

The Guardian Weekly

*Far right surges across EU*₁₀

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*

14 JUNE 2024 | VOL. 210 No. 24 | £5.95 | €9

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Eyewitness Mali

PHOTOGRAPH:
OUSMANE MAKAVELI/AFP/GETTY

☛ Rain or shine

An aerial view shows people fishing during the Sanké mon collective fishing rite in the town of San, Ségou region. The rite, which lasts for 15 hours, commemorates the founding of the town and marks the beginning of the rainy season. It is held every second Thursday of the seventh lunar month.



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Founded in Manchester,
England
4 July 1919

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A week in the life of the world
14 JUNE 2024

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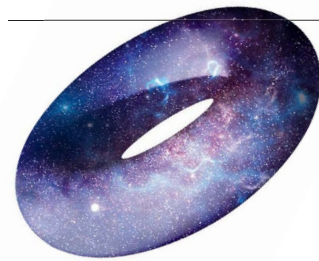
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*“
Entirely
different
concepts have
been confused.
Elections are
not democracy
and democracy
is not elections
”*



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SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS:
MATT BLEASE



On the cover Unaccompanied child migrants across Europe are being forced to work as soldiers for increasingly powerful drug cartels to meet the continent's soaring appetite for cocaine, a Guardian investigation has found. EU police have warned of industrial-scale exploitation of African children by networks operating in cities including Paris and Brussels.
Illustration: Carl Godfrey

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

GW

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Published weekly by Guardian News & Media Ltd, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London, N1 9GU, UK

Printed in the UK, Denmark, the US, Australia and New Zealand

ISSN 0958-9996

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1 FRANCE

Macron stuns nation by calling snap election

President Emmanuel Macron announced snap legislative elections following a drubbing at the hands of the far-right National Rally (RN) in last Sunday's European parliamentary elections. The RN won about 32% of the vote, more than double the 15% or so scored by Macron's allies, according to exit polls. The Socialists on 14% came within a whisker of the Macron group. Macron's Renaissance party currently has 169 deputies in the national assembly and the RN 88.

The unexpected decision, which amounts to a roll of the dice on Macron's political future, could hand major political power to the far right and neuter his presidency three years before it ends. If the far-right party wins an outright majority, the president would in effect lose control over most French domestic policy.

"This will be the most consequential parliamentary election for France and for the French in the history of the Fifth Republic," the finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, told RTL radio. The vote will take place on 30 June - less than a month before the start of the Paris Olympics - with a second round on 7 July.

The big story Page 10 →



2 US/UKRAINE



Biden apology comes with \$225m more in aid to Kyiv

Joe Biden apologised publicly to Volodymyr Zelenskyy for the months of delay in American military assistance that allowed Russia to make gains on the battlefield. Biden was referring to the uncertainty while Congress waited six months before sending a \$61bn military aid package for Ukraine in April. Meeting Zelenskyy in Paris last Friday, Biden announced a further \$225m in military aid to Ukraine.

The two presidents had attended the 80th anniversary D-day events, along with European leaders who have supported Kyiv's efforts in the war. In Normandy, Biden drew a link between the fight to liberate Europe from Nazi domination and today's fight against Russian aggression.

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4 BELGIUM

New seven-party coalition could take months to build

The prime minister tendered his resignation following a visit to the King, after his Flemish Liberals and Democrats party (Open VLD) suffered heavy defeats in last Sunday's general election.

Alexander De Croo will remain caretaker prime minister until a new coalition, involving seven parties, is formed, a process that could take months.

A new government is likely to coalesce around the rightwing New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), which beat its arch-rival, the far-right Vlaams Belang, into second place in the key Dutch-speaking Flanders region where it had been predicted to top the polls.

"Our obituaries were written, but we won these elections," said N-VA leader Bart De Wever, who now looks a good bet to become Belgium's next prime minister.

"This is a particularly difficult evening for us, the signal from the voters has been clear," De Croo told supporters last Sunday, wiping a tear from his eye.

The French-speaking liberal party Mouvement Reformateur was the biggest winner in Brussels and French-speaking Wallonia.

3 UNITED STATES

No presidential pardon for son, Joe Biden signals

Joe Biden indicated that he will not pardon his son Hunter if he is convicted at his federal gun trial, where the prosecution rested its case last Friday in Delaware and Naomi Biden took the stand in defence of her father.

Hunter Biden has been charged with three felonies: lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days. He also faces a trial scheduled for September on felony charges alleging he failed to pay at least \$1.4m in taxes over four years.

5 UNITED STATES

UK tech tycoon Mike Lynch not guilty of fraud charges

British tech tycoon Mike Lynch was found not guilty on all 15 counts of fraud he faced over Hewlett-Packard's \$11.1bn purchase of his company Autonomy in 2011.

Lynch's trial began in March in San Francisco after a lengthy extradition battle. He was first charged in 2018, accused of inflating sales, misleading regulators and duping his eventual buyer. HP wrote down the value of his company soon after the deal closed, alleging it discovered major accounting improprieties. Lynch maintained his innocence throughout the proceedings.

6 UNITED STATES

Cocaine worth \$63m seized after maritime shootout

A high-seas shootout ended with a smugglers' boat at the bottom of the Caribbean Sea and the US Coast Guard seizing \$63m worth of cocaine, authorities in Florida said. The dramatic encounter took place last week about 40km north of Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, when the coast guard cutter Resolute - patrolling with the Dutch navy ship Groningen - identified a vessel in international waters suspected of carrying narcotics, according to a USCG press release.

The "non-compliant vessel" was turned at speed towards the enforcement vessels, and the boat caught fire and sank. A search for the three people onboard found no survivors. Resolute docked at Port Everglades, Florida, and unloaded more than 2,177kg of cocaine recovered from the scene.

Special report [Page 15](#) →

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8 SPAIN

Fans jailed over racist abuse of Brazilian footballer

Three Valencia fans were sentenced to eight months in prison on Monday for hate crimes against Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior, in what La Liga - the top men's division - called the first conviction related to racist abuse at a football match in Spain.

During a match in May last year, several fans hurled racist slurs at the Brazilian footballer, causing the game to stop for several minutes as Vinicius pointed to a Valencia fan in the stands, telling his teammates that the man had called him a monkey and made the gestures of an ape.

While Valencia moved to ban the fans from their stadium, Vinicius vowed to fight on. "I will go up against the racists until the very end," he said.

7

4

1

10 FRANCE

**Second world war veteran, 100, ties knot in Normandy**

Second world war veteran Harold Terens and his sweetheart Jeanne Swerlin tied the knot last Saturday inland from Normandy's D-day beaches.

Terens, 100, called it the best day of his life. Swerlin, 96, said: "It's not just for young people, love, you know? We get butterflies. And we get a little action, also."

The location was the town hall of Carentan, a key D-day objective that saw ferocious fighting after the allied forces' landings on 6 June 1944. The wedding was not binding in law. Mayor Jean-Pierre Lhonneur's office said he wasn't empowered to wed non-resident foreign citizens. The couple, both widowed, are American.

7 DENMARK

**No 'political motive' for attack on PM Frederiksen**

An attack on the prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, which left her "shaken" and with a whiplash injury, was probably not "politically motivated", Danish authorities have said.

A 39-year-old Polish man, who was apprehended after allegedly hitting the prime minister last Friday evening, was remanded in custody after appearing before a Copenhagen court. Frederiksen, a Social Democrat who has been prime minister since 2019, was taken to hospital for a check-up and her official events for last Saturday were cancelled.

9 ARGENTINA

Milei to shut gender-based violence unit in cost-cuts

Far-right president Javier Milei is poised to dissolve the government department responsible for tackling gender violence, prompting a backlash from human rights activists. Claudia Barcia, the head of the undersecretariat for protection against gender violence, resigned last week with a warning, later confirmed, that the agency will shut.

The decision comes as Milei's administration cuts back on government spending and imposes sweeping austerity measures. The country is suffering one of the highest inflation rates in the world, with more than half of the population living in poverty.

12 ISRAEL/PALESTINE

UN security council endorses US Gaza plan

The UN security council adopted a resolution calling for Hamas to agree to a three-phase hostage-for-ceasefire proposal outlined by Joe Biden, the first time the body has endorsed a comprehensive peace deal to end the war in Gaza.

A Hamas statement said the group welcomed the resolution. The Israeli government has also officially accepted the peace plan but the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has sought to distance himself from it, and his coalition has shifted to the right after the former army chief of staff and centre-right National Unity party leader Benny Gantz resigned from the war cabinet last weekend.

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14 YEMEN

Houthi rebels detain 11 Yemenis working for UN

Houthis detained 11 Yemeni employees of UN agencies under unclear circumstances, authorities say, as the militia group faces increasing financial pressure and airstrikes from a US-led coalition. UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said 11 UN staffers had been taken.

People working for other aid groups also have been detained. The Maymun Organisation for Human Rights named other aid groups whose employees were detained by the Houthis across four provinces that the rebel group holds – Amran, Hodeida, Saada and Saana.

13 SOUTH AFRICA



President seeks to form national unity government

President Cyril Ramaphosa said that his African National Congress (ANC) would seek to form a government of national unity with a broad group of opposition parties. In last month's general election, the ANC won just over 40% of the vote and 159 seats in the National Assembly, falling short of an outright majority for the first time.

There had been speculation the party might seek to form a minority government or a coalition with one or two major parties, but in the end Ramaphosa invited all his rivals to talks.

11 IRAN

Clerics approve candidates for presidential election

The Guardian Council approved the country's hardline parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, 62, a former Tehran mayor, and five others to run in the country's 28 June presidential election after a helicopter crash that killed the president, Ebrahim Raisi, and seven others.

The council again barred the former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a firebrand populist known for the crackdown that followed his disputed 2009 re-election, from running.

The decision by the council, a panel of clerics, represents the starting gun for a shortened, two-week campaign. Recent votes had record-low turnout.

Global report

15 DR CONGO

**Three US citizens among defendants in coup trial**

More than 50 people, including three US citizens and a Belgian, went on trial in Kinshasa over what the army has described as an attempted coup.

The actions of the three Americans were “punishable by death”, Judge Freddy Ehume told the military court.

Taylor Christian Thomson and Marcel Malanga, both 21, and 36-year-old Benjamin Reuben Zalman-Polun (above, from left) were the first of the defendants to take the stand.

The alleged coup attempt occurred on 19 May, when armed men attacked the home of the economy minister, Vital Kamerhe, before moving on to the nearby Palais de la Nation that houses President Félix Tshisekedi's offices.

17 SOUTH KOREA

Plan to raise birthrate labelled ‘absurd’ by critics

A government thinktank sparked anger after suggesting that girls start primary school a year earlier than boys because the measure could raise the country's low birthrate.

A report by analysts at the Korea Institute of Public Finance said creating a one-year age gap between girls and boys at school would make them more attractive to each other by the time they reached marriageable age.

The claim is based on the idea that men are naturally attracted to younger women because men mature more slowly.

“Having females enter school one year earlier could potentially contribute to men and women finding each other more attractive when they reach the appropriate age for marriage,” the report on tackling the decline in the working population said.

The suggestion is one of several ideas put forward to address South Korea's demographic situation. Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the main opposition party, described the report's recommendations as “absurd”; other critics labelled the suggestion as “ridiculous”.

19 AUSTRALIA

King George V statue beheaded on public holiday

A statue of King George V was beheaded and covered in red paint in Melbourne in the latest attack on colonial monuments in Victoria. Police were called to the statue on Monday. Victoria, and most other states in Australia, held a public holiday on Monday to observe King Charles's birthday.

“It appears the head of the statue has been removed and red paint thrown at the monument,” a police spokesperson said.

Other statues have been the target of vandals this year, including a statue of Capt James Cook that was cut at the ankles before it was toppled in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne, in February. Another Capt Cook statue, in the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda, was also sawn off at the ankles the day before Australia Day in January.



DEATHS



William Anders
US astronaut who took the celebrated 1968 Earthrise photograph during the Apollo 8 mission to orbit the moon. He died on 7 June, aged 90.

James Lawson Jr
Nonviolent US protest pioneer, pastor and professor, who was a close adviser to Martin Luther King Jr. He died on 9 June, aged 95.

John Blackman
Australian TV and radio star. He died on 4 June, aged 76.

Christophe Deloire
French head of media freedom group Reporters Without Borders. He died on 8 June, aged 53.

Janis Paige
Hollywood actor and singer who created the role of ‘Babe’ Williams in the Broadway musical The Pajama Game. She died on 2 June, aged 101.

Jeannette Charles
Elizabeth II's most famous lookalike. She died on 2 June, aged 96.

16 SUDAN

Attack forces last hospital in North Darfur to close

The last functioning hospital in El Fasher closed after an attack by paramilitaries trying to seize the key city, the charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has said.

El Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state, is the only state capital in the vast western region not under Rapid Support Forces (RSF) control, and a key humanitarian hub for a region on the brink of famine.

“On Saturday, MSF and the ministry of health suspended all activities in South Hospital, El Fasher, after RSF soldiers stormed the facility,” said MSF in a statement posted on X last Sunday.

18 INDIA

Opposition coalition key in blocking Modi majority

The Indian National Congress, the country's only national opposition party, in coalition with other parties and united under the acronym India, won 234 seats in the election, taking more than 60 from Narendra Modi's BJP and preventing his party from forming a majority government.

“We fought as one,” said Rahul Gandhi, the best-known face of the Congress party, after results were announced.

Congress almost doubled its number of parliamentary seats to 99 and Gandhi won both the seats he was contesting by a landslide.

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20 HONG KONG

More overseas judges resign from top court

Two of the last remaining British judges and a Canadian judge who sat on Hong Kong's top court resigned last Thursday.

Lawrence Collins and Jonathan Sumption, former UK supreme court justices, and former chief justice of Canada's supreme court, Beverley McLachlin's resignations came after 14 people were found guilty of conspiracy to commit subversion in the biggest national security trial of pro-democracy activists. Seven overseas judges remain on the bench of Hong Kong's court of final appeal. The city's legal system is derived from English common law.



ELECTION 2024

PM vows to keep fighting despite dismal poll showing

A defiant Rishi Sunak vowed to fight on until the last day of the election campaign after a torrid week in which the prime minister was criticised for missing part of the D-day commemorations.

On Monday, the prime minister said he could still win back voters in the 4 July election and he did not accept that the result was a foregone conclusion. Sunak said he was still fighting despite polls showing the Conservatives are 20 points behind Labour. "There's lots of people who want to write me off ... I'm not going to stop going. I'm not going to stop fighting for the future of our country. I believe in what we are doing."

Both the prime minister and the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, are under pressure to explain how they would fund government spending after the election, after the Institute for Fiscal Studies repeated its criticism of both their parties' economic plans.

The IFS director, Paul Johnson, said: "The more that [political leaders] say 'we're not going to increase council tax', 'we're not going to increase income tax', national insurance contributions and so on, the more they tie themselves into either not being able to raise the money they need or raising it in ways which are actually more damaging."

Starmer rejected that criticism, insisting that Labour could make its economic plans work by growing the economy.

"It is always tempting for a government to go to tax and spend but I'm not going to pull those levers," he said. "We don't intend to pull those levers. We want to go to the lever marked growth."



2.75

The amount, in billions of pounds (\$3.5bn), that English and Scottish football fans are expected to spend on items including beer, pizzas and new TVs during the men's Euro 2024 tournament, which kicks off this week

WALES

Gething loses confidence vote after 12 weeks in office

The Welsh first minister, Vaughan Gething, lost a confidence vote less than 12 weeks after taking office, following a series of scandals that have called into question his judgment and transparency.

The motion of no confidence was tabled by the Tories and backed by Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, but Gething has also lost the backing of some in his own party.

Gething's leadership has been damaged and pressure on him to step down is bound to grow.

His tenure has been overshadowed by £200,000 (\$250,000) in donations for his leadership campaign that he took from a company whose owner was convicted of dumping waste on the Gwent Levels in south Wales.

CULTURE

Campaign launched to save 'ugly' 1980s phone boxes

Campaigners are trying to secure listed status for the "boringly ugly" telephone boxes that BT used to replace thousands of red phone boxes in the 1980s.

The Twentieth Century Society, which champions outstanding examples of modern design, has applied for listed status for one KX100 box each in England, Scotland and Wales before they are removed next year.



UK NEWS

TV doctor Mosley found dead on Greek island

The British TV presenter Michael Mosley was found dead on the Greek island of Symi last Sunday. Mosley had gone missing after going for a walk on the island last Wednesday. His body was discovered on rocky terrain, next to a small resort accessible only by boat or by foot.

Mosley, 67, a Daily Mail columnist, made a number of documentaries about diet and exercise. He was also credited for the rising popularity of the 5:2 diet, which involves fasting for two days a week to lose weight. He was named medical journalist of the year by the British Medical Association in 1995.



LAW

Baby Reindeer's 'real Martha' sues Netflix

The woman who identified herself as the inspiration behind the character Martha Scott in the hit Netflix drama series Baby Reindeer has filed a \$170m lawsuit against the streaming giant.

In a lawsuit filed last Thursday in the US district court for the central district of California, Fiona Harvey accused Netflix of defamation, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligence, gross negligence and violations of her right of publicity.

It follows the success of the series starring Richard Gadd, a writer and actor who created the show based on his own experiences of being allegedly stalked.

Harvey has identified herself as the inspiration behind the series but denied being a stalker, as well as claims that she sent Gadd 41,000 emails, hundreds of voice messages and 106 letters.

A Netflix spokesperson said: "We intend to defend this matter vigorously and to stand by Richard Gadd's right to tell his story."



Do you have a recently taken picture you'd like to share with Guardian Weekly? Scan the QR code or visit theguardian.com/pictures-guardian-weekly and we'll print your best submissions

Reader's eyewitness Off guard

'A rare chance since as a rule for all travellers in Iran, you should never take photos of the policemen. However, these four requested me to take pictures of them with my camera, which they believed was better than their smartphones.'

By 'Kan', pseudonym at photographer's request, Kerman, Iran



SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



MEDICAL RESEARCH

Gene therapy trial gives deaf children hearing in both ears

Five children who were born deaf now have hearing in both ears after taking part in an "astounding" gene therapy trial that raises hopes for further treatments.

Doctors at Fudan University in Shanghai treated the children, aged between one and 11, in both ears in the hope they would gain 3D hearing. Within weeks the children could locate the sources of sounds and recognised speech in noisy environments. Two of the children were recorded dancing to music, the researchers said in *Nature Medicine*.

POLLUTION

Animals left addicted and anxious by human drugs

Drug exposure is causing significant changes to the behaviour and anatomy of some animals - from brown trout becoming "addicted" to methamphetamine to the

contraceptive pill causing sex reversal in some fish populations, leading to a collapse in numbers and local extinction events as male fish reverted to female organs.

Michael Bertram, an assistant professor at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, said: "Active pharmaceutical ingredients are found in waterways all around the globe, including in organisms that we might eat."

In a paper published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, researchers said the pharmaceutical industry must urgently reform the design of drugs to make them greener.

ASTRONOMY

Carbon detected in galaxy just 350m years after big bang

Astronomers have detected carbon in a galaxy observed just 350m years after the big bang, in observations that raise the possibility that the conditions for life were present almost from the dawn of time.

The observations, made by the James Webb space telescope, suggest vast amounts of carbon were released when the first generation of stars exploded in supernovae. Carbon is a building block for life,

but was previously thought to have emerged later in cosmic history.

"This is the earliest detection of an element heavier than hydrogen," said Prof Roberto Maiolino, an astronomer at the University of Cambridge and a co-author of the findings, due to be published in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

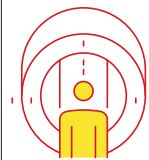
NEUROLOGY

Women perform better when menstruating, study finds

Women make fewer mistakes and have better mental agility while on their period despite feeling worse than at any other time during their menstrual cycle, research suggests.

The research, by University College London's Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health, found women's reaction times, accuracy and attention to detail were heightened while menstruating, challenging hypotheses on how women perform in sports during their period.

The study, in the journal *Neuropsychologia*, involved data from 241 participants (including 96 who were male and 47 women who were not regularly menstruating due to their contraception, for comparative purposes).



80%

Accuracy level of a 10-minute brain scan that could detect dementia up to nine years before people develop noticeable symptoms, a study suggests



📍 National Rally supporters in Paris react as the European election polls closed last Sunday

SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS; LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The big story
European elections

Far-right gains in last weekend's EU polls sent shockwaves across the continent - and prompted Emmanuel Macron to call a high-risk snap election in France. Is Europe on the brink of a political earthquake?

