Their pain, their desperation, their need is no less than anyone else who is fleeing conflict.”

Fatima (not her real name), a mother of three in one of the camps, suffers from severe back pain but is unable to access healthcare.

“We do not even have bread and water,” she said. “When [children] ask for bananas, I ask them to be patient. There is nothing we can do. Water and bread are more important.”

She said it was not safe for women and girls to go to the mountain to fetch wood to heat themselves or cook.

“It is not safe at all. I have to take my neighbour or anyone with me just to not go alone. I cannot send my children on their own either, because it is not safe. I do not have anyone.”

Nearly 7 million Syrians have been displaced internally [since conflict erupted in 2011](#). About 2.8 million are living in an [estimated 1,300 camps for internally displaced people](#) in the north-west of the country.

Widow camps in Idlib and Aleppo are managed by the opposition Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and Syrian Salvation Government (SSG). Conditions there are deemed “drastically” worse than in general camps. There is little or no delivery of essential services for residents, who are experiencing what aid workers have described as “a shocking crisis within a

crisis” and “the worst of the worst” protection challenges. Access has been restricted to local NGOs.

World Vision’s report comes before the government pledging conference on Syria in Brussels in May. Funding has dropped to its lowest level since 2015 due to what the report said was “donor fatigue and Covid-19”. Less than half of the Syria humanitarian response plan was met last year. More than 14 million Syrians were in need of some form of aid as of last month, [according to the UN](#).

This article was amended on 13 April 2022. The widow camps in Idlib and Aleppo are managed by the opposition Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), not by “the Syrian opposition and the Turkish military” as an earlier version said due to incorrect information provided.

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Elon Musk

Elon Musk will not join Twitter board after all, company's chief says

Parag Agrawal says tech entrepreneur has declined offer, adding: 'I believe this is for the best'



Elon Musk, the world's richest man, was due to become a Twitter board member on Saturday. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

[Dan Milmo](#) Global technology editor

Mon 11 Apr 2022 11.00 EDTFirst published on Mon 11 Apr 2022 00.51 EDT

Elon Musk has performed a U-turn on joining Twitter's board a week after it emerged he had taken [a surprise 9.2% stake](#) in the social media company.

The world's richest man was due to become a board member on Saturday but Twitter's chief executive, Parag Agrawal, said on Monday morning that

Musk had declined the offer. Musk, who is worth \$260bn (£200bn), emerged as a large [Twitter](#) investor last week and was invited to join its board.

Announcing on Twitter that Musk would not be joining the board, Agrawal said: “I believe this is for the best. We have and will always value input from our shareholders whether they are on our board or not. Elon is our biggest shareholder and we will remain open to his input.”

Elon has decided not to join our board. I sent a brief note to the company, sharing with you all here. pic.twitter.com/lfrXACavvk

— Parag Agrawal (@paraga) [April 11, 2022](#)

After the news of the U-turn broke, Musk tweeted and then removed a hand-over-mouth emoji.

On Monday it also emerged that Musk had amended his declaration to the US financial watchdog about his investment. The [schedule 13D form](#) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission gave notice of more tweets about the company, stating that Musk might “express his views to the board and/or members of the issuer’s management team and/or the public through social media or other channels with respect to the issuer’s business, products and service offerings”.

□

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [April 11, 2022](#)

When Musk’s 9.2% stake was made public last Monday, it made him Twitter’s largest shareholder. However, a subsequent filing by Vanguard, a major US asset manager, shows the financial firm is now the biggest shareholder with [10.3% of Twitter](#), having held 8.8% previously.

Musk, an active tweeter with 81.3 million followers on the platform, followed up his stake acquisition with a series of posts proposing radical changes to the business.

Several of the multi-billionaire's posts have since been deleted. Suggestions included making Twitter's premium service ad-free, even though the company relies on advertising for 90% of its revenue. "The power of corporations to dictate policy is greatly enhanced if Twitter depends on advertising money to survive," Musk tweeted.

Other suggestions included asking users if they wanted an edit button – soon followed by Twitter confirming that it was working on an editing feature – and, more in keeping with Musk's playful tweeting style, whether Twitter should convert its headquarters in San Francisco to a homeless shelter "since no one shows up anyway".

In his statement to colleagues, which he shared on Twitter, Agrawal said the board had been "clear about the risks" of Musk joining. He said the board believed that appointing Musk as a fiduciary of the business who "has to act in the best interests of the company and all our shareholders" was the best path forward.

However, Agrawal said Musk had told the company on Saturday, the day that his appointment was due to become effective, that he would no longer be joining.

Agrawal added: "There will be distractions ahead but our goals and priorities remain unchanged. The decisions we make and how we execute is in our hands, no one else's. Let's tune out the noise and stay focused on the work and what we're building."

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Musk has frequently taken issue with Twitter's moderation policies, having said last year that "a lot of people are going to be super unhappy with West Coast hi-tech as the de facto arbiter of free speech".

In March, after acquiring his large stake in the company but before it was publicly known, he posted: "Given that Twitter serves as the de facto public

town square, failing to adhere to free speech principles fundamentally undermines democracy. What should be done?”