Into the void

FRANCE
By *Angelique Chrisafis* SOISSONS

Everyone is in total shock," said Baptiste Lopata, a radiologist, sitting in his trade union office in the small northern French town of Soissons. "Now we've all got to mobilise against the far right."

When Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration, far-right National Rally (RN) won a historic victory in the European elections last Sunday night, its highest scores were here, in the north-eastern department of L'Aisne, where it won over 50%, and even 60% in some rural villages, compared to a 31% score nationwide.

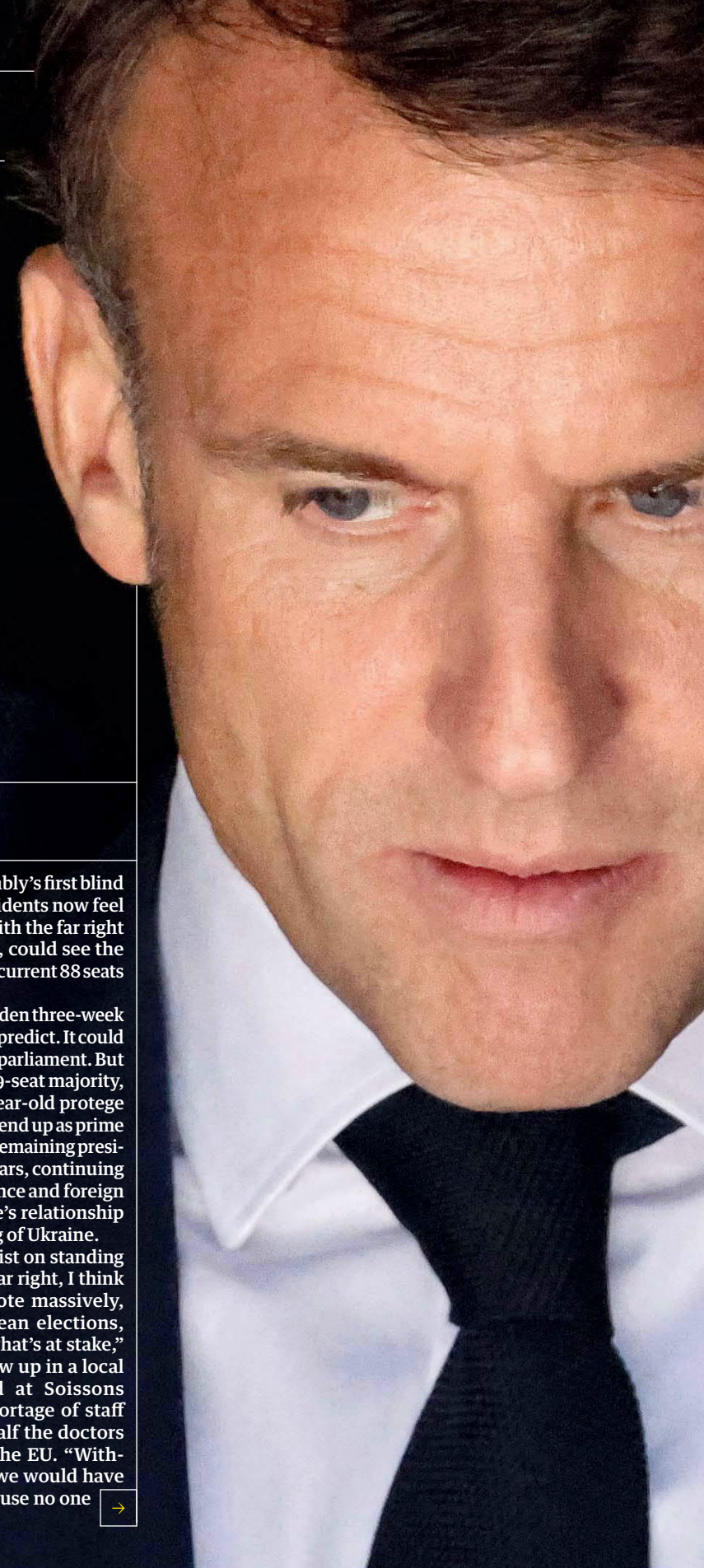
The far right's huge success was expected in this heartland area, which is ageing, underpopulated, has higher than average unemployment and poverty, and a history of factory closures. Instead, the real shock was Emmanuel Macron's sudden decision to dissolve parliament and call a snap election.

Two years ago, Lopata's area of Soissons elected an RN member of parliament, José Beaurain, a professional piano-tuner who was the

French national assembly's first blind MP since the war. Residents now feel that a snap election with the far right on an upwards trend, could see the party increase from its current 88 seats to more than 200.

The result of the sudden three-week election race is hard to predict. It could result in another hung parliament. But if the RN reached a 289-seat majority, Le Pen's popular 28-year-old protégé Jordan Bardella would end up as prime minister with Macron remaining president for three more years, continuing to be in charge of defence and foreign policy, namely France's relationship with Nato and backing of Ukraine.

"We're going to insist on standing together against the far right, I think young people will vote massively, unlike in the European elections, because they know what's at stake," said Lopata, who grew up in a local village and worked at Soissons hospital, where a shortage of staff means that almost half the doctors come from outside the EU. "Without foreign doctors, we would have no doctors at all, because no one wants to come here."





▲ Emmanuel and Brigitte Macron cast their votes in Le Touquet

HANNAH MCKAY/GETTY

'I think young people will vote massively, because they know what's at stake'

► Marine Le Pen delivers a victory speech

DANIEL DORKO/HANS LUCAS/AFP/GETTY

Across France, there was bafflement at Macron's sudden decision to call an election when he was in a weak political position and Le Pen's party was on a high.

Macron's centrist grouping had dropped to a historic low of less than 15% in the European elections with many voting to punish him personally, two years after it failed to win a majority in parliament and forced through unpopular changes, such as raising the pension age.

By contrast, Le Pen's party greatly expanded its voter base from its working-class heartlands to higher-earning graduates, topping the polls in an unprecedented 93% of communes across France, including in Brittany and the Ile de France area outside Paris, which had traditionally been hostile to its policies.

Faced with Le Pen's rise, the left, centrists and traditional right had been expecting to spend the next three years strategising about how to counter her in the 2027 presidential election. Suddenly they now face mobilising in less than three weeks.

Some opposition politicians speculated that Macron had feared a vote of confidence on the government's autumn budget and felt it was better to act fast.

Crucially, those close to Macron felt confident the French people would not ultimately vote for a far-right government. "We're going for the win," a member of Macron's entourage said. Calling the snap election was a way to try to diffuse "a kind of fever and disorder in parliament that makes action difficult".

The French left were more cautious, suggesting Macron was taking a reckless gamble. They said Macron was potentially opening the doors of government to a party, which though it had changed its name from Front National, was founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen, and for decades was seen as a danger to democracy that promoted racist, antisemitic and Islamophobic views.

On the high-street in Soissons, Karim, 29, who runs a fast-food restaurant in Paris, grew up in the *banlieue* town of Aubervilliers. He was visiting his parents who had retired to l'Aisne. "What will it change if Le Pen's party gets in?" he said. "Yes there may well be more racism, but let's be honest there is already a massive amount of racism in France and it is increasing year on year."

Joël, 60, a forklift truck driver in Soissons, said he'd voted for Bardella out of frustration and anger at not being able to make ends meet. On paid sick-leave and renting an apartment from a private landlord, he said his bank account was empty by the end of the month. "There's no sense of justice, it feels like public services don't work. I hope things will change." He felt Macron was an "egotist" who didn't understand workers' lives.

Joël had worked in all sorts of jobs, from park-keeper to picking the champagne grape harvest. His father had worked in a canning factory but factories here closed down and "Europe finished us off", he said. He used to vote for the rightwing Jacques Chirac

and said he didn't have anything against immigrants, "but we should close our borders anyway."

Another resident, Matthieu, 21, a finance student from Soissons who was at university in Lille, and voted for the traditional right Les Républicains said: "I wasn't surprised Macron called an election, he didn't have an absolute majority, he was stuck." Matthieu had voted tactically for Macron in the past to keep out Le Pen in the 2022 presidential election. "I'll vote again to keep the far right out," he said.

Alain, 73, a retired senior civil servant, had voted Macron because he was pro-Europe and supported Ukraine against Russia. He was shaken by Macron's decision to call a sudden election. "I'm not rejoicing about this, I can tell you that," he said. "Macron was in difficulty in parliament and maybe he thought he just couldn't carry on," he added.

In Alain's village of 300 people in L'Aisne, the combined vote for anti-immigration far-right candidates had risen to 50%. "But I've never even seen an immigrant in our village."

ANGELIQUE CHRISAFIS IS THE GUARDIAN'S PARIS CORRESPONDENT



Seats summary *Provisional results, as at 10 June*

Left	S&D	Green /EFA	Renew	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Others
36	135	53	79	186	73	58	45	55
-1	-4	-19	-23	+10	+4	+9		

Source: European parliament. +/- change from the outgoing parliament in 2024. Note: the total number of seats has increased by 15

Centre parked Mainstream alliance holds in the face of far-right surge

By Jon Henley



So in the end, with a couple of alarming wobbles, the centre held in Europe.

As polls predicted, the mainstream pro-EU alliance of centre-right, centre-left, liberal and Green parties in the European parliament hung on, comfortably, to its majority.

National conservative and far-right forces made big gains, ending up with just under a quarter of MEPs in the 720-seat assembly – their highest tally ever. But in some places they fared worse than forecast.

Where they did do well, they did very well, most notably in France, where Emmanuel Macron's humbling 15%-32% defeat by Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) pushed the French president into the huge gamble of calling a snap legislative election.

In Germany, too, despite a number of scandals including Nazi whitewashing, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) garnered a higher percentage of the national vote (16%) than any of the three parties that make up the beleaguered coalition of the chancellor, Olaf Scholz.

These are worrying developments in the two countries that have traditionally acted as the motor

that has driven the EU forward. France faces the risk of a far-right majority in parliament, while Germany's government has been further weakened.

Brothers of Italy, led by the Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, was a big winner, too, scoring 28%. But outside those big three member states – and Austria, where FPÖ, as long predicted, finished first on 26% – the hard right's scores often underwhelmed.

Belgium's Vlaams Belang scored less than 14%, as did the Danish People's party (6.4%). The Finns (7.6%) and the Sweden Democrats (13%), both of which are either in or supporting rightwing governments, disappointed.

In Poland, Law & Justice (PiS) was narrowly defeated by Donald Tusk's Civic Coalition. Spain's Vox failed to clear 10%, Geert Wilders' Freedom party (PVV), winners of the last Dutch national election, wound up with three fewer seats than the Labour/Green Left Alliance, and in Hungary, Viktor Orbán



Despite their gains, rightwing groups' divisions will limit their impact



► AfD leaders Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel celebrate

had his worst night in years.

Overall the results were broadly in line with expectations. "More than anything, these elections reflect developments at the national level," said Cas Mudde, an expert in populism and the radical right at the University of Georgia.

Mudde said developments undoubtedly included highly unpopular incumbent governments. But if anything, judged against their current strength at national level across the bloc, the far right was now "underrepresented at European level".

The elections' main impact, consequently, is likely to be most felt in national capitals – particularly Paris and Berlin.

In the European parliament, the centre-right European People's party (EPP), the centre-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the liberals of Renew are on course for more than 400 MEPs.

Adding in the Greens, which shed about a quarter of their seats but were left with more than 50, that gives the pro-European mainstream "centre" a total of about 455 MEPs – a reduced but still relatively comfortable majority in the 720-seat assembly.

Meanwhile, the combined hard right, splintered into Meloni's national-conservative ECR, Le Pen's far-right Identity and Democracy (ID), and assorted (thus far) non-aligned parties, including AfD and Orbán's Fidesz, can count on perhaps 145.

Mujtaba Rahman, of the Eurasia Group consultancy, said: "Despite their gains, divisions and disorganisation among the rightwing groups will limit their impact on the



► Polish PM Donald Tusk at an election event

EU's political and policy agenda in the next five-year term."

Along with other analysts, however, Rahman said that on specific issues where far-right policy positions had traction, tactical alliances could dilute or even derail EU initiatives.

Those are most likely to include debates around migration and the climate.

Nicolai von Ondarza, of the German Institute for International Affairs (SWP), said that although the centre held, "European politics are going to get more polarising, more politicised and more populist."

There would be much movement among the various parliamentary groups on the right, von Ondarza said, with AfD likely to try to form its own "righter-than-far-right" group but also MEPs from Orbán's Fidesz seeking a new home.

"But these movements will not affect the overall majority," he said. "If anything, they are likely to further strengthen the EPP, which will grow."

Although the far right's big gains in France and Germany will have little impact on the European parliament as such, they could well have a major impact on EU politics, because most EU power still resides in the capitals.

JON HENLEY IS THE GUARDIAN'S EUROPE CORRESPONDENT

● LEFT

The Left group
This group is more leftwing than the S&D and includes some green, communist and Eurosceptic parties.
Includes: Irish opposition leader Mary Lou McDonald

● S&D

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
This centre-left bloc comprises mainly social-democratic parties.
Includes: Spanish PM Pedro Sánchez

● GRN/EFA

Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
This group is largely composed of green and regionalist parties.
Includes: German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock

● RENEW

Renew Europe group
This liberal, pro-European group was founded in 2019 and is the successor of the ALDE group.
Includes: French president Emmanuel Macron

● EPP

Group of the European People's party
This is the traditional centre-right bloc and comprises Christian-democratic and conservative parties.
Includes: Polish prime minister Donald Tusk

● ECR

European Conservatives and Reformists group
These are rightwing parties who are often more critical of the EU than the EPP.
Includes: Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni

● ID

Identity and Democracy group
This far-right group advocates nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic policies.
Includes: French opposition leader Marine Le Pen

● NI

Non-aligned
These are national parties or individual MEPs who decline to align with any of the parliamentary groups.
Includes: Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Pole position

Von der Leyen must look left or right to seal second presidency

By Jennifer Rankin BRUSSELS
and Angela Giuffrida ROME

Ursula von der Leyen this week began trying to craft a majority for a second term as European Commission president, after major gains for the far right that are likely to mean a less stable European parliament.

Von der Leyen, a German Christian Democrat, was jubilant after her European People's party (EPP) secured 186 of the 720 seats in the European elections, maintaining its 25-year hold as the largest group and leaving her a narrow path to a second term.

But she has been presented with a wild card: the French president, Emmanuel Macron's decision to call snap elections after his Renaissance party came a dismal second to Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally.

Von der Leyen, the first woman to lead the commission, was the EPP's lead candidate and is in pole position.

With the uncertainty of French elections in the mix, she has to clear two hurdles. First she needs the backing of a qualified majority of EU leaders, then an absolute majority – 361 votes – in the new European parliament.

EU leaders are expected to take a decision on her appointment as part of a package of top jobs at a two-day summit starting on 27 June, just before the first round of French parliamentary elections on 30 June.

One EU diplomat said von der Leyen “was and still is the presumptive second-term commission president” and there was no reason to expect a delay: “Macron can do what he wants with national elections, but he shouldn't expect all of us to grind to a halt to watch him do it.”

Célia Belin, the head of the Paris office at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said the impact of the French elections on the EU jobs talks could depend on Macron's popularity at home. If opinion polls showed Macron far behind National Rally “the legitimacy for him to appoint von der Leyen is much smaller”, she said, but if the polls showed a better, or less bad, result for him, “he might feel emboldened to just decide earlier”.

Either way, Macron was set to discuss von der Leyen's future with Germany's Olaf Scholz and Italy's Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Puglia this week. Von der Leyen was also expected in Italy, as was the European Council president, Charles Michel, tasked with being an

honest broker in the top jobs negotiations. These five will join other EU leaders for an informal dinner in Brussels next week to widen the discussions.

Von der Leyen arguably has an even more pressing task: persuading the incoming European parliament to back her. On Monday, she reiterated that she would turn to Europe's “main political families” to form her majority, referring to her own EPP, the Socialists and Democrats, in second place with 135 seats, and the centrist Renew group with 79 seats, according to provisional results on Monday afternoon.

These three groups hold 400 of the 720 seats, but that slim majority is not enough. In the large, ideologically messy European parliament political families, around 10-15% of MEPs regularly fail to toe the party line.

In 2019 von der Leyen was elected with only nine votes to spare, despite a paper majority of 65 for the groups supporting her. That means she has to look right or left to secure her re-election, either to the hard-right Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), who surged to win 73 seats, or the Greens, who were knocked down to 53 seats.

While von der Leyen has clearly ruled out working with “Putin's proxies” on the far right, she has avoided saying whether she favours a deal with “constructive” Eurosceptics in the ECR, led by Meloni.

Speaking to CDU activists in Berlin on Monday, von der Leyen reiterated that her goal was to work with parties that are “pro-European, pro-Ukraine and for the rule of law”, a designation that for her apparently includes Meloni's hard-right Brothers of Italy.

But choosing Meloni would put von der Leyen at risk of losing allies in the centre: the Socialists have insisted they will not support von der Leyen if she makes a deal with the ECR.

Von der Leyen could instead look left, turning to the pro-European Greens, who slipped to sixth place behind Meloni's ECR and the far right.

Alberto Alemanno, a professor of EU law at HEC Paris business school, thinks the appointment of commission president will be delayed until the autumn. “Nobody has a clearcut idea what these elections mean and how they can be translated into the next political cycle.”

JENNIFER RANKIN IS THE GUARDIAN'S BRUSSELS CORRESPONDENT; ANGELA GIUFFRIDA IS ROME CORRESPONDENT

◀ Ursula von der Leyen said she would turn to Europe's ‘main political families’ to form her majority

CLEMENS BILAN/EPA

Timothy Garton Ash
Wake up! Europe is trouble
Page 45 →





ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

The horror and joy of the hostage rescue

Page 20 →

Spotlight

SPECIAL REPORT

Europe's appetite for the drug is surging like never before. But the North African children forced to service the trade face a brutal reality of beatings, rape and torture


The bloody cost of the cocaine boom

By Mark Townsend

Maddalena Chiarenza never knows what state the children will be in when they arrive at her door. She has seen black eyes, missing teeth, a broken jaw. "They suffer such regular violence," said Chiarenza, whose Brussels-based NGO, SOS Jeune, cares for unaccompanied Moroccan and Algerian children.

A short walk from the NGO's office near the Eurostar train terminal, groups of north African children are a common sight. Some walk the streets like zombies, after being fed sedatives.

Some children the NGO has cared for have since died; through sickness, murder or suicide; Chiarenza says at least five in the past three years. Another 23 children it has had contact with are in prison, some on drug offences.

On the surface, the plight of these unaccompanied child migrants, and hundreds of others like them throughout Europe, is a testament to the failure of governments across the continent to provide help and assistance to the most vulnerable victims of the global migration crisis. Dig deeper and these children tell a different story, 





an untold narrative of Europe's growing addiction to cocaine.

A Guardian investigation has found that hundreds, if not thousands, of African children have been trafficked into Europe's booming cocaine trade, small cogs in a criminal industry worth more than \$10bn that is transporting vast quantities of the drug from the Andean rainforests to increasing numbers of customers across the continent.

In March, senior police officers met secretly in Brussels. Present were officers from 25 EU countries along with the UK, Europol, the EU border force, the UN refugee agency and the European Commission. On the agenda: the exploitation of unaccompanied African children by international drug syndicates based in western Europe.

"We have evidence that these foreign minors are exploited in large numbers in the EU by OCGs [organised crime groups] involved in drug trafficking," said a police source who was present.

The phenomenon, police say, is on an industrial scale. A Belgian police document chronicles a recent briefing by European officers investigating organised crime and human trafficking: "Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and France presented several concrete cases of the exploitation of hundreds of north African minors, recruited by drug trafficking networks to sell narcotics."

The cocaine networks are particularly brutal, say police. Children are told to sell a set quota of drugs or risk being gang raped. Others are forced to have sex with adults to secure a place in a squat. Some have fled Belgium; terrified they will be killed because they owed money from dealing. A number are converted into child soldiers: proxies ordered to attack rival drug gangs, usually with knives.

The latest Europol intelligence confirms the "abusive" hiring of

children by such networks to target rivals. It said: "They recruit minors for the commission of violent attacks to intimidate non-collaborative actors."

One of Europe's most senior officers investigating the exploitation of such children, Belgian judicial commissioner Eric Garbar, said Moroccan and Algerian minors are particularly vulnerable and are most commonly exploited by gangs.

Youssef knew Europe would be different. "You don't know the language, the values, the customs - or anybody. It's a big shock." Having fled the Moroccan city of Salé and an abusive father, Youssef was vulnerable when, aged 15, he reached Spain and headed to Brussels.

"Criminals in Europe approached me but I always refused," said Youssef. Others were less resolute. Some of his friends have simply disappeared.

"They are at the mercy of organised crime groups," stated a Belgian police document sent to Europol last December, adding: "...to whom they turn like shipwrecked sailors drawn by the reassuring light of a lighthouse."

The brightest lighthouse belongs to a Moroccan cocaine network colloquially known as the "Mocro Mafia". It controls much of the turf

around Brussels' Eurostar terminal. It also controls Europe's second largest container port, 50km north.

Antwerp has become the continent's main gateway for cocaine from South America, hidden among the 12m containers passing through each year. Last year, authorities seized a record 116 tonnes of cocaine at the port. A lot still gets through: according to reports, just 1% or 2% of containers coming into Antwerp are searched by officials.

Analysts say Europe's cocaine gangs, such as the Mocro Mafia, are now working directly with the South American cartels to encourage cocaine production to reach record levels.

Market growth also needs manpower. The Mocro Mafia realised that undocumented, unaccompanied children such as Youssef make cheap and disposable street-drug sellers. Last year police referred 623 unaccompanied children from Morocco and Algeria to Brussels' safeguarding service. Others melt away, never to be found.

Tijana Popovic of Child Focus in Brussels recorded 332 "worrying" disappearances of unaccompanied minors in Brussels last year, some aged 11 and 12. Aside from Brussels,

10bn

The estimated value - in dollars - of Europe's cocaine industry. Analysts say Europe's gangs are encouraging record cocaine production

Cocaine routes into Europe How the drug is smuggled from South America

Roads

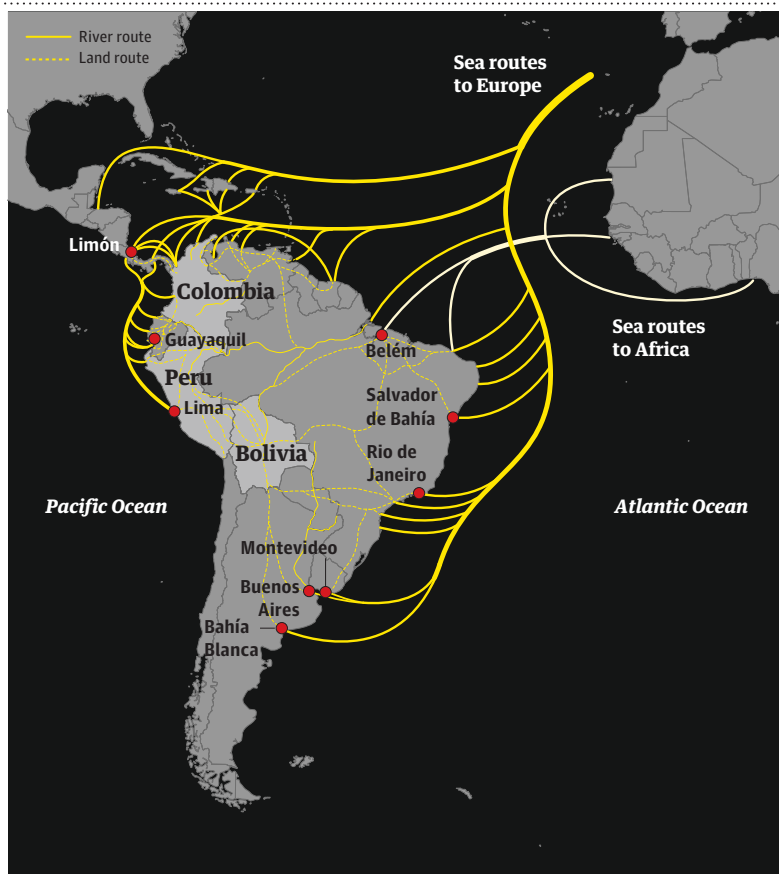
Cocaine reaches seaports from production zones and labs by road. Ecuador has become a hotspot as cocaine from Colombia is shipped from ports like Guayaquil.

Rivers

It is also transported on inland waterways, like the Southern Cone route that sees cocaine produced in Bolivia and Peru hauled on the Paraná River towards Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

Sea

Almost every country in Central and South America is involved in shipping cocaine to Europe. Cargo is often transported via the Caribbean and West Africa.



many vanish in Paris. Last year, police disrupted a large-scale drug network in the Barbès area that exploited Algerian children. More recently, London has emerged as a source of concern.

Amin squints in the sun, his face crisscrossed with scars he refuses to discuss. Behind him, a six-metre fence separates Morocco from the Spanish enclave of Melilla. For three years, Amin has survived by selling tissues in the port of Beni Ansar, evading authorities keen to eject him. Over the fence lies Europe. Freedom. Soon, surely, he will scale the fence?

"I want to help my family, go to Europe. I want to change my life," said the 13-year-old, who left home to search for work after his father died.

Youssef climbed the fence, hiding in a rescue boat bound for Spain. Most hide in trucks. A number are trafficked direct to cocaine networks based in European cities, say police.

Criminal syndicates use social media to lure children such as Youssef and Amin. Platforms host *harraga* channels linked to drug networks promising a better life in Europe. *Harraga* means "to burn" in Arabic, a nod to the destruction of personal documents to avoid identification once in Europe. Children such as Amin call themselves *harragas* - burners.

Back in Brussels, armed police are herding young Moroccans away from the Eurostar terminal. A separate police operation to tackle the trafficking of African children into Europe's cocaine cartels is due to be announced soon.

But a change in policing mindset is required, said Garbar. Arresting the child street dealers makes no difference. The district surrounding the Eurostar has seen 2,000 drug-related arrests in the past six months with no apparent impact on cocaine supply.

Youssef urges a humane solution. "They need to be seen as human, given a chance away from crime." He is proof they can prosper. Now 25, he has lived in Belgium for six years and works for the Red Cross.

Garbar warns that failure to assimilate such vulnerable children will end with Europe paying a high price. Today's 12-year-old street dealers are tomorrow's narco-bosses. "If we don't act against this phenomenon then in 10, 15, 20 years, we are going to face one of our most important problems."

MARK TOWNSEND IS A SENIOR GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT REPORTER AT THE GUARDIAN

The drugs trade How big is the problem - and who is paying the price?

By Annie Kelly



The fall in price - once adjusted for purity - of a gram of cocaine in 2020 compared with 2015

38%

Weight in tonnes of cocaine seized by EU member states in 2021 - the biggest volume ever confiscated

303

Over the past 10 years, Europe has developed a serious cocaine problem. The drug, originating in the jungles of South America, is being transported, sold and consumed across the European continent in record amounts.

The increasing demand from users - and the huge profits to be made in this booming marketplace - is reshaping the international drug-trafficking trade on both sides of the Atlantic and its widespread availability is leaving a trail of addiction, organised crime and human rights abuses in its wake.

What is cocaine and how is it made?

Cocaine is a highly addictive stimulant made from the leaves of the coca plant, native to Andean countries in South America, especially Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Usually manufactured in makeshift labs, cocaine is often cut with a variety of substances before it is sold and then distributed as a white, crystalline powder that can be snorted or injected. It can also be combined with baking soda to create a rock-like product called "crack" cocaine, which is usually smoked.

How much cocaine is coming to Europe?

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs

and Crime (UNODC), people in Europe accounted for 21% of all global users of cocaine in 2021.

According to UN analysis, 2016-17 is seen as a pivotal moment in the expansion of the cocaine markets in western and central Europe, with data pointing to a much wider supply and consumption of the drug after 2016.

Over the past five years, record amounts of cocaine have been seized by the authorities across Europe. More than 303 tonnes of cocaine were seized by EU member states in 2021, the biggest volume of the drug ever confiscated by the authorities, and UK authorities seized more than 37 tonnes in the two years to March 2023.

The most recent UNODC report into the global cocaine trade found the UK has the second highest rate of cocaine use in the world, with one in 40 British adults using the drug, more than any other country in Europe.

How much does cocaine cost?

Europol puts the total street-level value of the European cocaine market at between €7.6bn and €10.5bn (\$8-11bn).

A report by Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) found a gram of cocaine was 38% cheaper - once adjusted for purity of the drug - in 2020 compared with 2015.

Last year, the Guardian's Europe correspondent, Jon Henley, reported that the drug sells at up to twice as much as in the US: a kilo of cocaine bought for \$1,000 in Colombia is worth more than €35,000 in Europe and can be sold for €50-€70 a gram.

What are the effects of Europe's cocaine addiction?

The bloodshed, chaos and human rights abuses that come hand in hand with the cocaine trade are playing out on both sides of the Atlantic.

The infiltration of international trafficking networks into Ecuador is causing community violence, gun crime and political instability. Earlier this year the government declared a state of "internal armed conflict" after attacks on cities, prisons and TV stations by narco gangs.

In countries along the supply chain, an influx of arms, drug traffickers and cocaine money are swamping cities with violence and crime; corrupting political institutions and law enforcement in countries such as Venezuela; creating a generation of child addicts; and leading to a surge in violent crime in Caribbean transit points such as Trinidad and Tobago.

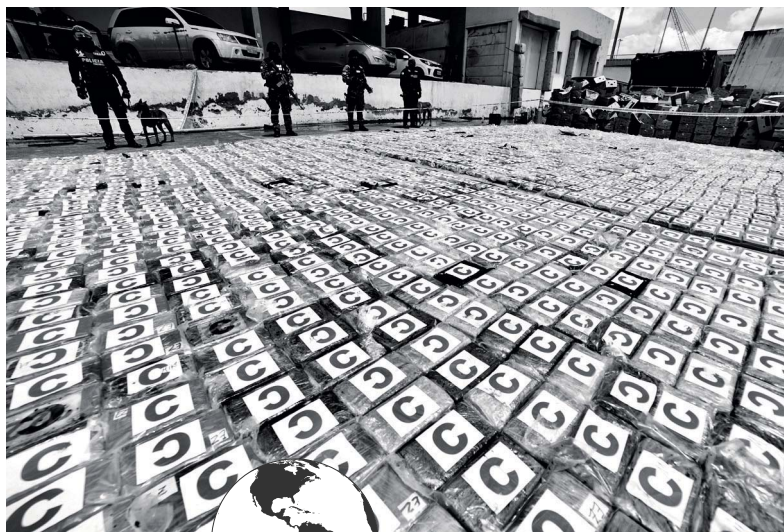
A recent Europol and EMCDDA report said drug trafficking was leading to unprecedented levels of child exploitation, gun violence and crime.

Cocaine, often considered a recreational or party drug, is also highly addictive. With purity levels rising and widespread availability of the drug, the health and social consequences for users, their families and communities is also proving devastating.

In 2023, cocaine was the second-most frequently reported drug used by people admitted for drug use in hospital emergency departments across Europe.

ANNIE KELLY IS EDITOR OF THE GUARDIAN'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS PROJECT

CARL GODFREY



ECUADOR

Fighting a losing battle Death and destruction mark cocaine's path to Europe

By Tom Phillips GUAYAQUIL

A sign on the doorway said “For rent” and the house’s lights were out. But the assault team were convinced a group of armed gang members lurked inside. As darkness enveloped Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city, six truckloads of military and police troopers screeched to a halt in front of the seemingly vacant home. Some pummelled its entrances with steel battering rams, crowbars and fists. Others scrambled up its outer wall.

Their hunch was confirmed. One suspect leapt from a second-floor window and ran across a roof. As the house was stormed, a second man was wrestled to the ground inside a bedroom.

A third suspect was bundled to the living-room floor as the house was searched for hidden guns and drugs.

The raid took place in January, just hours after Ecuador’s president, Daniel Noboa, vowed to wage “war” to prevent Ecuador becoming “a narco-state”. The two captured men were allegedly members of Los Águilas (the Eagles), one of 22 gangs and organised crime groups that Noboa accuses of bringing carnage to what was until recently one of South America’s most peaceful countries.

Similar scenes have played out in recent years from Tijuana, on the Mexico-US border, to Rio de Janeiro as part of a bloody and largely ineffectual battle against the illegal drug trade. But these scenes are also umbilically linked to European cities thousands of kilometres away, where soaring demand for cocaine has helped make cities such as Guayaquil some of the most violent on Earth.

Over the past five years, Ecuador’s Pacific ports have become a crucial shipment point for cocaine, produced in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, to be smuggled to the US and Europe.

Bob Van den Berghe, deputy head of the passenger and cargo border team at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, said people in Europe need to wake up to the pain they are causing on the other side of the world.

“If someone is consuming one gram of cocaine [they should be] aware that it doesn’t end up on the market just like that. There’s a story behind it – which is not a very nice story. In fact, it might even be quite a bloody story.”

Van den Berghe said that of 220 tonnes of cocaine seized last year in Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly 90% was bound for Europe and about 37% was recovered in Ecuador.

About 43 tonnes were heading to Antwerp, the European capital of cocaine smuggling, while about 39 tonnes were going to Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Hamburg in Germany and Valencia in Spain. “These are the four main ports,” said Van den Berghe, a former member of Belgium’s federal police, who trains police and customs officers to identify “high-risk consignments” before they set off for Europe.

In a sign of mounting European concern over the impact of organised crime, the mayors of Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam recently travelled to Ecuador’s capital, Quito. “Your problem is also our problem,” Bart De Wever, the nationalist mayor of Belgium’s second-largest city, told Noboa, admitting European drug use was “at the root of criminality” in Ecuador.

For all the problems drug trafficking is causing in Europe, the violence blighting Guayaquil is undeniably worse, as gangs battle to control the streets and smuggling routes. Ecuador’s murder rate almost doubled between 2022 and 2023, when more than 8,000 murders made it the most violent country in Central and South America.

Glaeldys González, an International Crisis Group expert, said Guayaquil’s location – and longstanding trade ties with Europe – have placed it and the province of Guayas in the eye of Ecuador’s storm. At least six criminal groups have spent recent years fighting over access to the region’s ports, from which huge shipments of bananas are sent to Europe each year – and with them large stashes of cocaine.

That strategic position has attracted the attention of two of Mexico’s most powerful cartels, Sinaloa and the Jalisco New Generation cartel, which have allied themselves with Ecuadorian partners through which they are fighting a proxy war in the streets of cities such as Guayaquil.

As he toured Socio Vivienda – one of the Guayaquil communities controlled by the leader of the Los Tiguerones (The Tigers) gang, nicknamed Commander Willy – a local police officer, Jorge Alexander Masache Novillo, 29, urged European drug users to think about the impact of their habit.

“They need to understand the damage their consumption is causing and the damage they are doing to our country,” he said.

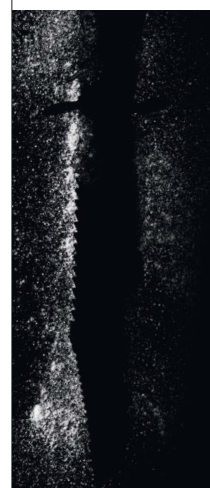
TOM PHILLIPS IS THE GUARDIAN’S LATIN AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

◀Ecuadorian anti-narcotics police stand guard next to packs of cocaine seized in the port of Guayaquil

MARCOS PIN/AFP/GETTY

8k
The number of murders in Ecuador in 2023. The country’s murder rate almost doubled between 2022 and 2023

220
The weight in tonnes of cocaine seized last year in Latin America and the Caribbean – 90% of which was bound for Europe



GUARDIAN DESIGN

ANALYSIS
INDIA

Power down Voters slam the brakes on Modi's bulldozer

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen DELHI



It was widely described as the week India's beleaguered democracy was pulled back from the brink. As the election results rolled in last Tuesday, all predictions and polls were defied as Narendra Modi lost his outright majority for the first time in a decade, while the opposition re-emerged as a legitimate political force. Last Sunday Modi was sworn in as prime minister but many believe his power and mandate are diminished.

For one opposition politician in particular, the humbling of the prime minister was a moment to savour. Late last year, Mahua Moitra, one of the most outspoken critics of Modi and his Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), was expelled from parliament and kicked out of her home after what she described as a "political witch-hunt".

The murky circumstances of Moitra's expulsion from parliament were seen by many to symbolise Modi's approach to dissenting voices and the steady erosion of India's democracy. She was among several opposition politicians who were subjected to investigations by government crime agencies.

But having won re-election in her home state of West Bengal, Moitra will return to parliament, part of the newly empowered opposition coalition. "I can't wait," she said. "If I had gone down, it would have meant that brute force had triumphed over democracy."

Many have portrayed the results as something of a defeat for Modi. The BJP's campaign was centred around him: the manifesto was called "Modi's guarantee" and in many constituencies, local candidates often played second fiddle to the prime minister. He told one interviewer he believed his mandate to rule was given by God.

"Modi's aura was invincibility," said Moitra. "But the people of India didn't give him a simple majority. They were voting against authoritarianism and against fascism. This was a resounding anti-Modi vote."

During the past decade, Modi and the BJP enjoyed a powerful majority and oversaw an unprecedented concentration of power in the prime minister's office, where key decisions were made by a select few.

The government was accused of imposing authoritarian measures, including the harassment and arrest of critics under terrorism laws, while the country tumbled in global democracy and press freedom rankings. Modi never faced a press conference or committee of accountability for the often divisive actions of his government. Politicians regularly complained that parliament was reduced to a rubber-

stamping role for the BJP's Hindu-first agenda. Analysts said the opposition coalition's performance in the election was remarkable given that the BJP is accused of subverting and manipulating the election commission, putting key opposition leaders behind bars and far outspending all other parties. The BJP has denied any attempts to skew the election in its favour.

"This election proved that the voter is still the ultimate king," said Moitra. Several of the parties in the BJP's alliance who will sit in Modi's coalition cabinet do not share his Hindu nationalist ideology. Speaking to his coalition partners last Friday, Modi's tone was unusually modest and measured.

Moitra was not alone in describing the election as a reprieve for the troubling trajectory of India's democracy. Columns heralding that the "mirror has cracked" and the "idea of India is reborn" were plastered across the country's biggest newspapers. "The bulldozer now has brakes," wrote the Deccan Chronicle newspaper. "And once a bulldozer has brakes, it becomes just a lawnmower."

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT

▼ Narendra Modi is sworn in as India's prime minister
RAJAT GUPTA/EPA

The people of India didn't give him a simple majority. This was a resounding anti-Modi vote





ISRAEL

Joy at hostage rescue – but silence over Gaza lives lost

By Bethan McKernan JERUSALEM

Eight months after the horrors of 7 October, last Saturday was a rare, joyful day in Israel after four hostages were rescued safely from Gaza.

Street parties were held across the country, and the weekly demonstration in Tel Aviv demanding that the government strike a deal with Hamas to release the remaining 120 captives was invigorated by the news. Israeli media celebrated the reunion of the Nova festivalgoer Noa Argamani with her terminally ill mother, and broke the sad news that the father of another freed Nova hostage, Almog Meir Jan, had died just hours before his son arrived home in a military helicopter.

Meir Jan was the only one of the four to have made any public comment by last Sunday, telling state broadcaster Kan Radio last Saturday: “Thank you, thank you to everyone. I am fine. I am with my supportive family.”

Family members of the hostages said that their loved ones were aware while in captivity of the grassroots protest movement pressuring the

▶ People celebrated across the country
SHARON EILON/SOPA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

government to bring them home. There was little bandwidth in Israel for the renewed suffering in Gaza that the special forces rescue operation has caused. A total of 274 people were killed and another 696 were injured, according to medics in the Palestinian territory, the majority in airstrikes that allowed the commandos to escape.

Even a column in Haaretz – Israel’s leading leftwing newspaper – mentioned the Palestinian deaths only in the context of how they will further damage Israel’s image internationally.

Gaza’s health ministry does not differentiate between civilian and militant casualties, but graphic images and videos from the scene in Nuseirat and a local hospital suggested dozens of women and children were among the dead and dying. Ben Saul, the UN’s special rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights, has suggested that the operation may be deemed a war crime if it was anticipated “that civilian casualties would be excessive”.