Musk’s use of Twitter has also caused him various legal problems, including with the SEC. In 2018 Musk and Tesla agreed to pay a total of \$40m in civil fines and for Musk to have his Tesla-related tweets approved by a corporate lawyer after he tweeted about having the money to take Tesla private at \$420 a share.

Twitter shares rose 27% last Monday, after Musk’s stake was first announced. By the end of the week the shares were up 17% and they rose a further 1.7% on Monday, valuing the business at more than \$37bn.

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Somalia

All-female newsroom launched in Somalia to widen media's scope

The pioneering Bilan project, funded by UN, will report on gender-based violence, women in politics and female entrepreneurs



Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim interviewing for Bilan. ‘Men think you should come in, read the news and go home,’ she says of attitudes from male colleagues in the media. Photograph: Bilan

[Isabel Choat](#)

Mon 11 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 17.13 EDT

The first all-women media house in [Somalia](#) has been launched, creating a rare opportunity for female journalists in the country to research and publish stories they want to tell.

Led by one of the few female senior news producers in the country, the team of six will produce content for TV, radio and online media on issues such as

gender-based violence, women in politics and female entrepreneurs.

Crucially, they will have the autonomy to make editorial decisions.

“We want to cover these issues and challenge societal beliefs that women should stay at home,” said the editor-in-chief, Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim, who has worked as a journalist for 12 years and is a founding member of the [Somali Women Journalist Organisation](#).

Women working in the media in Somalia face multiple challenges, from being ignored and denied promotions to bullying and sexually harassment. “Men think you should come in, read the news and go home,” said Ibrahim, 27.

Bilan’s deputy editor, Fathi Mohamed Ahmed , 25, said sexual harassment was rife in the media sector and she has had to develop tactics to ward off advances from male colleagues. “The biggest challenge facing female journalists in Somalia is abuse, especially from male journalists,” she said. “They offer to help you but only if you give them something in return.”

Ahmed added: “Men have said things to me like, ‘you’re beautiful, I like your body’, and it was only when I said I was engaged that they stopped.”

Bilan, which means bright and clear in Somali, will be based in the capital, Mogadishu, at Dalsan Media Group, one of the country’s largest media organisations. It will publish news and features, and provide training and mentorship from established Somali and international journalists, including the BBC’s Lyse Doucet and Razia Iqbal, Channel 4’s Lyndsey Hilsum and Mohammed Adow at Al Jazeera. Six-month internships will be offered to the best final-year female journalism students at two universities in Mogadishu.

Funded by the [United Nations](#) Development Programme (UNDP), the project is a year-long pilot, but Jocelyn Mason, UNDP’s resident representative in Mogadishu, is confident it will become a permanent set-up, and may also be extended into Somalia’s regions. “We hope this will be a gamechanger for the Somali media scene, opening up new opportunities for

women journalists and shining a light on subjects that have been ignored, particularly those that are important for women,” said Mason.

The team at Bilan includes a woman who is leaving her family for the first time to work in Mogadishu. “I come from a rural clan which does not want any of its members to become journalists, especially young women,” said Shukri Mohamed Abdi. “We come from the bush, where the concept of being a journalist does not exist.”

Another member of the team, Kiin Hasan Fakat, grew up in one of the three [Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya](#). She hopes Bilan will provide a safe and inspiring environment for women to tell their stories. “Ask any Somali who they depend on. They will always say ‘my mother’. Everything in Somalia depends on women – the economy, the home, the children, the family.”

This article was amended on 11 April 2022 to correct Nasrin Mohamed Ibrahim’s name

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/all-female-newsroom-launched-in-somalia-to-widen-medias-scope>

Johnny Depp

Johnny Depp's \$50m defamation lawsuit against Amber Heard begins

Jury selection under way as former couple face off in Virginia court in case centered on allegations of domestic violence



Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. The lawsuit comes after Depp lost a similar defamation case brought against News Group Newspapers in the UK in 2020. Photograph: AP

[Edward Helmore](#) in New York and agencies

Mon 11 Apr 2022 13.34 EDTFirst published on Mon 11 Apr 2022 04.21 EDT

Johnny Depp has lost one high-profile defamation case involving his ex-wife, [Amber Heard](#), in a London court. On Monday, the 58-year-old actor launched a sequel in Fairfax, Virginia, as part of an effort to refute career-damaging allegations that he abused Heard during their three-year marriage.

Ahead of jury selection, [a court order said](#) fans of the two celebrities could not “camp on courthouse grounds” and added: “Litigants and their legal teams in this trial will not pose for pictures or sign autographs in the courthouse or on courthouse grounds.” Contravention of the order would be treated on grounds of contempt.

The Virginia case centers on an op-ed Heard, 35, [published in the Washington Post](#) in 2019, in which she wrote that she had become “a public figure representing domestic abuse”. The piece did not mention Depp by name or go into details, but it also said she had experienced “the full force of our culture’s wrath for women who speak out”.

The London libel action, which Depp brought against the Sun after it described him as “wife beater”, ended with the judge ruling the article in question was “substantially true”. During the trial, the court heard testimony from Heard that she was in “fear for her life” during several encounters with the actor. Depp was refused permission to appeal.