The rescue of Argamani, 26, Meir Jan, 21, Andrey Kozlov, 27, and Shlomi Ziv, 40, was not the first successful rescue of the conflict. The 18-year-old soldier Ori Megidish was brought home in October in an operation in which two Hamas militants were killed, according to the Israel Defense Forces, and a similar raid in Rafah in February freed two elderly men in a mission that reportedly left at least 67 Palestinians dead. Hamas claimed without evidence that three other hostages had been killed during last Saturday’s rescue operation, including a US citizen.

Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has long insisted that military pressure, rather than a hostage release and ceasefire deal, is the best way to bring the remaining captives home – a position widely believed to be politically motivated.

Public support for negotiations is still strong; polling from last month suggested the majority of Israelis prioritise a deal over military action.

Netanyahu has also been widely criticised at home for capitalising on the successful rescue mission. He is yet to meet or contact many hostage families whose loved ones are still missing or have been killed.

BETHAN MCKERNAN IS THE GUARDIAN’S JERUSALEM CORRESPONDENT

PALESTINE

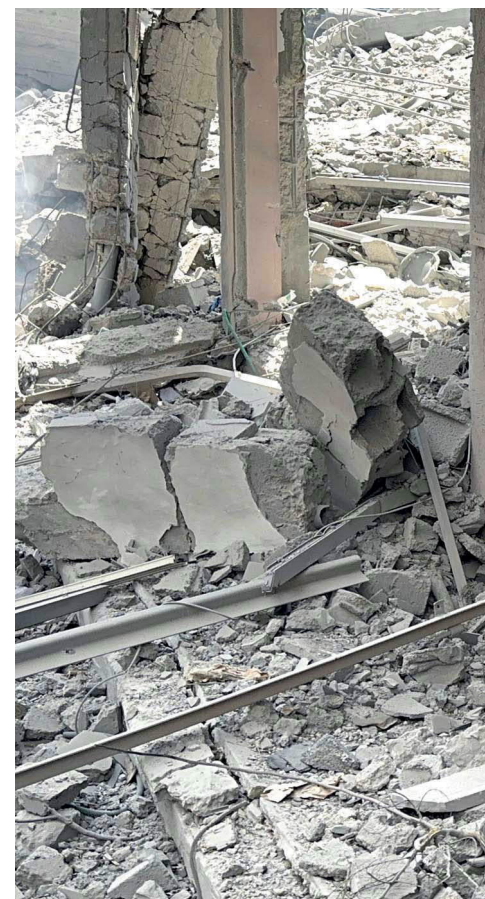
By Malak A Tantesh GAZA,
Aseel Mousa and
Emma Graham-Harrison

‘Besieged’ Army raid that killed hundreds

Nuseirat market was crowded with civilians when Israeli forces launched an assault to free four hostages held nearby

The market in Nuseirat was busy last Saturday morning. Among the crowds were Asia El-Nemer, looking for a pharmacy that still had stock of her sister’s medication, and Ansam Haroun, hoping to find new clothes to lift her daughters’ spirits on the forthcoming Eid al-Adha holiday.

This part of central Gaza had emptied at the start of the year when Israeli troops first moved through, but filled up again from May as more than a million people fled north to escape another operation in Rafah.



▶ Buildings destroyed during Israel’s rescue mission in Nuseirat

HATEM AL-RAWAG/UPI/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

"The Nuseirat market is always crowded, but now more than usual because of the many displaced people," said Haroun, 29.

She was looking at outfits for the girls when the first Israeli airstrikes hit, and raced out of the door to go to them. Outside, she found a scene "like the horrors of judgment day", as panicked crowds tried to escape.

"Everyone was screaming," she said. "The street I was on was only 50 metres long, but it was packed with hundreds of people, all running."

El-Nemer, a 37-year-old software engineer originally from northern Gaza, was among the crush of people trying to escape.

"I was jogging along the street with other women. We were terrified," she said. They ran past health clinics and schools where they might once have sought shelter, but now shunned because of Israeli attacks on both types of compound. She took cover in a nearby house, dragging in another woman who was having a panic attack.

They would not discover for hours that the attack was launched to support Israeli special forces on a mission to free four hostages held in apartments near the market. The soldiers arrived in central Nuseirat in a truck piled with furniture, disguised as Palestinians displaced from Rafah,

Israel's Ynet online news channel reported, citing Saudi media.

Raed Tawfiq Abu Youssef, who was keeping vigil at hospital over a son critically injured in the attack, said his cousin watched the Israeli team arrive in the truck and a car. "Some men got out of the truck, greeted people in front of the house, went in and started killing everyone," he said.

The bombing began soon after. The Israeli military said its forces came under attack during a complex operation, and "under 100 people were killed"; a spokesperson said he did not know how many were civilians.

Most of the dead and victims were taken to the nearby al-Aqsa hospital, where Ali Ibrahim Tawil, 31, was on cardiology wards before the war, but now mostly serves as an emergency doctor trying to treat a stream of war-wounded with dwindling resources. Even by those standards, the scenes last Saturday were catastrophic.

"It was a terribly difficult sight," he said. "The injured we received were of all ages: children, women, men, elderly people, and there were all kinds of wounds."

The bombardment was ordered at least in part to shield the hostages and Israeli forces, and the attacks intensified after a rescue vehicle carrying the three male hostages was trapped under

▼ Injured
Palestinians
are brought to
al-Aqsa hospital

ASHRAF AMRA/ANADOLU/
GETTY

heavy fire, Israeli media reported. The air force and navy provided cover as troops went into the camp on foot and in armoured vehicles and tanks, the Ynet online outlet reported.

"The reinforcements and air force managed to isolate the central battle scene, thus providing a safe escape route for the [rescue] force with the three hostages," the report said. They were taken west to a beach near a new US pier built for deliveries of aid into Gaza, and flown from there by helicopter to Israel.

Ghazal al-Ghussein, 16, had been sitting with her family in a camp of refugee shacks in al-Hasayneh, about a kilometre inland of Nuseirat, when the bombing began. A missile landed beside them, killing one brother and injuring her father, mother and other brother, said her aunt Iman Abu Ras, who had brought her to hospital. Ghusein was hit by shrapnel that caused bleeding on the brain and paralysed her hand and foot.

"No one helped them," Abu Ras said. "The area was besieged, and the ambulance was only able to come to evacuate them after a long time."

Abu Youssef, 42, said even living beside the hospital had not protected his family. He had lost his three other children earlier in the war, and doctors said his last son had little chance of survival.

"My house is near al-Awda hospital," he said. "Although it is hundreds of metres away from the building they targeted, there were a lot of airstrikes and all kinds of attacks in the area to cover up their cowardly operation."

MALAK A TANTESH AND ASEEL MOUSA ARE GAZA-BASED JOURNALISTS; EMMA GRAHAM-HARRISON IS A SENIOR GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL REPORTER

Additional reporting by Matan Cohen

'The street I was on was packed with hundreds of people, all of them running'





UNITED KINGDOM

Could this be the end of the Tories?

Even before last week, the party's prospects were grim. Now some believe it faces a wipeout that would reshape the UK political landscape

By Toby Helm and Daniel Boffey NORMANDY

Partly in preparation for the worst, but also as a way of finding hope for the longer term, a book that has previously attracted little attention in the UK has suddenly become popular bedtime reading among British Conservative politicians.

Full Circle: Death and Resurrection in Canadian Conservative Politics by Bob Plamondon charts the fortunes of Canada's centre-right Progressive Conservative party at the 1993 general election, when it crashed from holding a Commons majority to losing all but two seats.

Many dark years in the wilderness followed, before a merger and name change allowed it to claw itself back and eventually regain power in 2006, in one of the more remarkable political renaissances of recent times.

Even before Rishi Sunak's disastrous blunder last Thursday, when he flew home early from the D-day commemorations with veterans and world leaders, potential parallels with the Canadian experience were already being drawn.

Could the Tories in Britain be all but wiped out in a similar way, Conservatives are now asking themselves. And if so, what are the chances of a previously annihilated party rising again from the ashes?

The UK Conservative party seems to be spinning ever faster into a death spiral, while Labour shores up its poll lead and poses as a government in waiting.

At the end of an emotional service at the British Normandy Memorial near Ver-sur-Mer last Thursday, Keir Starmer agreed to a short interview with broadcasters on the lawns overlooking Gold beach. After being asked to give his thoughts on the events of 80 years ago, the TV journalists pressed Starmer about the latest ins and out of the general election campaign and rows with Sunak over tax.

The Labour leader refused to engage. The day, he told the reporters, was for the veterans. He was asked once more, and, again, Starmer opted not to take the free hit. His next stop was the international commemoration on Omaha beach.

Meanwhile, Sunak had taken his leave and was already on the plane home, slipping away to do an interview with ITV that may well turn out to be another hammer blow to his chances of re-election.

Next morning, as veterans accused Sunak of letting the country down, Labour's defence spokesperson, John Healey, was able to slot the ball into an open net. "Given that the prime minister has been campaigning on the idea that young people should complete a year's national service, what does it say that he appears to have been unable to complete a single afternoon of it?"

Tory candidates have been beyond despair. One said: "If you had actually tried to pick an issue on which to upset my constituents, you could not have chosen a better one."

The former Tory special adviser Sam Freedman revealed how talk of replacing Sunak before the election was spreading among his friends and followers on X: "Had several messages this morning asking me if there's any precedent, in any country, for a major party leader being replaced during a campaign. I can't find one."

Last week began terribly for the Tories and Sunak - but still managed to get worse. First came apocalyptic polls, including one in the Daily Mail predicting the Tories would win just 72 seats. Then Nigel Farage - the former Ukip and Brexit party leader - announced he was standing for Reform UK in Clacton-on-Sea, and would lead the hard-right party for the next five years.

With the campaign hurtling off the rails, the polls refusing to turn, Farage threatening to split the rightwing vote and morale plunging, where are the Tories heading in the event of humiliation, or even annihilation?

Former Tory cabinet minister David Gauke believes things will probably be at the worse end of expectations on election night and that the party would then lurch dramatically to the right. "My fear is - particularly if Reform do well and Nigel Farage is elected as the MP for Clacton - that the instincts of much of the Conservative party will be that we need to lean into that, we

▲ David Cameron deputises for the absent Rishi Sunak next to Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz and Joe Biden
BENOIT TESSIER/REUTERS

Low expectations Rob Ford, an expert on voting trends, says the evidence from polls shows that “an electoral asteroid is streaking through the atmosphere” and is heading for the Tory heartlands. Ford no longer thinks it impossible that the Conservatives could end up with fewer than 100 seats, given that their campaign has been misfiring so badly and the amount of trust they have they lost over 14 years and the tenures of five prime ministers. Other analysts say that such is the geographical spread of the Tory vote, and the brutal nature of the first past the post system, that once their vote drops into the low 20% region, the number of seats could go as low as 20.

need to unite the right, we need to form an alliance, if not a merger, with Reform, and that is where the Conservative party has to go.”

If that did happen, Gauke said he feared the Conservative party would be “surrendering for at least a generation, possibly for ever, its once held position as the natural party of government, the party of the middle classes, the home counties, of business.”

He believes that former home secretary Priti Patel could emerge as Tory leader, strike a deal with Farage, and invite Boris Johnson back in to the parliamentary party. Patel, he says, remains on better terms with Johnson than other possible leadership contenders from the right. She also is on good terms with Farage.

Ryan Shorthouse, executive chair of the Bright Blue thinktank, which promotes liberal Conservatism, agreed that if Reform does well, there would be a push to merge with Reform. But he believes a higher proportion of one nation Tories in the parliamentary party would then not want to choose a rightwing successor to Sunak. “The lesson from Rishi is that moving to the right is the wrong approach, so my view is that the MPs will be more one nation and will pick someone who is more of their persuasion,” he said.

The reality is that, as things go from bad to worse on the campaign trail, most Tories are braced for annihilation. But no one knows how, or whether, the party could survive, in anything like its current form – or whether the Conservatives could eventually reinvent themselves, as happened in Canada. *Observer*

TOBY HELM IS THE OBSERVER'S POLITICAL EDITOR; DANIEL BOFFEY IS THE GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER'S CHIEF REPORTER

▼ Sunak apologises on TV for leaving the D-Day commemorations early

SKY NEWS



BREAKING NEWS Sunak: It was a mistake not to stay in France longer

ANALYSIS
UK/CANADA

'A lost decade' Brutal lessons of 1993 serve as a warning for Sunak

By Leyland Cecco TORONTO



As the UK's Conservative party faces the prospect of a blowout defeat, political historians say

Canada's recent past offers lessons on tempering populist rumbles – and the steep electoral losses that can follow.

Before the 1993 federal election, Canada's main party of the right, the Progressive Conservatives, were in a bad situation. After governing for nearly a decade, a chastened prime minister, Brian Mulroney, had resigned after two failed attempts to amend Canada's constitution and mounting questions over his ethical conduct.

His successor, Kim Campbell, was thrust into the top job. The country's first female prime minister, Campbell enjoyed a momentary poll boost, but as the general election campaign unfolded it became clear that key portions of the Progressive Conservative vote were fleeing to new parties that reflected geographic and cultural grievances.

In the oil-producing western provinces, the perception that residents' hard work was being frittered away for the economic benefit of eastern Canada led to a deep resentment of the PC. Voters turned to the socially conservative Reform party, which had deep roots in the Prairies. And in francophone Quebec, the newly formed Bloc Québécois seized on growing separatist sentiment.

Jean Chrétien and his Liberal party emerged with a strong parliamentary majority. The PC lost

all but two of their seats in the worst ever electoral result for a governing party among western democracies.

“The lessons of 1993 are that the worst-case scenario can happen,” said political analyst Éric Grenier at the Writ. “Just because you’ve been around for ever doesn’t mean that you will be around for ever. You can have the kind of election that requires you to restart a party and to come back from almost zero.”

The Progressive Conservatives plunged into a struggle with competing visions for the future of conservatism in Canada.

“The election result put the conservative movement adrift. They couldn’t win. They couldn’t really make headway,” said Grenier. “It was a lost decade for the conservative movement in Canada.”

The Reform movement supplanted the PC as the largest rightwing party in parliament. But its focus on the specific grievances of western Canadians meant it had little success across the country. By 2000, the party changed its name to the Canadian Alliance, in an

154

Number of seats lost – all but two of those held – by the Progressive Conservatives, Canada's main party of the right, in the 1993 federal election

unsuccessful attempt to broaden its appeal. Soon after, it merged with the ailing PC, in an attempt to unify a rightwing voting bloc. The newly formed Conservative party went on to win three general elections under Stephen Harper.

Harper was himself part of what Reform UK's leader, Nigel Farage, last week referred to as a “reverse takeover of the Conservative party” by Canadian Reform activists.

Grenier says the fallout of 1993 should be a warning to Rishi Sunak's Conservatives. “It was a stark lesson that just because you’ve been one of the governing parties for centuries in the UK, just because you’ve been able to hold on in the past – it doesn’t mean you can’t have a disastrous result,” he said.

LEYLAND CECOCO COVERS CANADA FOR THE GUARDIAN



BRAZIL

By Tom Phillips
ITAQUAÍ RIVER

'We must transform pain' Defiance in face of grief

A widow's emotional journey marks anniversary of the killings of Dom Phillips and his Brazilian colleague, Bruno Pereira

Alessandra Sampaio fell to her knees and wept as she clambered on to the boat's deck and came face to face with the remote riverside clearing where her husband's life was extinguished and hers turned upside down.

The sound of Sampaio's lament mixed with birdsong and the voice of an Indigenous shaman echoed through the jungle where the British journalist Dom Phillips and his Brazilian comrade Bruno Pereira were shot dead in June 2022.

"Dom and Bruno are here! Save them! Their spirits are lost here! We can't see them but they are here!" the 85-year-old medicine man, César

Marubo, cried out, imploring his people's God and creator, Kana Voã, to guide their souls towards paradise.

"Take them by the hand and lift them up into heaven!" he pleaded.

On the bank of the Itaquai river before them, two wooden crosses marked the spot where Phillips and Pereira were ambushed and murdered, allegedly by a trio of illegal fishers who are in prison awaiting trial.

"What I most want is to leave this pain behind," Sampaio had said the previous evening, as she prepared to make her first journey to the place where Phillips's final reporting mission came to a sudden end.

Sampaio's visit, marking the two-

year anniversary of the crime, was part of a deeply personal quest to come to terms with the loss of her husband, a longtime Guardian reporter who was writing a book about the Amazon when he was killed.

"I've never felt anger, I just miss him so much," said Sampaio, who wears the wedding ring recovered from her husband's body around her neck.

The pilgrimage also announced the creation of the Dom Phillips Institute, which will honour his legacy through initiatives raising awareness of the complexities and magnificence of the Amazon and its original inhabitants.

"We don't want to be frozen in pain and frustration. We want to forge ahead," Sampaio said as she journeyed towards the shrine activists have built at the scene of the crime. "We must transform this pain into a positive movement - and give new meaning to everything that happened."

Sampaio said the institute would be guided by the qualities for which her husband was known: tenderness, a burning desire to listen, and respect for diversity and life.

"I think that if Dom was here talking

◀ Alessandra Sampaio with members of the Marubo and Matis peoples

JOÃO LAET

'We don't want to be frozen in pain and frustration. We want to forge ahead'

Alessandra Sampaio

to me now he'd say, 'Go Alê: move forwards, learn more, make contacts, help to echo this message about this incredible thing that is the Amazon and all of its beauties,'" Sampaio said.

Indigenous searchers who spent 10 days trying to find Phillips and Pereira after they disappeared accompanied Sampaio to pay tributes of their own.

Orlando Possuelo, an Indigenous expert who helped coordinate the search, hoped the memorial would remind frontline activists of the dangers of their struggle to preserve the Amazon. "We don't want the Javari valley to be filled with crosses," he said.

The headquarters of Possuelo's Indigenous monitoring group, Evu, in Atalaia do Norte, was the first stop on Sampaio's two-day tour of the isolated rainforest region near Brazil's tri-border with Colombia and Peru.

There, she heard distressing reports about the ongoing assault on the Javari valley territory where illegal fishers, poachers, miners and drug traffickers continue to operate despite government pledges to crack down.

But Sampaio also heard heartening accounts of how Evu had ramped up its activities in the two years since her husband was killed while reporting on the group's fight to protect Indigenous lives. The next day Sampaio visited the base of the Indigenous association Univaja, the nerve centre of the 2022 search effort, to discuss her plans for the institute and ask local leaders how it could help their cause. "They will not silence Dom's voice," she said.

Representatives of the Matis, Marubo and Mayoruna peoples took turns to voice their hopes and fears over the region's future. "There's been such a big change in the past 40 years. We are losing our culture. Our culture is becoming folklore," said Clóvis Marubo, a 58-year-old leader.

Silvana Marubo lamented the threats to Indigenous activists and their non-Indigenous allies. "I worry who the next Doms and Brunos will be," she said, telling Sampaio: "Your pain is our pain ... your tears are our tears. Your struggle is our struggle."

Sampaio has vowed to return to the Javari valley to ensure the institute's first project benefited a place her husband had loved and where he was lost.

"I don't want to be stuck with this [negative] image of the Javari," she said. "This is a special place for me."

TOM PHILLIPS IS THE GUARDIAN'S LATIN AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

BRAZIL

Calamitous floods made more likely by global heating

By Jonathan Watts

The unusually prolonged and extensive flooding that has devastated southern Brazil was made at least twice as likely by human burning of fossil fuels and trees, a study has shown.

The record disaster has led to 169 deaths, ruined homes and wrecked harvests, and was worsened by deforestation, investment cuts and human incompetence.

The team of international scientists behind the study predicted that calamities on this scale would become more common in the future if there was not a sharp reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions heating the planet.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and in nearby Uruguay are still trying to rebuild their lives after a month of persistent downpours that displaced 80,000 people and left more than a million without essential services.

During the peak of the rains, the city of Santa Maria set a 24-hour rainfall record of 213.6mm. In three days, the state capital, Porto Alegre, was inundated with two months' worth of rain.

▶ A flooded street in Porto Alegre

DANIEL MARENCO/EPA



The economic cost is expected to exceed \$1bn and the dire impact on agriculture is expected to raise prices of rice - Rio Grande do Sul usually produces 90% of Brazil's crop - and dairy products across the country.

The region's focus on agriculture has come at a high cost. The study's authors said in recent decades, natural flood defences have been cleared for fields, often in violation of weakly enforced environmental regulations.

In recent years, municipal governments had cut investment in these protections despite warnings that this low-lying, deforested region at the intersection of five major rivers would be increasingly vulnerable to flooding as a result of manmade climate disruption.

Scientists from the World Weather Attribution group have confirmed the powerful human influence on the flooding disaster, the fourth to hit Brazil's southernmost state in the past year and a half.

They analysed a four-day and a 10-day period of the floods by combining weather observations with results from climate computer models. They found that human-driven climate change made the extreme rainfall two to three times as likely and about 6% to 9% more intense. This influence was similar to the natural effect of the El Niño phenomenon.

As well as increasing the frequency and intensity of heavy rain, global heating has pushed the tropical belt further south, which acts as a wall across central Brazil that blocks cold fronts coming from Antarctica. As a result, flooding that once used to be more common further north in Santa Catarina is now more likely in Rio Grande do Sul. More than 90% of the state was affected.

Lincoln Alves, a researcher at Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, said the country's climate had already changed, adding: "It is essential for decision-makers and society to recognise this new normal."

To minimise the potential impact of future disasters, the authors suggest more comprehensive urban planning, greater investment in flood defences and closer attention to equitable social development.

The most important measure, however, is to rapidly reduce the burning of trees and fossil fuels.

JONATHAN WATTS IS THE GUARDIAN'S GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT EDITOR



Follow Euro 2024 online
Scan the QR code or visit theguardian.com/football/euro-2024 for the latest news and reports from the Euros in Germany



GERMANY

Friends reunited Football and a troubled continent

Europe is suffering a crisis of identity but for four weeks the Euro 2024 tournament offers a kernel of something pure

By Jonathan Liew

Almost three years ago, at the Olympiastadion in Berlin, the Euro 2024 logo was officially launched, featuring the colours of all 55 Uefa member nations in a symbolic display of continental solidarity. “It shows that in Europe we are united, we are friends,” the Uefa president, Aleksander Čeferin, announced of the new design. “Football is about friendship, it’s about good values, different cultures uniting.”

Friendship. Good values. Everyone united. Yes, good luck with all that. Perhaps it would be harsh to point out that just a few months after Čeferin spoke these words, Europe would be embroiled in its biggest land war since 1945, a crisis of identity and division from which the continent is still forlornly trying to extricate itself.

Predictions, a mug’s game, and all that. But the point to make here is that if football’s administrators are going to make these sorts of grandiose, messianic claims then it’s only fair to hold them up to the light of reality every now and again. Is football *really* about friendship? Is it about good values, different cultures uniting, Xherdan Shaqiri and Aleksandar Mitrović sat round a campfire playing the banjo?

Or is it simply the greatest and silliest pastime humanity has yet invented for itself, a seething mass of tribal rivalry,

and hollow escapism and performative debauchery set against the backdrop of some of the most sublime athletic feats ever conceived? Let’s find out! Fingers on remote-control buttons. Wallcharts and office sweepstakes at the ready. Fireworks delicately lodged in buttock cracks. Euro 2024 is about to detonate, although not literally, we hope. The prospect of genuine trouble is small but real, driven as much by a populist fetish for “security” and riot gear as by any credible threat.

In Britain, the silliness has already ramped up. The supercomputer and AI predictions, the betting company stunts, the tenuous commercial tie-ups (try to spot the creative ways in which brands mention the Euros without troubling the intellectual property lawyers), the political piggybacking. The general election – in between the last 16 and the quarter-finals – can be relied on to generate the usual toxic discourse, bad tweets and cringe-worthy photos of politicians pumping their fists at the telly.

For Scotland, a run of seven games without a win between September and March has not obscured the progress made in the five years under Steve Clarke, during which a core of seasoned international veterans has triumphed and suffered together. They qualified with two games to spare, made Rodri foam at the mouth, upstaged Erling Haaland in his backyard. They will fear nobody.

The issue is where the goals are going to come from. They are still only the fourth-ranked team in their group. They have still never made the second phase of a major tournament. But opening night in Munich, with the hosts anxious, would be the perfect opportunity to spring an ambush.

England’s optimism, too, is based on more than the usual charms and wishes. In Jude Bellingham, Harry Kane and Phil Foden they can boast arguably the best players in La Liga, the Bundesliga and the Premier League. Throw in Bukayo Saka, Cole Palmer

and Declan Rice, and you have a depth of individual technical quality that is the envy of pretty much everyone in Europe.

And at this point, of course, we hit a problem: individual technical quality wins you nothing on its own. In the 18 short months since the last World Cup, England’s problem has been a systemic failure to keep clean sheets against elite opposition. The lack of natural left-footers makes them a sitting target on that flank. England have the means. Whether they have the ends remains to be seen.

Three years ago Italy and England had the two best defences in the tournament. Five years before that Portugal grimaced their way to victory at Euro 2016 despite somehow only managing to win one of their seven games in 90 minutes. Greece in 2004 (getting everyone behind the ball) and Spain in 2008 and 2012 (not letting anyone else have the ball) employed radically different strategies but to a common end.

It tells us that once again Portugal, who had the best defensive record in qualifying, are in the mix. With Roberto Martínez in charge, much of the attention has focused on the rich seam of attacking talent, where at least three of Rafael Leão, Gonçalo Ramos, Diogo Jota, João Félix, Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes and Cristiano Ronaldo (yes, still there) will have to be left out. But it is at the back, where an experienced constellation of legends – Rúben Dias, João Cancelo, Pepe (yes, still there) – will hustle, scrape and shithouse everything that comes their way.

The Nations League champions, Spain, by contrast, will lean heavily on youth, with the 21-year-old Pedri now a relative veteran alongside the Barcelona prodigies Pau Cubarsí (17) and Lamine Yamal (16). And if Luis de la Fuente’s side is a little short on star wattage, there is a unity and cohesion there, driven by their experience of playing together at age-group level.

Their Group B rivals Italy are defending champions, even if barely a handful of the 2021 team have survived the cut under Luciano Spalletti. They look a formidable prospect on paper, but they feel just a little brittle.

France will go into the tournament as joint-favourites with England. The surprising recall of N’Golo Kanté is probably an admission that Didier Deschamps craves more stability, that he foresees situations further down the line that not even Kylian Mbappé will

► France’s Kylian Mbappé will captain his country in Germany

CATHERINE STEENKES/GETTY

◀ Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with the trophy in 2021

MICHAEL REGAN/UEFA/GETTY

Game on
How the teams will line up

GROUP A
Germany
Scotland
Hungary
Switzerland

GROUP B
Spain
Croatia
Italy
Albania

GROUP C
Slovenia
Denmark
Serbia
England

GROUP D
Poland
Netherlands
Austria
France

GROUP E
Belgium
Slovakia
Romania
Ukraine

GROUP F
Turkey
Georgia
Portugal
Czech Republic



▼ England start the tournament as one of the favourites

CHRISTOPHER LEE/UEFA/GETTY



be able to salvage for them. Belgium and the Netherlands are well-equipped outsiders. Croatia and Denmark have probably had their time. Jan Oblak will play his first international tournament for Slovenia; Robert Lewandowski is probably playing his last for Poland. Georgia, helmed by the sparkling Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, will make their debut alongside Serbia.

Ukraine have an intriguingly kind draw. They remind us, too, that this is a tournament taking place in the foothills of human tragedy, at a time when the European project itself - the postwar spirit that birthed so many of the continent's institutions - has never felt more contested or divided.

For the host nation, Germany, Euro 2024 arrives with some trepidation: over political unrest, over security and policing, over the trains, over the lack of striking options to challenge big Niclas Füllkrug, over their terrible recent tournament record.

But as public buildings have been liveried and results have improved, a nation in the grip of a nascent decline has briefly allowed itself to dream again. The 2006 World Cup parallels are probably laid on a little thick, but in coach Julian Nagelsmann, midfielders Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz, and the reborn Kai Havertz, Germany again has a chance to show the world a different side of itself. A country that works, however fleetingly. A country that unites, however illusorily.

And really, short of armed conflict, only football has the power to bring people together like this. Moreover, amid the growing perversions of the club game, the widening greed and disconnect, there remains at the heart of the European Championship a tiny kernel of something pure, something that can't be bought and sold by a wealth fund, something that can't be shipped to Saudi Arabia or Donald Trump's America. We are not united. We are not friends. But - and this will have to do for now - we are all watching.

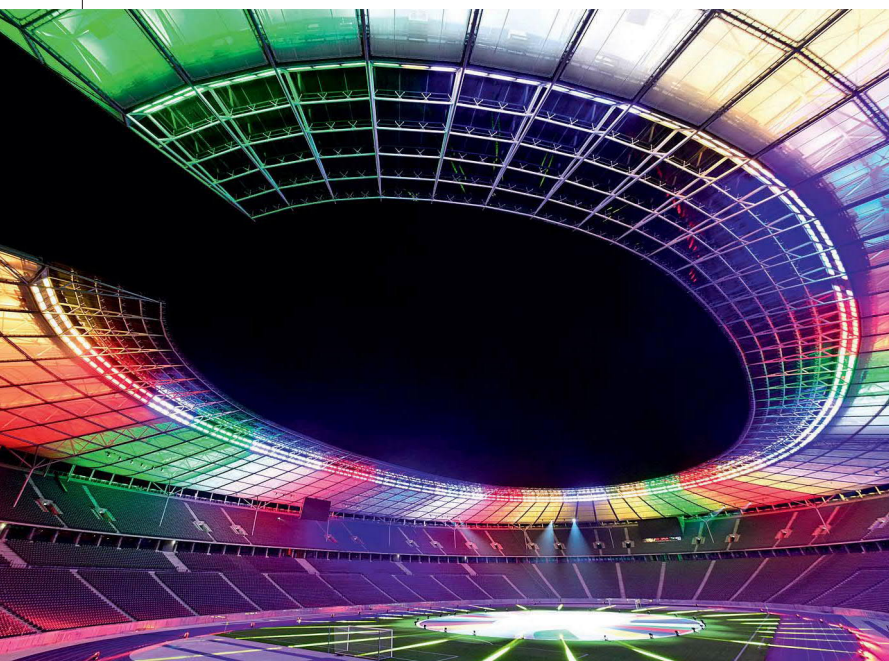
Europe may be seething and torn apart by rivalries and history and politics and language, and whether "It's coming home" is wistful lament or imperial bombast. But somehow, this is still our Europe, and our Euros. To enmity! To disunity! To different cultures clashing! To bad values!

JONATHAN LIEW IS A GUARDIAN SPORTS WRITER

▲ Netherlands fans will turn stadiums orange
MARTIN MEISSNER/AP

◀ Berlin's Olympiastadion lit up with the colours of the Uefa nations
JOHN MACDOUGALL/ AFP/GETTY

▼ One of Spain's young guns, 16-year-old Lamine Yamal
JUAN MEDINA/REUTERS



▲ Young Germany fans have high hopes for the host nation
MARTIN MEISSNER/AP





ITALY

Catania turns the tables on invasive blue crabs

By Ismail Einashe CATANIA

In a suburb of Catania on Sicily's east coast, smoke billows from street stands selling grilled horse meat, and youngsters gather around kiosks selling the region's unique handmade drink, *seltz limone e sale* (seltzer with lemon and sea salt). It is here that a family of charismatic ex-fishers have opened a seafood restaurant that bravely challenges long-held regional conventions.

The Salamone family sell all the usual local specialties in their slick new business La Fish, such as Sicily's famous swordfish, sardines and tuna. However, the feature of tonight's tasting menu is a relative newcomer to these shores and to Sicilian tables: the Atlantic blue crab.

Inside the restaurant, about half a dozen blue crabs are displayed on a large fish counter alongside an array of other seafood. These crabs, with their blue claws and olive-green shells, are creating a crisis. **Originating from the western Atlantic Ocean**, they have no natural predators in the Mediterranean and feed on young clams, disrupting traditional shellfish harvests and affecting Italy's position as one of the top clam producers in the world.

Some Italians, like the Salamones,

▲ A fisher holds a blue crab, the species threatening marine life in the Mediterranean

PIERO CRUCIATTI/
AFP/GETTY

Across the ocean
The blue crab is a native of the east coast of the United States. It probably found its way into the Mediterranean via ships' ballast tanks, says Carmen Barberá, a researcher at the Marine Research Centre at the University of Alicante in Spain, who is a specialist in invasive species. When ships are not fully laden, they maintain their trim by filling ballast tanks with water, which they later discharge at their destination, dumping marine life from one side of the world to the other.

have adapted by incorporating these crustaceans into their cuisine.

"I love the blue crab," said chef Mario Contadino, citing its delicious and sweet taste that, he says, adds depth to any dish. To entice local people to try this alien critter, he serves it on sticky sushi rice with onions, bell peppers, garlic, tomatoes and coriander, adorned with edible flowers.

He says people in Catania can be "closed-minded" when it comes to trying unfamiliar ingredients. "It's possible people may think to themselves, 'What is this?' or say, 'Oh no, I don't like this.'" But he believes the taste will win over even the most sceptical diners. "That first bite does not lie."

Francesco Tiralongo, a marine biologist at the University of Catania, has documented the explosive population growth of the blue crab. He explains how rising water temperatures in the Mediterranean have made Sicilian waters a welcoming environment for such alien species. "Changing fish consumption habits in Sicily to include alien species like the blue crab is a necessary response to climate change and current ecological challenges," he said.

The blue crab can be found in the fish market behind Catania's Piazza del Duomo. On a warm day, the market bustles with activity. Fishers, traders, local people and tourists mingle in narrow alleys, as fishmongers cut chunks of silvery swordfish and tuna.

Holding a large knife next to buckets filled with crustaceans and fish is Rosario, a fishmonger who sells blue crab. "I sell it because people like it," he said. Having started with a few kilos, he now averages daily sales of 20kg.

Rosario says blue crabs are no different from the many varieties of crustaceans the Catanese eat.

"People are getting to know it," Rosario said, adding that they really like its delicate taste. He says other invasive species such as scorpion fish, lionfish and the silver-cheeked toadfish are too strange for his customers.

Tomaso Salamone says his family's restaurant is taking a new approach to the invaders, presenting them as desirable. He said: "We are making these dishes with blue crab to show people that anything can be edible." *Observer*

ISMAIL EINASHE IS A JOURNALIST AND A DART CENTER OCHBERG FELLOW AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY JOURNALISM SCHOOL

This report was supported by Journalismfund Europe



JAPAN

Net gains The women who fill the fishing gap

Although female fishers are helping to address a labour shortage, they face resistance in a sector dominated by men

By Justin McCurry ŌFUNATO

With one last heave, Mayumi Okada launches a sopping-wet rope into the Pacific Ocean. As a fresh afternoon wind forms frothy crests on the waves, her husband, Kuniaki, leaves his cabin, peers over the edge of their boat and confirms the batch of oyster "spat" larvae is in position, ready to mature into the plump, highly prized bivalves associated with this region of north-east Japan.

The couple abandoned regular



13%

The percentage of female employees in Japan's fishing industry - or about 11,000 out of 87,000

60

The number of firms, out of 300 asked in a 2023 survey, that said they would employ women

Photographs by Justin McCurry

▲ Mayumi Okada works on a fishing boat off the coast of Tomari

▼ Women clean scallop shells that will help cultivate oysters

careers three years ago to build a new life in Tomari, a village of 2,200 people, 500km north of Tokyo. Kuniaki, 54, had always dreamed of earning a living going out to sea.

"He had always wanted to be a fisherman, so we looked at a lot of places in the region, and Ōfunato was the most welcoming," Mayumi, 49, said.

Today, they are preparing to cultivate oysters off the coast of Iwate, one of three prefectures devastated by the deadly tsunami 13 years ago. In a quayside tent, women prepare empty scallop shells that will be used to bring the young oysters to maturity. But unlike her female peers, Mayumi is to be found out at sea as often as on shore.

Japan's fishing industry is in desperate need of labour. Like other traditional sectors of the country's economy, it is ageing and shrinking. The average age of a Japanese fisher is approaching 60; in some places it is over 70. In 1961, Japan employed 700,000 seagoing workers, but the number had more than halved by the early 1990s and halved again by 2017.

According to the 2018 census, the industry now employs 87,000 people, of whom 11,000, or 13%, are women.

Kuniaki said: "We heard about companies that refused to sell boats when they heard women would be

working on them, but attitudes are changing. If women aren't involved then the men will be unable to do it all by themselves."

A growing number of fisheries operators are turning to women to address the decline in the workforce. But they are up against a cultural resistance towards women earning a living at sea. Some of that resistance is rooted in folklore, in which the goddess of the sea becomes "jealous" when women board a fishing boat.

Farther north in the coastal village of Omoe, Koichi Sato, a fisher for more than three decades, is sceptical about revitalisation schemes that encourage women to work at sea.



"There is an old saying, 'Women on land, men at sea,'" Sato said as he used a crane to lift sacks of kombu seaweed out of a storage tank. "The village's fishing industry wouldn't be able to survive without women, but you need physical strength to work on a boat, hauling in the catch and putting it in storage. And then there are the long hours, including working at night. And what about seasickness?"

That question prompts a good-natured laugh from Natsumi Nakamura, a female fisher whom Sato, despite his misgivings, is mentoring through the final stages of her training. She said she has stronger sea legs than her husband, Koshi, with whom she moved to Omoe a year ago.

"I find it frustrating that women's role in fisheries begins only after the catch has been landed," Nakamura, 28, said, referring to the large numbers of women employed in processing.

"This is a very traditional region of Japan. When I told my neighbours that I wanted to be a fisherwoman, a lot of them asked me if I was serious. It's not really sexism ... people just can't imagine women working on fishing boats."

Despite government efforts, the proportion of women working in fisheries remains low. Recruitment events have been held in Tokyo for women interested in working in fisheries, but a 2023 survey found that only about 60 of 300 firms hoping to take on workers said they would employ women.

"There are jobs in fisheries that people used to think could only be done by men," said Kumi Soejima, a senior lecturer at the National Fisheries University. "Mechanisation and other improvements - like the installation of toilets - have made it much easier for women. All it takes is a change of attitude and a little ingenuity."

"The entire fishing industry has a patriarchal culture in which older men are at the top of the hierarchy ... that needs to change. If the fishing industry in Japan is going to survive it needs to attract more people, including women. The door should be open to them."

Back in Omoe, Nakamura brandishes a freshly caught octopus the couple will sell at the local market. "I would definitely encourage other women to give fishing a try," she said. "Times have changed, and we're living in an age where women can do anything they put their minds to."

JUSTIN MCCURRY IS THE GUARDIAN'S TOKYO CORRESPONDENT

A cosmic doughnut?

The quest to map the universe

Rather than stretching to infinity and beyond, scientists say the cosmos may have a topology that could eventually be mapped

An international project called CMB stage 4, using a dozen telescopes in Chile and Antarctica, should help researchers in their hunt for answers about the shape of the universe

Most topological possibilities correspond to the universe having a finite volume but no edges: if you travel farther than the scale of the universe, you end up back where you started



By Philip Ball

We may be living in a doughnut. It sounds like Homer Simpson's fever dream, but that could be the shape of the entire universe - to be exact, a hyperdimensional doughnut that mathematicians call a 3-torus.

This is just one of the many possibilities for the topology of the cosmos. "We're trying to find the shape of space," said Yashar Akrami of the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Madrid, a member of an international partnership called Compact (Collaboration for Observations, Models and Predictions of Anomalies and Cosmic Topology). In May, the Compact team explained

that the question of the shape of the universe is wide open and surveyed the future prospects for pinning it down.

"It's high-risk, high-reward cosmology," said team member Andrew Jaffe, a cosmologist at Imperial College London. "I would be very surprised if we find anything, but I'll be extremely happy if we do."

The topology of an object specifies how its parts are connected. A doughnut has the same topology as a teacup, the hole being equivalent to the handle. Similarly, a sphere, cube and banana all have the same topology, with no holes.

The idea that the whole universe

can have a shape is hard to picture. In addition to the topology, there is another aspect: the curvature. In his theory of general relativity in 1916, Albert Einstein showed that space can be curved by massive objects, creating the force of gravity.

Imagine space as two-dimensional, like a sheet, rather than having all three spatial dimensions. Flat space is like a flat sheet of paper, while curved space could be like the surface of a sphere or a saddle.

These possibilities can be distinguished by simple geometry. On a flat sheet, the angles of a triangle must add up to 180 degrees. But on

a curved surface, that's no longer so. By comparing the real and apparent size of distant objects such as galaxies, astronomers can see that our universe as a whole seems to be as close to flat as we can measure: it's like a flat sheet pocked with little dimples where each star deforms the space around it.