In Depp’s new legal action, which could last six weeks, the actor and his lawyers must under US law reach a higher burden of proof, showing Heard not only defamed him but did so with malice.

Depp’s lawyers claim Heard orchestrated an elaborate hoax in order to cripple Depp’s career, an allegation that led her to file a \$100m counter-claim. They plan to introduce witness testimony and review texts and photographs – all carried live on [Court TV](#). If successful, Depp’s lawyers have said they will ask the judge, Penney Azcarate, to award \$50m in damages.

Last week, Heard issued [a statement](#) to her 4.1 million Instagram followers, saying she continued to pay a price for speaking out against men in power.

“Hopefully when this case concludes, I can move on and so can Johnny,” she wrote.

The trial comes at a highly sensitive moment for Depp, who has seen film parts dry up, and for the US film industry, which despite efforts at behavioral

and representational reform was recently tarnished during the Oscars ceremony when Will Smith slapped host Chris Rock on stage.

For Depp, who ranks among the top 10 highest-grossing movie stars of all time, the trial represents perhaps a last opportunity to salvage his career. As recently as 2010, he was earning \$75m a year after making the transition from the brooding teen dream of 21 Jump Street to lead roles in light-entertainment blockbusters including the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise.

“His ability to almost guarantee a big box office … means studios are willing to pay whatever it takes to get a bit of the Depp magic,” [Forbes](#) noted then.

But Depp’s image lost its shine with tales of off-screen excess before his star power was all-but extinguished during the London high court action.

He was dropped from the Pirates and Fantastic Beasts franchises and has only appeared in relatively small-budget movies, City of Lies and Minamata, which were filmed before the London verdict and collectively made \$5m. He does, however, have a voice-over part in an upcoming animation, Puffins Impossible.

In 2020, the [Hollywood Reporter](#) quoted a studio source saying: “You simply can’t work with him now. He’s radioactive.”

The French luxury house Dior was roundly criticized for keeping Depp as the face of its Sauvage fragrance.

After the UK ruling, Heard’s lawyers filed to have Depp’s claim in Virginia dismissed. Judge Azcarate rejected the motion, saying it would set a “dangerous precedent” since libel laws in the US and the UK are substantially different.

But as the trial opens, Heard’s lawyers are likely to invoke a Virginia law that creates immunity from civil liability for individuals under certain circumstances, including defamation based solely on statements that are made either to third parties regarding “matters of public concern that would be protected under the first amendment” to the US constitution.

Heard's lawyer, Elaine Bredehoft, has argued the article in question addressed a very serious issue of public concern: domestic violence. Depp's lawyers have argued that the law does not apply, because Heard's claims pertain to Depp's alleged personal behavior.

- *Press Association contributed to this report*
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Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka nearly out of medicine as doctors warn toll from crisis could surpass Covid

Emergency surgery may soon be impossible, president told, while protests continue amid worsening economic downturn



Protesters outside the Sri Lankan president's office call for his resignation as anger mounts over the country's deepening economic crisis. Photograph: Tharaka Basnayaka/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Agence France-Presse in Colombo

Sun 10 Apr 2022 19.46 EDT Last modified on Mon 11 Apr 2022 13.06 EDT

Sri Lanka's doctors have warned they are almost out of life-saving medicines and say the country's economic crisis threatened a worse death toll than the coronavirus pandemic.

Weeks of power blackouts and severe shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals have brought widespread misery to Sri Lanka, which is suffering its worst downturn since independence in 1948.

The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) said all hospitals in the country no longer had access to imported medical tools and vital drugs.

Several facilities have already suspended routine surgeries since last month because they were dangerously low on anaesthetics, but the SLMA said that even emergency procedures might not be possible very soon.

“We are made to make very difficult choices. We have to decide who gets treatment and who will not,” the group said on Sunday, after releasing a letter it had sent President Gotabaya Rajapaksa days earlier to warn him of the situation. “If supplies are not restored within days, the casualties will be far worse than from the pandemic.”

Mounting public anger over the crisis has seen large protests calling for Rajapaksa’s resignation.

Thousands of people braved heavy rains to keep up a demonstration outside the leader’s seafront office in the capital of Colombo for a second day.

Business leaders joined calls for the president to step down on Saturday and said the island nation’s chronic fuel shortages had seen their operations haemorrhage cash.

Rajapaksa’s government is seeking an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout to help extricate Sri Lanka from the crisis, which has seen skyrocketing food prices and the local currency collapse in value by a third in the past month.

Finance ministry officials have said sovereign bond-holders and other creditors may have to take a haircut as Colombo seeks to restructure its debt.

The new finance minister, Ali Sabry, told parliament on Friday that he expected \$3bn from the IMF to support the island’s balance of payments in

the next three years.

A critical lack of foreign currency has left Sri Lanka struggling to service its ballooning \$51bn foreign debt, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

Economists say Sri Lanka's crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/sri-lanka-nearly-out-of-medicine-as-doctors-warn-toll-from-crisis-could-surpass-covid>

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