"Knowing what the curvature is, you know what kinds of topologies are possible," said Akrami. Flat space could just go on for ever, like an infinite sheet of paper. That's the most boring, trivial possibility. But a flat geometry also fits with some topologies that cosmologists euphemistically call "nontrivial", meaning they're far more interesting and can get mind-boggling.

There are 18 possibilities. In general, they correspond to the universe having a finite volume but no edges: if you travel farther than the scale of the universe, you end up back where you started. It's like the screen of a video game in which a character exiting on the right reappears on the left. In three dimensions, the simplest of these topologies is the 3-torus: like a box from which, exiting through any face, you re-enter through the opposite face.

Such a topology has a bizarre implication. If you could look out across all the universe - which would require the speed of light to be infinite - you would see endless copies of yourself in all directions, like a 3D hall of mirrors. Other, more complex topologies are variations on the same theme, where, for example, the images would appear slightly shifted - you re-enter the box in a different place, or perhaps twisted so that right becomes left.

If the universe's volume is not too big, we may then be able to see such duplicate images - an exact copy, say, of our own galaxy. "People started looking for topology on very small scales by looking for images of the Milky Way," said Jaffe. But it's not entirely straightforward because of the finite speed of light, and so you may not recognise the duplicate.

If, on the other hand, the universe is immense yet not infinite, we may never be able to distinguish between the two, said Akrami. But if it is finite, at least along some directions, and not much larger than the farthest we can see, then we should be able to detect its shape.

One of the best ways to do that is to look at the cosmic microwave background (CMB): the very faint glow

Star signs

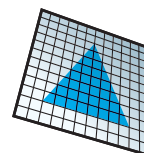
Cosmologists are studying the shape and geometry of the universe

Different geometries

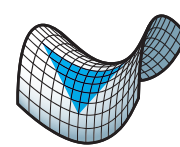
In the three geometric scenarios space-time might bend in on itself, be flat or bend outwards. In each example the angles of a triangle would either exceed, be equal to or be less than 180°



Closed Universe $>180^\circ$
(positive curvature)



Flat Universe $=180^\circ$
(zero curvature)

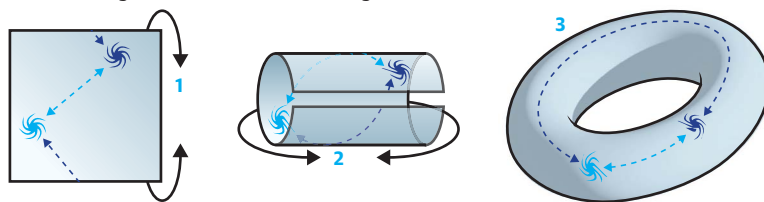


Open Universe $<180^\circ$
(negative curvature)

Imagining a doughnut universe

One of topologies possible for the universe is a **Euclidian 3-torus**. Although hard to visualise in three dimensions, the equivalent for a two-dimensional space is a 2-torus: a simple doughnut. Imagine a two-dimensional sheet. Two edges can curve to meet, making

a cylinder, and then the ends of that would loop around to form a ring shape. In this scenario light would travel from one galaxy to another in different directions and multiple instances of it would be visible. Although finite, the endless line of sight would give the impression of infinite space.



Source:
University of Oregon

of heat left over from the big bang, which fills the cosmos with microwave radiation. First detected in 1965, the CMB is a key piece of evidence that the big bang happened. It is very nearly uniform throughout the cosmos. But as astronomers have developed ever more precise telescopes to detect and map it, they have found tiny variations in the "temperature" of this microwave sea, remnants of random temperature differences in the nascent universe.

Thus the CMB is a sort of map of what the universe looked like at the earliest stage we can still observe today (about 10bn years ago), imprinted on the sky. If the universe has a nontrivial topology that produces copies in some or all directions, and if its volume is not significantly larger than the sphere on which we see the projection of the CMB, then these copies should leave traces in the temperature variations. Two or more patches will match. But that's not easy to detect, given that these variations are random and faint and that some topologies would shift the duplicates around.

The Compact team has studied the chances of finding anything. It showed that, even though no nonrandom patterns have yet been seen in the CMB map, neither have they been ruled out.

Others outside the group agree. Ralf Aurich, an astronomer at Ulm University in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, said: "I think that nontrivial topologies are still very much a possibility."

Isn't it, though, a little perverse to imagine that the universe may have some twisted-doughnut shape rather

than having the simplest possible topology of infinite size? Not necessarily. Going from nothing to infinity in the big bang is quite a step. "It's easier to create small things than big things," said Jaffe. "So it's easier to create a universe that is compact in some way - and a nontrivial topology does that."

The problem with seeking patterns in the CMB, said Neil Cornish of Montana State University in Bozeman, is "there are an infinite number of possibilities to consider, each with its own unique predictions, so it is impossible to try them all out".

Aurich said a planned improvement of the CMB map should help the hunt. But the Compact researchers suspect the CMB alone may not give a definitive answer to the topology question.

However, there is plenty of other astronomical data we can use. "Everything in the universe is affected by the topology," said Akrami. "The ideal case will be to combine everything that is observable and hopefully that will give us a large signal of the topology."

There are several instruments in use or in construction that will fill in more details of what is inside the volume of observable space. "We want a census of all the matter in the universe," said Jaffe, "which will enable us to understand the global structure of space and time."

If we manage that - and if it turns out that the cosmic topology makes the universe finite - Akrami imagines a day when we have a kind of Google Earth for the entire cosmos. *Observer*
PHILIP BALL IS A SCIENCE WRITER

'We want a census of all the matter in the universe'



UNITED STATES

Tijuana border feels weight of Biden's order on closure

By Amanda Ulrich SAN DIEGO

Every year, waves of people from around the world make their way to southern California to start a new life and find safe harbour.

Along remote, isolated sections of the border between California and Mexico, many asylum seekers cross illegally, often fleeing violence or persecution in their home countries, and then surrender to border agents; apprehensions among those crossing in the San Diego region recently reached their highest level in decades.

The San Ysidro border checkpoint, connecting Tijuana and San Diego, represents the busiest land crossing in the western hemisphere. Asylum seekers and tens of thousands of citizens or visa holders pass northbound through the official port of entry every day.

Now, in the wake of [Joe Biden's executive order on immigration](#), which

temporarily blocks the entry of most people who cross the US-Mexico border illegally, this bustling border region is filled with uncertainty.

Aid groups in the San Diego area are grappling with the abrupt changes. Some experts fear the rules won't deter people from making the dangerous journey to the US and crossing unlawfully through treacherous landscapes, and will instead sow confusion among an already vulnerable population.

People waiting in shelters in Tijuana, for example, do not always have access to reliable information about the asylum process, said Monika Langarica, a senior staff attorney with the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at the University of California, Los Angeles law school. Big changes to that process can "very easily thrust them into the crosshairs of purveyors of disinformation", she said, including smugglers and traffickers.

In general, the new order allows for authorities to quickly remove most people who cross the border unlawfully - at least during times when apprehensions or "encounters" at the border are high. Certain types of asylum seekers, such as victims of severe trafficking and unaccompanied children, are exempt. Those who are ordered to be removed could face a five-year ban on re-entering the US and potential criminal prosecution. Those measures went into effect last week, and will be in place until apprehensions at the southern border drop to a seven-day average of less than 1,500.

People can still seek to enter the country in a lawful way, officials have reiterated, specifically by scheduling an appointment at an official port of

▶ Asylum seekers queue at the El Chaparral crossing

CARLOS MORENO/
NURPHOTO/REX/
SHUTTERSTOCK

'No choice' move
Delivering remarks at the White House alongside mayors of border towns, Biden said congressional Republicans had left him with "no choice" but to take unilateral action after they blocked a bipartisan border security bill earlier this year.

Under the executive order, the administration would shut down asylum requests to the US-Mexico border once the number of daily encounters has reached 2,500 between legal ports of entry, which regularly occurs now. The border would reopen two weeks after that figure falls below a daily average of 1,500 for seven consecutive days.

Many progressive and Hispanic lawmakers expressed alarm at the sweep of the order, the most aggressive border move taken by the administration so far.

entry, such as San Ysidro, through a government app called CBF One. But the app has long been plagued by glitches, and people sometimes wait for months for an appointment.

"It's devoid of due process," Langarica said, "and it's going to subject people to these rapid deportations."

To combat misinformation, groups such as the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, a social justice law firm, are planning to meet directly with asylum seekers at shelters in Tijuana.

The law firm also represents asylum seekers in court based on a "universal representation" model. But now, people who cross the border illegally might have a very small window of time before deportation, putting a strain on the few attorneys who handle those types of cases, said Margaret Cargioli, the organisation's directing attorney of policy and advocacy.

"Desperate people are forced to take desperate measures to save their lives and the lives of their children," she said.

There are still many unknowns about how the measures will affect every element of the complex asylum system. But after Biden's announcement, aid groups still had a job to do.

For Ruth Mendez, a volunteer with Immigrant Defenders, that involves helping people who are dropped off at a San Diego trolley station a few kilometres north of the border, often without much information about where they are or where to go next.

"I think about it like this: how would I want to be treated if I'm arriving to a new country?" Mendez said. "Everything's a culture shock."

For now, many asylum seekers are trying to move forward with whatever piecemeal information they have.

One man named Mujtaba, who is from Afghanistan and left to escape the Taliban, waited at the station last Tuesday, hoping to get a ride to the airport. He had just come from an immigration detention centre and processing, he said.

In the midst of the perilous journey to the US, Mujtaba, whose last name was withheld for safety reasons, hadn't heard anything about Biden's order, which had been announced only hours before.

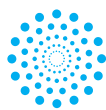
"I'm very tired," he said. "People might think that [the journey] is easy, but it's not easy at all. It's very dangerous. You play with your life."

AMANDA ULRICH IS A CALIFORNIA-BASED JOURNALIST

ANALYSIS
D-DAY

A grim shadow Anniversary comes at time of conflict and carelessness

By Dan Sabbagh



Twenty-two British D-day veterans, the youngest nearly 100, crossed the Channel

last Tuesday to mark the 80th anniversary of the landings in Normandy, representing a thinning thread to the heroics of two or three generations ago when about 150,000 allied soldiers began a seaborne invasion of western Europe that helped end the second world war.

Ron Hayward, a tank trooper who lost his legs fighting in France three weeks after D-day, told crowds assembled in Portsmouth last Wednesday why he and other soldiers were there: "I represent the men and women who put their lives on hold to go and fight for democracy and this country. I am

here to honour their memory and their legacy, and to ensure that their story is never forgotten."

There will not be many more opportunities to commemorate with survivors, while this time the presence of Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, in France on 6 June was a reminder that a part of Europe is in the grip of the largest war since 1945. A deadly war also rages in Gaza, while the living memory of the second world war fades into historical record.

That D-day was a risky task is an understatement: 4,441 British, American, Canadian and other allied soldiers are estimated to have been killed on 6 June 1944, and at least a similar number of Germans. A BBC documentary, D-day: the Unheard Tapes, relying on recordings of veterans' experiences, demonstrates how terrifying it was - and how nobody ought to go through it again.

"I just cried my eyes out. I just stood there and cried, I did," James Kelly, a Royal Marines commando from Liverpool, recalled of finding himself isolated, alone in the French countryside, a few hours after he had fought his way off Sword beach.

I represent the men and women who put their lives on hold to go and fight for democracy

A buddy was killed in front of him as they had got to the sand, but Kelly was ordered to press on.

While leaders present at the commemorations in Normandy included King Charles, Rishi Sunak, Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz, many of those representing forces of division were not present, not least Vladimir Putin, the architect of the invasion on Ukraine.

Last Friday, Biden spoke at Pointe du Hoc, where 80 years ago 225 US Rangers captured a strategically situated artillery bunker. It was perhaps the most dangerous single mission on D-day, and casualties were severe.

There is almost certainly another reason for the location of Biden's address, given the US president has an election to fight. Forty years ago a Republican president, Ronald Reagan, spoke at the same site.

"We in America have learned bitter lessons from two world wars: it is better to be here ready to protect the peace than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost," Reagan declared - very different to Donald Trump's comments that he would refuse to defend Nato members who do not spend enough on defence, never mind previous threats to quit the alliance.

Two years of the war in Ukraine - but also the conflict in Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East - is a reminder that there are those who appear to prefer conflict to stability. Many people are anxious: a recent YouGov poll found 55% of Britons believe it somewhat or very likely the UK will be involved in a war in the next five years.

Since the end of the cold war at least, and perhaps since 1945, it has been easier to take stability and security in Europe for granted, helped partly by the military pact of Nato and the economic alliance of the EU, but also by the grim memory of all-out conflict. But a rise of nationalist rhetoric suggests there is also a growing carelessness. If it metastasises, as the stories of D-day survivors demonstrate, ordinary people end up bearing the brunt.

DAN SABBAGH IS THE GUARDIAN'S DEFENCE AND SECURITY EDITOR

War toll
Sacrifices and rising tensions

150k
Number of allied soldiers involved in the D-day invasions

4,441
D-day death toll among allied soldiers

55%
Ratio of Britons who think it likely the UK will be involved in a war in the next five years

◀ A D-day veteran watches a fly-past by the Red Arrows in Portsmouth

LEON NEAL/PA



Once upon a time, it was only hardcore bodybuilders who pumped themselves up with testosterone. Today it is no longer niche. But how dangerous is it? *By Stephen Buranyi*

DAVE IS AN ORDINARY OFFICE WORKER IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND. He is about average height for a British man - 1.77 metres - and to catch a glimpse of him between 9am and 5pm, the only hint that his leisure time is spent shattering the natural limits of human growth might be his slightly ill-fitting XXL shirt, or the fact that he sometimes wears women's trousers, to better accommodate the steep slope between his trim waist and bulging thighs.

But in the videos and photos Dave posts online, to approving comments from other weightlifters ("huge progress 🍌🍌🍌"), he is a total beast. His chest looks herculean, and the skin on his legs is pulled so tight that it has ceased to conceal the striated landscape of muscles underneath. Looking at him brings to mind the peeled-back diagrams of an undergraduate anatomy textbook. You can imagine attentive medical students poring over him, admiring the clarity - there the brachioradialis, there the palmaris longus. He looks impossibly strong, and he is. His record deadlift is 250kg, about the weight of three average men.

To get this body, Dave needed two things. First, the discipline to eat well, sleep well and work out intensely four to six times a week. And second, to take steroids. Like most users, he does so in cycles - periods of 8-20 weeks, up to two or three times a year. During his last cycle, in January of this year, he was taking 600mg of testosterone enanthate a week, injected - or pinned, in weightlifting jargon - into his buttock or thigh with a needle, and 40mg of oxandrolone a day, as an oral tablet. He is so far thrilled with the results, and not shy about discussing it. "I wouldn't say it's a taboo subject," he told me. Someone at work recently asked him how he got so big and strong. "I replied simply: 'Steroids,'" he said.

At the end of his cycle, Dave gets blood tests from a private medical lab. These will show his testosterone levels crashing down, and ideally his alanine transaminase, an enzyme that serves as a proxy for liver health, remaining average - indicating that his body tolerated the regime well. It is also likely, though harder to measure, that the walls of his heart are thickening, increasing his risk of heart attack. His testicles, freed from their job of producing testosterone by the influx of pharmaceutical chemicals, have partially atrophied, and, at the moment, Dave is injecting small amounts of testosterone every week, to keep his levels in the normal range for a man in his early-30s - a practice that he may have to continue for the rest of his life. He isn't planning another cycle of steroids anytime soon. But "the temptation is always there", he told me.

A decade or two ago, it would have been unlikely a white-collar office worker like Dave would have been so seriously into weightlifting, let alone steroids. But over roughly that period, steroid use has become perhaps more widespread than ever before. One early warning, according to Jim McVeigh, a Manchester Metropolitan University addiction researcher, was that workers at needle exchanges were seeing more and more steroid users show up at their services.

How
steroids
got

mu

And the trend appears to be accelerating. In a recent paper, McVeigh and his colleagues estimated that there are about 500,000 men in the UK between the ages of 15 and 64 who have used steroids in the past year. Joseph Kean, a harm reduction coordinator for Bradford council, believes the number might be double that. “We might have something like 70,000 steroid users coming into needle exchanges alone,” he told me. If the lower estimate is right, there are about as many steroid users as cocaine users among men in that age group. If the higher number is right, steroids are the second-most used illegal drug in the country, after cannabis.

In the UK, steroid possession is not criminalised – although they are illegal to sell – so it may have higher rates of use and disclosure than in other western countries. But it is clear that the steroids boom is not only a UK phenomenon. A study in the US using data going back to the 1980s suggests that up to 4% of men use steroids at some point in their lives. A smaller scale study published in 2022 found the rate of steroid use in adolescent boys in Minnesota was almost 7%. An analysis of 187 studies found that in countries where data existed, 6.4% of men and 1.6% of women had used steroids at some point.

Over the past six months, I have spoken with more than 30 steroid users from different walks of life, as well as gym owners, former pro bodybuilders and powerlifters, fitness influencers and people familiar with the dealers who sell these drugs or cook them up in underground labs. What became clear through these conversations was that the values of previously marginal subcultures long associated with steroid use – such as bodybuilding or powerlifting – have increasingly entered the mainstream. They have flourished on social media, at the same time that larger cultural taboos around drugs and medical interventions have faded. The result is that more young men now feel drawn, or pushed, to transcend their natural limits in a way that would have seemed frightening or pathological to previous generations. As one

20-year-old in the West Country taking his first course of steroids told me, he was initially “terrified about the idea of sticking a needle with mostly unknown contents in”. Now, though, it’s as easy “as waking up and making a brew in the morning”.

I also spoke to doctors, scientists and harm-reduction workers who are studying the long-term effects of these drugs, many of which are still poorly understood. Some predict a tsunami of health problems crashing over the current cohort of users in two or three decades, burdening health services with their weak hearts and testicles, and currently only hinted-at cognitive impairments. In 2018, a group of prominent researchers published a review calling steroids a “hidden epidemic”, and a “looming public health threat” in the US. Other experts believe the effects can be managed. But one thing everyone I spoke with agreed on was that steroid use would continue to grow. “It’s not just a certain kind of person, certain region, certain gym,” says McVeigh. “What we have learned is: wherever we look for steroid use, we find it.”

THE BASIC APPEAL OF STEROIDS IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND. They do exactly what they promise to: grow muscles fast. A 2018 review of studies on steroid use concluded that, on average, users ended up with 52% greater strength gains than non-doped control groups. Historically, weightlifting records take off like a shot in the 1960s, when steroids entered widespread use. “It’s not ideal to say this about a drug we’re trying to get people not to use, but steroids do really work,” Kean told me.

For the many men – and smaller number of women – fixated on becoming more muscular, the easy availability of steroids means there is always a “what if?” in the back of their mind.



The 20-year-old man who had just started his first cycle of steroids told me he had been in the gym less than a year, but felt he wasn't progressing fast enough, and had begun to suspect his natural testosterone levels were a little low. Another young man in his mid-20s in the home counties told me he'd been working out for 10 years but "hopped on gear to get more strong and aesthetic than I'd ever been". There are older men taking steroids as they feel their strength and vitality decline, and teens taking them for a little pump up before a big party holiday abroad.

The majority of what we colloquially call steroids are kinds of synthetic testosterone. Testosterone is the hormone that promotes masculinisation, or the traits we associate with maleness: a deep voice, large muscles, body hair, aggression. On a course of steroids where testosterone levels can be up to 100 times higher than normal, the body's systems for muscle tissue production and energy generation are thrown into overdrive, allowing a person to lift more weight, recover faster and grow more muscle.

But it isn't just muscle tissue that responds to testosterone. Overstimulated hair follicles may shut off, causing balding. Red blood cell production increases, thickening the blood and stressing the heart. And because the human body uses testosterone as raw material to make oestrogen, steroids can cause oestrogen levels to spike, leading the body to retain water and grow fatty breast tissue. "Big muscles, a big heart and big boobs," says Wiebke Arlt, an endocrinologist at the University of Birmingham. "Maybe not the intended result."

What makes these side-effects so complicated and unpredictable is that steroid users are taking a huge range of chemical compounds that mimic testosterone, but aren't as well understood. One of the best-known is metandienone, or Dianabol, colloquially called Dbol, which was developed by the American physician John Ziegler in the mid 20th

century to give to weightlifters, including the American Olympic squad. Because it was tested on humans and in academic laboratories, it is generally accepted that Dbol is very good at activating muscle growth, and very poor at converting into compounds like oestrogen, thus reducing side-effects. Doctors and endocrinologists I spoke with broadly agreed that Dbol acted as most users assumed it did.

ANOTHER POPULAR STEROID IS TRENBOLONE, or "tren". But we know less about what exactly tren is doing in the body, because since its invention in the 1960s it has never been officially studied for human use. It is a livestock drug, used to fatten up cattle. Much of the best available information on its effects has been compiled over the years by users. The strength coach and podcaster Scott McNally described tren to me as "a very harsh compound, once reserved for the hardest core of bodybuilders". One older bodybuilder described it to me as like "a steroid on steroids". It can lead to immense strength gains, but also low moods, insomnia, acne and a strange but well-documented phenomenon known as "tren cough", a fit of coughing immediately after injection of the drug.

This corpus of knowledge was once limited to personal conversations and pamphlets passed around gyms. Today, it is available to everyone. Instagram and TikTok are awash with memes about taking tren - there are two famous influencers with more than 1 million followers named "the Tren Twins" (although they claim that they do not use tren). On YouTube and message boards there are more detailed and serious discussions about how to tweak a course of steroids for the best and safest results - generally led by people who have been taking them a long time. The tone of the advice is often supremely confident, and it is easy to start to believe that these committed amateur muscle-scientists really do have steroids figured out.

But that isn't really the case. These community-compiled resources are often "very impressive", says Channa Jayasena, an endocrinologist at Imperial College London, but the bottom line is that "most of these compounds were never approved for people, so scientifically we are very in the dark". Steroids themselves are complex enough, but many people also source black-market versions of prescription oestrogen blockers to reduce side-effects, as well as gonad-stimulating drugs like human chorionic gonadotrophin in an effort to restart testicles and improve fertility.

This, says Jayasena, is perfectly logical - using one drug's intended effect to block another - but it's not actually very scientific. There are no studies about these methods, no knowledge of the strange and unexpected ways multiple drugs might interact in the body, and no doctor would recommend the approach. There are too many unknowns.

▼ The number - in thousands - of men in the UK aged 15-64 estimated to have used steroids in the past year

5000





5.7

▲ The number - in millions - of Instagram followers for 22-year-old US bodybuilding influencer Sam Sulek

There was a time when sourcing trenbolone, or the horse steroid boldenone, or any number of performance-enhancing drugs, required initiation into the inner sanctum of bodybuilding culture. “Even a decade or so ago, you really had to know a guy, in a gym, and you had to be trusted,” says Tim Piatkowski, a drug researcher at Griffith University in Australia. Nick Gibbs, a Northumbria University criminologist who has written a book about the evolution of steroid markets, noted that this put a hard limit on who could get steroids. “I wouldn’t be able to approach those kind of networks. I’m too small, I don’t look the part,” he said.

That’s all changed now that steroid sales have moved online. It took no more than 20 minutes of research to find Instagram, TikTok and Telegram accounts that offered to send me an eight-week cycle of testosterone, tren, and the syringes I’d need to administer them, all for a bank transfer of about £150 (\$190). It was even easier to find a website that offered a full pharmacopoeia of steroids and related compounds, to ship to my home in the UK (or US, when I asked their extremely helpful WhatsApp customer service line).

The consensus on bodybuilding forums, and among most of the steroid users I spoke to, was that aside from the odd scammer, these dealers are generally trustworthy. Popular suppliers have been active for years and have thousands of satisfied customers. Most of what we know about the scale and authenticity of illegal steroids comes from border police. A 2017 analysis of 1,200 different steroids and related chemicals seized at the Swiss border found that “less than 20% of the products contained the claimed substance in the respective amount”. But research by Gibbs, the criminologist, suggests that in the UK the majority of steroids - one of his sources put the number at 80-90% - are manufactured domestically in underground laboratories, using legal chemical precursors, often imported from China or India. This is a vast network supplying hundreds of thousands of users, almost completely invisible to the law.

As steroids have become more widely available, the kind of person who takes them has changed. Jon Findlay, national harm reduction lead for the drug treatment charity Humankind, told me that he and his colleagues had found that “the average steroid user is now younger - in their 20s or even teens - and more naive. Not a bodybuilder who is monitoring his bloodwork and taking care, but a kid who might barely even work out.” I heard the same from several outreach workers. (As far as I could tell, this shift mostly involved men - with women who use steroids generally still being committed strength athletes.)

Most of the older steroid users I spoke with noted this shift, too, and disapproved of it. Steve Gardener, a 59-year-old former grip-strength champion based in Wales, who has used steroids and hosts an advice podcast, told me he would “never tell a kid to take steroids. Even up to 25 is too early. You need physical maturity and emotional maturity.” Most people, he said, simply weren’t dedicated enough to

‘I never thought about the reasons why I shouldn’t start steroids. I only saw the good stuff’

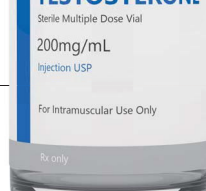
make the risk of steroids worth it. “I see it all the time, the majority of people come to the gym and stick with it for two, three years, max. Then they’re gone, on to a job or marriage or whatever else in life, and they never come back,” he said. “So you risk fucking up your health for nothing. What’s the point?”

But norms like this can’t be enforced once steroids are no longer confined to a subculture of strength-sport enthusiasts. Earlier this year, at the Arnold Sports festival UK - a bodybuilding and strength sports convention - I spoke to a group of young men in their early 20s from Belfast. One was a powerlifter who attended competitions. He was noticeably stacked, and in the valley between his pectoral and deltoid muscles were stretch marks from growing so fast. He told me he was on synthetic testosterone and Dbol. His friend was just a regular gym goer who didn’t compete. But he, too, was on a high dose of synthetic testosterone, looking to give his body “a kick into gear”.

MANY OF THE YOUNG MEN I spoke to felt surrounded by signals that a muscular body was what they needed. They had noticed that celebrities, from movie stars to the sexed-up randos on reality shows such as Love Island, had got more muscular, though no one I talked to wanted to emulate a movie star exactly, let alone go on reality TV. The idea that “muscles get you girls” came up often, although most men acknowledged that only a small subset of women prefer a mammothly muscular body. Many mentioned social media, where they saw constant images of successful muscular men - friends they knew and influencers they didn’t - which had, in some small way, made them feel bad about themselves. Many had got into weightlifting or fitness in order to feel better, and yet they often felt as if they were falling behind, or not achieving the milestones - “gains” in muscle or strength - that they should. Steroids, they hoped, would help.

The desire for this kind of body is relatively recent. In her 1999 book, *The Male Body*, the feminist social critic Susan Bordo noted that in the preceding decade, advertising and mass culture had become fixated on a kind of male body - muscular, athletic, often nearly nude - that hadn’t been considered ideal or attainable for much of the modern era. The erosion of mid-20th-century social hierarchies had weakened the traditional connection between body type and social position: the plump office manager versus the muscled factory worker, for example. Free of such associations, people were beginning to see their bodies as a representation of their identity or self. Bordo realised that the inescapable gaze of mass consumer culture would soon have the same shame-making effect on men as it did on women. “I never dreamed that equality would move in the direction of men worrying more about their looks rather than women worrying less,” she lamented.





Almost everyone I spoke to mentioned influencers. Strength training is huge on social media, and plenty of influencers have no truck with steroids. Some of today's muscle-bound internet stars are what you might expect: brash, alpha types here to shout you into shape. But there are influencers for every audience. "If you want someone to drone on about studies and citations, you got it," says Mike "Dr Mike" Israetel, a sports scientist and bodybuilder whose YouTube channel has 1.8 million subscribers. "You want someone to be super relatable and cool and not make you think too hard, you got it, too." There are strength influencers for Asian moms, and ones for craft-beer nerds. Among the most popular at the moment are the Joe Rogan-adjacent, self-optimisation-obsessed More Plates More Dates channel, with 2 million YouTube subscribers, and Joey Swoll, a relentlessly positive himbo sort whose main non-lifting shtick is calling out instances of cyberbullying for his 4.4 million Instagram followers.

But the current king - and the person most mentioned by young men I spoke with - is Sam Sulek, a 22-year-old Ohian with 5.7 million Instagram followers. Sulek is a slab of pure lean meat with an 80s-rocker shag of black hair, and an affable style. When I asked people what they liked about Sulek, they cited his humility and the way he seemed like an ordinary person. Indeed, Sulek is perhaps the perfect example of an influencer: in every way normal and relatable - someone like you, or someone you know - except for one almost unbelievably extreme quality, in this case being perhaps the most muscular person I've ever seen. (I stood near Sulek in a washroom at Arnold UK, and the width of his shoulders made taking a position at the urinal next to him essentially impossible.)

Sulek has stated that he does not use steroids, but his most famous predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has admitted to doing so in the past. In a 2017 paper on the history of gym culture, the sociologists Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson note that Schwarzenegger didn't just introduce bodybuilding to mainstream culture, he also pioneered a punishing, steroidal, aesthetically extreme version of it, and made the mainstream culture more aesthetically extreme as a result. (Last year, Schwarzenegger gave an interview to Men's Health warning of the dangers of steroids.)

There isn't a single influencer with the thousand-watt charisma of a young Schwarzenegger, but there are hundreds who are just as large and steroidal, and once your algorithm has realised you want to see big guys, you are going to see a lot of big guys. The result is a now-familiar online dynamic, where what was once extreme comes to seem normal, and what is genuinely normal can come to feel inadequate.

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE are now saturated in the previously niche world of "gains", "hypertrophy" (muscle growth), nutrition, recovery and its attendant values. And while working out is generally a healthy activity, a mind-boggling amount of the online culture around it is anything but. Only a handful of strength training influencers actually admit to using steroids, the rest avowedly do not. But the reason that so many influencers need to spell out that they do not use steroids is that the wider community is obsessed with them. The question of "natty or not" - is your body natural, or not - is posed in comments, and discussed on endless podcasts, videos and forums.

Jesse James West, a 24-year-old American strength influencer with 4 million YouTube subscribers, told me he receives hundreds of comments and direct messages about whether he uses steroids, and fluctuations in his weight are dissected on forums like Reddit's 175,000-member "nattyorjuice" message board. West is, in fact, natty, and in several recent videos, he has highlighted what he calls the fitness industry's "steroid epidemic", by interviewing bodybuilders and dealers. "We can say, 'Don't blast tren!'", but it would

'You're the alpha everywhere you go. You feel like you command respect. It's wild'

be better to be honest about the fact people use, and not present a false image," he told me.

West's online persona is more class-clown than ubermensch, but he isn't under any illusion about the power he has. "Influencers have to realise how much influence they actually have. There are people out there who will literally do what you tell them."

There was, in all my conversations, a resignation that steroid use was only going to grow over the coming years. If that's right, it will make understanding the long-term consequences "incredibly urgent", says Findlay, the harm-reduction expert. "The question for us really, in medicine, is not *why* people are using, but what exactly the dangers are," says Jayasena, the endocrinologist. "A very rigorous study in Denmark showed us that over a decade, your overall chance of death taking steroids triples versus non-users. That's about the same risk as cocaine, but less than a third of heroin use," he told me.

The basic medical consensus is that during the period when steroids are being taken, the risks are high. A study in Australia in 2020 showed that while taking steroids affected basic heart functions, after steroid use had ceased, the heart appeared to rebound, recovering over the course of a year or more. This is less true of the testicles. While many men will regain the ability to produce their own testosterone - and make viable sperm - for some, "it simply never comes back, and we're not sure why", says Jayasena.

Testosterone also has a potent effect on the mind. On this, I found there was a stark split between novice steroid users and veterans. Younger or first-time users were often thrilled with the psychological benefits: "You're the alpha everywhere you go. You feel like you command respect. It's wild," the young man from the home counties told me. Older users tended to lament the side-effects. "One of my coaches used to call it 'the burden'," says Mike Israetel, referring to the long-term feelings of deadened emotion, anxiety and the dips in mood that accompany cycles of steroid use. Israetel has been open in his videos about his own use, and often begins those discussions with the statement: "Steroids are not fun." Another thing he said, echoing many other older men I spoke to, was that "steroids make you stupid", citing deficiencies in memory and reasoning that come with regular use.

Astrid Kristine Bjørnebekk, a psychiatrist at Oslo University hospital in Norway, conducted one of the first large-scale studies on the effects of steroids on the brain. Her team scanned the brains of more than 80 people who had used steroids for at least a year, and compared the scans with non-steroid users. They found the steroid users had on average smaller brain volume and significant reductions in grey matter. "It is not one small region being affected," she says. "It is the whole brain."

In the short term, how should states deal with the growing number of steroid users? Starting in the late 2000s, Denmark and Sweden, along with the Netherlands and Belgium, took a hardline approach. According to April Henning, a professor of sports science at the

University of Stirling in Scotland, a combination of the Olympic steroid scandals of the 1980s and 90s, and the “fear that steroid users would be a drain on the future public health system”, led them to adopt harsh penalties, including jail time, for steroid use.

In Denmark and Sweden, police were given powers to raid gyms at random, and even to stop notably ripped people on the street and demand an immediate urine test. This came to be known as muscle-profiling, or *muskelprofiler* in Swedish. In 2010, the policy made international news when the American bodybuilder Toney Freeman was detained after an appearance at a sports shop in Sweden, taken to a police station, and reportedly forced to pee in a cup. (Freeman was released the same day and was not charged.) Alex Danielsson, a former editor of *Body* magazine in Sweden, told me it created a culture of fear around bodybuilding, and had little effect on overall steroid use.

WITH ITS RELATIVELY PERMISSIVE drugs policy, the UK offers an alternative approach. In early May, I visited one of the longest-running steroid clinics in the country, Sheffield’s Juice clinic, which runs out of an addiction support complex in a commercial building just outside the city centre. John McNeil, an outreach worker, has been working with steroid users for nearly two decades. Over that time he has seen the same shift that other needle exchanges around the country have reported: “Then, it was 70% heroin and crack, 30% steroids. Now, it’s flipped,” he told me.

The point of the clinic is not to confront people about abusing steroids. “They don’t see themselves as the same as other drug users, they see themselves as much healthier,” said McNeil. And, as a former IV drug user himself, he knows confrontation doesn’t work anyway. The point is to help people be safe, and then encourage them to think about what they’re doing.

On the day I visited, men were waiting to get blood tests done, with a consultation to discuss the results two weeks later. Sitting in on the sessions, I met a tanned, healthy-looking man who buys synthetic testosterone on trips overseas. He was an evangelist for low doses of testosterone, but keen to keep an eye on his health after two years of use. He chatted easily as McNeil expertly slipped a needle into his forearm and drained blood out into three small tubes for testing.

Next, a compact, nervous man who used to take steroids years ago arrived. He said he was thinking about starting a testosterone replacement therapy dose again, bought from a local contact. McNeil told him he would chat about the safest way to inject when the man came back next time for his results. A little later there was a hushed conference among the staff about an active bodybuilder’s bloodwork.

His liver results were worrying. It was unlikely to be just the result of steroids, and they wondered if he had been drinking heavily, too.

McNeil and the two nurses working with him did not have special expertise in steroids, but they could offer people a safe place to discuss their worries and monitor their health. Many steroid users told me they’d never talk to a doctor outside an emergency, because doctors had little specialist knowledge, and they didn’t want to get a note on their medical record. But they come to the clinic. Juice has recently had to restrict appointments to Sheffield residents. “We had people driving across the country for us,” McNeil said.

But there are only a handful of these services across the UK, and they can only keep going as long as often-ephemeral public health funding lasts. Kean, in Bradford, said running a monthly clinic doing bloodwork and basic harm reduction might cost as little as £25,000 a year. But the dream would be something bigger, offering blood testing, psychological wellbeing services, and always being accessible. “That takes time and money, though,” he noted, ruefully.

People need some kind of service. When I was speaking to young men, I found them well informed, but also overconfident, in the way that young people are. They assured me that they would beat any negative health consequences, that they would only use steroids “for a little while”. It was hard to believe them. Online, newer steroid users often seem lost: posting on forums asking for help, with little idea of safe dosing or side-effects. The quality of the responses are a matter of pure chance.

One of the last people I chatted to was a 20-year-old from the West Midlands who became depressed and quit in the middle of his second cycle of steroids. He was convinced he had thrown his whole hormone system out of whack for ever. “After I stopped pinning, my mood went down, no motivation and no morning wood, so my testosterone is pretty much messed up at this moment,” he messaged me. He felt awful. “I actually never thought about the reasons why I shouldn’t start steroids. I only looked at the good stuff. I was pretty much blinded by all the progress influencers and people online made on gear,” he said.

People online had been telling him he had been stupid and reckless, which was probably true. Still, he wasn’t dissuaded from taking steroids again. “Taking gear was enjoyable, but coming off it was the fucked-up part, if you get what I mean. I am planning on going back on gear to hopefully get myself in shape and my testosterone levels back up. If there’s anything else just let me know man,” he wrote to me. He didn’t write again. I checked in a few days later, but he was off to some other corner of the internet, or attending to his real life. He seemed as if he needed a counsellor, or a doctor. I hoped he knew how to find them ●

STEPHEN BURANYI IS A REGULAR GUARDIAN LONG READ CONTRIBUTOR

6.4%

▲ The proportion of men – in countries where data exists – who have used steroids. For women, the proportion is 1.6%



Keeping the peace

Military service for 18-year-olds is a key Tory election pledge in the UK. But in countries with conscription, opting out comes at a cost. *Michael Segalov* asks seven conscientious objectors why they refused to serve in the armed forces



'The apartheid society I lived in was offensive to the core of my being'

PETER HATHORN, 63 ►
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

The society I grew up in was one of the most bizarre and institutionally racist environments ever to exist. Every aspect of life was stratified along racial lines, puritanical and repressive. Our Durban suburb was all white, save for domestic workers. I went to a whites-only school. At the liberally minded University of Cape Town in the late 70s, barely a single academic or student was a person of colour. Sexual relations across the colour line were prohibited, punishable by jail time.

At that time the African National Congress was a banned organisation, engaged in an armed struggle. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. South Africa's army was fighting a war in the north of Namibia and southern Angola, and was integral to maintaining the apartheid state, long before it was deployed in Black townships in South Africa to quell uprisings. It was largely a conscript army of white men called up at 16. Failure to comply came with a prison sentence of up to two years, after which you could be enlisted again.

I went to university to defer military service, then decided to refuse it. From the late 70s, a small number of conscientious objectors in mainstream churches had voiced strong objections to apartheid and resisted participating in an unjust war. They had a profound impact on many of us. My opposition to serving was purely political: the apartheid society I lived in was offensive to the core of my being, and after graduation in 1983 I wrote to my prospective unit informing them of my decision.

After my court martial date was set, I spoke to students, other conscripts, campaigners and church groups, explaining my stand. I was sentenced to two years in prison and dishonourably discharged from the army.

Stepping through the wooden doors of Pretoria's notorious "hanging prison" was daunting. It's where people were brought to be executed, including many apartheid opponents. The warders were racist towards Black inmates and hostile to me. I felt fortunate when, after three months, a judge halved my sentence. I was released in early 1984, as the End Conscription Campaign was spreading and increasing numbers of conscripts were refusing to join up. We used innovative political methods - striking posters, musical and cultural events, a nationwide fast - as well as conventional rallies.

When I was conscripted again, the maximum sentence had been increased to six years in prison. Thankfully, a lawyer made a strong case that as I had already been discharged, my re-conscription was illegal. Faced with a complex legal fight, the army backed off. That was to my great relief: I didn't fancy having to decide whether to face a further six years in jail.

'As a woman, you're expected to give birth to sons who are willing to fight and die for their country'

MERVE ARKUN, 34 ◀
AYDIN, TURKEY

Women aren't conscripted like men into the Turkish military, but I'm still a conscientious objector: military service harms our whole nation, and I want my opposition to be heard. Over 10 years ago, I was a student at university in İzmir and heard of a Kurdish deserter arrested after running from the army. Many Kurdish young men



won't serve, despite the conscription laws: they face discrimination and abuse inside the military, while the Turkish government wages war against their people.

This man was placed in military prison - I went to visit him every week and we became close friends. We spoke for hours about his experiences and ideas. These conversations affected me deeply. I also became close with his wife, who had been left to support his family and children. I saw first-hand how conscription affects not just men but women, too. I started to see how national service is part of a wider militaristic culture. For me, being a conscientious objector means not just refusing to serve, but opposing the wider system: gender-based violence and abuse of women, discrimination, rape and sexual assault. I came to see that the macho military is at the heart of all of this. And as a woman, you're expected to give birth to sons who are willing to fight and die for their country.

In Turkey, men must serve at least six months, but those with money can cut that time. If you refuse, there are repercussions: fines, imprisonment and human rights violations. And the impact is felt long term. It's illegal in Turkey to hire a man who has failed to complete his service. Access to education is restricted.

We don't know how many objectors there are, whether Kurdish, anarchist, communist, LGBTQ+ or religious opponents. People don't feel comfortable to declare their position openly. I know people who have been forced to leave their jobs and homes. My partner is also an objector. He has faced investigations, criminal cases and financial penalties. We live in a small city and try to hide all this from our neighbours.

When we travel through Turkey as a family, we are often stopped by armed police. Identity checks see him flagged as a draft evader. Our son is six now - it's terrifying. We are trying to raise him in a peaceful way. I don't want to send my children into the army - to see my son fight, maim or murder. A woman might not be conscripted, but I want my opposition on the record.





**'This war proves that violence
is not the answer'**

EINAT GERLITZ, 20 ▲
TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Through most of my teenage years, the idea of military service barely bothered me. As an Israeli Jew, preparations start early. Some kids at school were excited to fight. I thought I'd just serve my time in a non-combat, educational unit, helping teach children and soldiers: keep my head down, get it over with. Then, in the 12th grade, I found climate activism. We organised nationally as a group of high-schoolers - Israelis and Palestinians. I started to understand the concept of occupation: that while we all lived in the same place, our realities were worlds apart. So much of what I knew was thrown into question.

I had been raised to believe that military service wasn't only an obligation, but my duty. Those who didn't do it were selfish and ignorant. The more I learned about the refusenik movement, the more certain I became. Yes, I could take a quiet job. Some people look to other types of exemption: for physical or mental health reasons, or because of religious beliefs. Instead, I decided that I wanted to refuse, publicly. It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to have your voice heard. Enlisting into the military is so central to Israeli life that refusing forces society to take notice. Facing time in prison to make your point carries weight in a culture that values sacrifice.

I contacted Mesarvot, a network supporting refusers. A lawyer helped me at every stage. During a volunteering year after high school, I had to go before a committee tasked with deciding whether I was truly a conscientious objector. These tribunals are made up primarily of military generals who draw a distinction between political and pacifist reasons for refusing. For me and others, these are intertwined.

I was summoned to a military base. As a teenager, it was hugely stressful: they tried to trip me up and undermine me. I explained I was a pacifist who campaigns against all violence, and was told terrorists and criminals had me to thank; that my refusal put my family in danger. My request for an exemption on conscientious grounds was refused. I had no idea what would happen next. You can be jailed, released, then conscripted again on repeat. Some have spent years in prison. In the end, I was sentenced four times, serving a total of 87 days, before I received an exemption. After an arbitrary period of imprisonment, the military decides you have suffered enough.

I knew it would be complicated with my family, but deep down, I understood they would always love me. That's a privilege not all here are afforded. I received messages thanking me for my stance, but strangers would also tell me I am selfish and deluded. Twice in prison, girls screamed at me: "Traitor, you need to die." But mostly I had interesting conversations with the others detained.



This teenage choice will be with me my whole life. But I'm proud of what I did. Contrary to what some Israelis might think, I refused because I care deeply about this place and its people. Because I believe things can change.

This war proves violence is not the answer. To think you can fight your way to peace is delusional.

**'I felt an urgency to do anything
I could to stop the war'**

BILL GALVIN, 74 ▲
WASHINGTON DC, US

During the first world war, conscientious objectors were treated awfully in the US; imprisonment and abuse were common. In 1940, as the country geared up for another conflict, some churches came together to demand better protection for pacifists. The Center on Conscience and War was founded. I've been involved with it my whole life, supporting those navigating the process.

While there is no conscription in the US today, there is still draft registration for most 18-25 male residents and citizens: you're forced to sign up to a database from which you could be conscripted, should the government desire. I help people object to their inclusion. We also support people who become objectors while in the military. Recruitment targets young men from poor and rural communities with few other routes to education, healthcare and opportunity. They're sold a dream that doesn't stack up. Warfare and violence often leads to moral injury. Suicide rates among military personnel are at their highest since records began.

I graduated high school in 1967, the height of the Vietnam war. Lots of my classmates were drafted. I was going to college, which allowed me to defer conscription. I was active in the Presbyterian church and planned on joining the ministry. I learned that to follow Jesus I must oppose all war or violence. We organised vigils and rallies. I travelled from North Carolina to the huge November 1969 anti-war march on Washington. While in college, I applied to be a conscientious objector. There was a written application: what do you believe? Why?

In 1971, my hearing was held in front of a draft board, six men in grey suits. All had served in the second world war. They weren't sympathetic and my application was denied, which was devastating. I made appeals, none successful. I prepared to face up to five years in prison. Thankfully, by this stage in the war, a draft lottery had been introduced. I lucked out and was never selected.

Meanwhile, I was training to be a minister, but stopping the war remained my priority. Alongside four others, I poured concrete over railway tracks leading from a factory producing 6,000 bomb casings

a day for anti-personnel weapons to be used in Vietnam. At that time I felt an urgency to do *anything* I could to stop that never-ending war. For that, I'm a convicted felon.

When I objected, American wars were being fought in plain sight. Vietnam was the first time we had cameras on the battlefield. We saw body bags and devastation. Now, reporters only really see what's happening first-hand if embedded with troops, under their eye. Often, we don't know where our soldiers are, or what they're doing. Our income taxes go to the military, while roads crumble, schools fail and healthcare costs are through the roof. We should stand with Jesus and the early church and say no to violence. No to war.

'I spent three years in a psychiatric hospital, drugged alongside maniacs and murderers'

OLEG SOFYANIK, 60 ▼
MARHANETS, UKRAINE

I used to live in Crimea, but left in 2020 after years of being persecuted by the FSB, Russia's security agency, for opposing the illegal occupation of the peninsula. I was born in 1964, under Soviet rule, and raised in Sevastopol. Early on, I became a dissident: listening to western radio, I realised the Soviet regime was criminal. As a child, I delivered leaflets criticising the government. My first encounter with the KGB was at 13 – they searched my house and warned me off.

Back then, military service was mandatory for young men: two or three years. Those who refused, or deserted, were punished. It was necessary to have completed your service to pursue a career – failure to serve meant nobody would hire you. I tried, in my teens, to seek political asylum in the UK and America, but to no avail.

The first attempt to conscript me was in 1983. I was a first-year engineering student when I received my call-up notice. I presented myself alongside thousands of others at a central military base. My hope was to be sent to Afghanistan – there, I could escape my unit and cross a land border to freedom. Instead, I was selected to serve in the navy's Black Sea fleet. So I hid in the base as other recruits left. That night, before anyone noticed I was missing, I scaled the perimeter fence and ran away, staying with relatives to plan my escape from the Soviet Union. Before I could get out, police appeared at their door. I'm pretty sure a relation ratted me out. I was arrested and returned to military command, then ordered to conscript again. Again, I ran away, this time from a bus station while being moved to another base. I intended to head to Moscow to seek asylum at the Italian embassy.

But the military was already on to me. I spent a week in military



prison: my cell had no bed, so I slept on my jacket. I was then returned to the conscription office. This was my final warning. Still I refused to take my military oath. I was isolated from the other conscripts and sent to a psychiatric hospital. Here, a sympathetic doctor told me he would lie and diagnose me with a mental illness so the military would excuse me. I spent five months as an inpatient.

In April 1984, I was relieved of military duty and returned to Sevastopol. But my new medical history prevented me finding much work. The KGB harassed me. In the mid-80s, I made various failed attempts to escape the Soviet Union, even jumping off a cruise ship at night with an inflatable dinghy, hoping to cross the Black Sea to Turkey. I was picked up by the coastguard and imprisoned. A court ordered me to a psychiatric hospital, where I spent a further three years, drugged alongside maniacs and murderers. Let's just say that was difficult.

Today I live in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk oblast, under heavy Russian attack. Recently I've been to visit family in Berlin, but my civic duty is to be in the war zone, not in prosperous Europe. I'm a lifelong pacifist from Ukraine, but Putin's merciless and evil war is an unavoidable reality. The primary objective of the pacifist movement here must be to stop Russia's ruthless violence. I'm a man of peace, but what choice do we have? Putin is demonic – intent on destroying the Ukrainian identity. Even pacifists must resist him. All those serving in the Ukrainian military and dying are his responsibility. I plan on going to Russia this spring with a pacifist mission to defend the rights of political prisoners and objectors who have the courage to stand up to Putin. It's dangerous, yes, but I've been through so much: prison and death no longer scare me.

'If I'm sent back to Belarus I'll face a very long prison sentence or the death penalty'

MIKITA SVIRYD, 21 ▲
VILNIUS, LITHUANIA

Rural western Belarus is where I used to call home, but for the past two years I've lived in Lithuania. I'm a refugee here, having deserted the Belarusian army. If I'm sent back to Belarus I'll face a very long prison sentence or the death penalty: the president, Alexander Lukashenko, signed a bill introducing capital punishment for harming national security and for treason.

Mandatory military service in Belarus lasts 18 months. As a kid, I was not interested – not for any moral or political reason, but from hearing stories of how poorly new recruits were treated. The alternative, though, was prison time, so I decided to just get on with it. My first month was spent in training. Every Sunday,



we had an hour of “education” – mostly it was political, for instance, about how anyone protesting against the Lukashenko presidency is a fascist. We would be shown Russian and old Soviet films, often about the second world war.

This was before Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but we participated in joint military exercises with Russia. It was strange: our army depots had brand new combat kits. We were told it was for training, but we had only ever used very old equipment before. I was with this same unit when Russia’s invasion started. We were helping the Russians load ammunition at the time. The Russians left the next day.

After the invasion, everything changed. We were shown extreme Russian propaganda programmes: how in Ukraine Russia was fighting Nazis. It was intensive brainwashing, and it worked. About a third of those who weren’t pro-Putin before were converted. I wasn’t.

I was sent to man checkpoints around an airbase close to the Ukrainian border. Here, there were 20 or so Russian fighter jets; our job was to wave missile deliveries through. Then we were moved to the Lithuanian border, where we were instructed to find civilian clothes for a later mission. With these in my possession, I realised I could attempt to run away. On the evening of 26 May 2022, I packed a rucksack with these clothes, my documents and anything I had of value. I also grabbed a pair of night vision goggles. By 3am, I was on watch, alone. When I was sure nobody was awake, I got up and ran. I sprinted through the woodland towards Lithuania, changing into my civilian outfit. I’ve no idea how long I ran for. Then I saw a car, told the driver I was heading to see my grandma, and hitched a lift.

I’ve been in Lithuania for nearly two years now. For the first six months I was forbidden to work by law, and now nobody wants to hire me without documents. I applied for political asylum, but this was denied. My first appeal was also rejected – now I’m waiting for the result of another legal challenge. I’m terrified, and am barely sleeping. The only people I am in touch with from home are my parents. They don’t understand why I’ve done what I’ve done. Of course, I still love them. They are ordinary Belarusian people who have bought the propaganda. I don’t know if or when I’ll see them again.

**‘I played my part,
just not with guns’**

**TIMOTHY TYNDALL, 99 ►
LONDON, ENGLAND**

My father was ordained in 1913. During the first world war, he was a volunteer chaplain on the western front. He received a Military Cross in the Somme, and a bar to the cross in 1918. Afterwards, he became a parish priest in Birmingham. Dad rarely discussed the horrors he witnessed at war. As the years went on, he became convinced about pacifist ideas. From the youngest age, I agreed with him.

War had broken out again when I started at public school. We dug trenches to hide in, should bombing start. When old boys were killed in the fighting, their names would be read out at evening prayers. All the boys attended Officers’ Training Corps to prepare us for military careers. All the boys, except me. I refused. There was a brief attempt to try to ostracise me for my decision. If I close my eyes now, I can still picture the changing room at school where one boy tried to bully me. After a few days, however, it petered out.

During the first world war, 16,000 men objected. Some were allowed to do civilian work of national importance; others served in a noncombat corps. Those who were refused objector status were imprisoned. By the time war was declared against Germany in 1939, there was a clearer process. The vast majority of the nearly 60,000 objectors were rapidly put to other work, given dispensation to contribute peacefully.



In 1943, aged 18, I went to a tribunal in Bristol to make my case as a conscientious objector. My outlook was shaped by all I’d learned of the last war. Millions lost their lives, and for what purpose? In front of the panel, I had to present three letters to evidence my case. My uncle took me and sat at the back, watching. The panel wanted to be sure it was my decision alone. The chair asked me explicitly: “Are you making up your own mind or simply copying what your father did?”

I went on to join the Friends Ambulance Unit. Set up by Quakers in the first world war, it was a volunteer medical service operating behind the lines, taking the wounded off to receive treatment. The idea was that pacifism couldn’t just mean withdrawing from duty, remaining absent. It had to be a visible, active alternative in the midst of war. Its 1,344 members acted as medical orderlies during the blitz, and wherever medical support was needed: Scandinavia, the Middle East, mainland Europe. After my basic training, I set sail for China in 1944, serving the unit in humanitarian schemes, returning in 1947.

I never encountered much opposition to the choice I made. Few talked about their war afterwards. We were keen to get on with our lives, and for many it wasn’t an experience to be relived. I made my choice informed by the first world war. What we witnessed in Germany in the early 1940s was, of course, an altogether different evil. What should a person of peace do in the face of Nazism’s wickedness? It throws up complex questions. I never considered my choice a criticism or judgment on another’s decision to serve. I understood why allied governments acted as they did; why others fought. My view remains that in moments of conflict, it is important that a voice of conscience is heard, even if not followed by the majority.

On returning home I learned to live with my decision not to fight. I’ve no good reason to believe I made the wrong choice. I played my part, just not with guns. Eighty years have passed since I objected. Wherever I look, it’s the same old story. When will we learn that war begets war? Violence always begets violence ●

MICHAEL SEGALOV IS A JOURNALIST, FILMMAKER AND AUTHOR

GEORGE MONBIOT

Let's try other
ways of doing
elections

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Opinion



EUROPE

*Wake up! After this E-day, Europe
is again in danger from the far right*

Timothy Garton Ash



ILLUSTRATION: GUARDIAN DESIGN



Europe that just celebrated on the beaches of Normandy the 80-year-old D-day beginning of its liberation from war, nationalism and fascism now again faces fascism, nationalism and war.

Please don't be reassured by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen's complacent statement that "the centre held" on what we might call E-day - 9 June 2024, when the results of 27 different national elections to the European parliament were announced. That's true in the aggregate distribution of seats between the main party groups in the European parliament, with her own centre-right European People's party group coming out on top. But the EU is run by national governments even more than by its directly elected parliament, and E-Day produced hard-right successes in core member states that range from the significant to the shocking.

None of these Eurosceptic parties will be so stupid as to advocate following Britain's Brexit by trying Frexit, Dexit or Nexit. Instead, they will continue to pull the EU to the right from inside, with an even harder line on immigration, determined opposition to green measures, reduced support for Ukraine and clawing back national control from Brussels. So don't let anyone tell you: "It's not so bad." It's bad, and could get worse.

Most dramatic is France. I was in Normandy for the D-day anniversary and watched President Emmanuel Macron trying to use the international commemoration event to tell an inspiring story about how that liberation paved the way for today's European Union. But in the surrounding villages I saw mainly election posters for Marine Le Pen's National Rally. Sure enough, on E-day the National Rally scored a stunning victory, winning more than 30% of the vote and trouncing Macron's liberal centrist Renaissance. In the little town of Ver-sur-Mer, where my father landed along with so many other British soldiers to begin the liberation of western Europe on 6 June 1944, the National Rally got 33% of the vote. Another significant chunk of votes in Ver-sur-Mer went to Marion Maréchal, Le Pen's even more extreme niece, the name of whose party, Reconquête, suggests a "reconquest" of Europe from allegedly alien and especially Muslim inhabitants, as openly advocated by its founder, Éric Zemmour.

Then came the bombshell. Macron, whose always extraordinary self-confidence is now visibly tipping into hubris, called fresh elections on 30 June, with a second round on 7 July. "I can only salute this decision,"



There's still a majority of Europeans who don't want to lose the best Europe we've had. They need to be mobilised

replied Le Pen. This is a huge gamble, counting on the excellent French two-round electoral system for voters in most constituencies to prefer another candidate over the National Rally one in the decisive second round. But there's a risk that just three days after Britain gets a government of the pragmatic, cautiously pro-European centre-left on 4 July, France may get a government of the Eurosceptic hard right.

Only slightly less worrying is Germany. While the centre-right CDU-CSU was the clear winner, the extreme-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) came second, with just under 16% of the vote, more than was garnered by any of the three parties in the country's governing coalition, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats. And the AfD is a party so extreme that even Le Pen decided she did not want to be in the same European parliamentary group with it, after Maximilian Krah, its charming lead candidate, said in an interview that not all members of the SS were criminals.

Meanwhile in Italy, the Fratelli d'Italia of the country's post-neofascist prime minister Giorgia Meloni came out on top, as did the far-right Freedom party in Austria. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom of the Islamophobe Geert Wilders performed only slightly less well than the centre-left. Most worrying of all, many of these parties do particularly well among young voters.

Yes, there are more encouraging results from Poland and Hungary; but if the lesson from those countries (as from Britain) is that you must actually have your populist nationalists in power for some years before they start to be rejected, that's small consolation.

Although the parties of the hard right are divided over Ukraine, the net impact of these results will be negative. In Germany, roughly one quarter of the vote went to parties - of hard right (AfD), hard left (Die Linke) and a curious populist mix of the two (the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance) - that advocate a version of "peace" that effectively means Ukrainian capitulation. Unfortunately, Scholz's Social Democrats show signs of being tempted to appease these appeasers. The consequences of a victory for President Vladimir Putin's fascist Russia would bring Europe closer to a return to its bad old days.

All of this is before we get to the most important election for Europe this year, which doesn't happen in Europe. A victory for Donald Trump in November's US presidential election would further divide Europe, as hard-right populist nationalists would line up as the European party of Trump.

So is it time to despair and emigrate to New Zealand? Certainly not. There's still a large majority of Europeans who don't want to lose the best Europe we've ever had. But they need to be mobilised, galvanised, persuaded that the Union really does face existential threats. What we need is a combination of national governments and European institutions that between them deliver the housing young people currently cannot afford; the jobs, the life chances, the security, the green transition, the support for Ukraine. Will Europe wake up before it is too late? ●

✱ **Timothy Garton Ash** is a historian and *Guardian* columnist

HEALTH &
WELLBEING

I learned to skateboard in my 40s - I welcome it being taught at school

Emylia Hall



It's January 2022 and my seven-year-old son is standing on his skateboard at the top of a concrete ramp that's known in these parts as a "funbox". Right now, it doesn't seem so fun. I can feel the fear vibrating from him. I'm urging him to give it a go. Pleading, almost. The reason for my fervour? Only a few weeks earlier I'd stood, frozen, in that exact spot, before taking my own plunge. And I know how amazing he'll feel afterwards. So, we take baby steps. First, we hold hands as he rolls down. Then we hold fingers. Then fingertips. Then, finally, he does it all on his own. As he makes it, the smile on his face lights up the entire skatepark.

There's a strange alchemy to skateboarding: in a flash, terror turns into delight. My husband and I began skating three years ago, when we were 42 and 44 respectively, so that we could learn alongside our son. As a "later skater", what I've come to realise is that everything seems impossible until you try it. Every minuscule achievement, every incremental progression, feels epic, and each experience hard-won. There's a lesson in that. And apparently the establishment agrees: for the first time, skateboarding - long seen as a fringe pursuit, wild, rebellious, high in the misspent-youth pecking order - has been approved as a GCSE component (the exams taken by 16-year-olds) in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Perhaps this is a natural evolution. Skateboarding entered the mainstream as part of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, held in 2021, but the Covid pandemic that

delayed those Games also played a role. Skateboarding experienced a boom in popularity during lockdown, which feels fitting for a sport that was first born on flat days; a replacement activity for surfers in the late 1940s to early 1950s, who turned to asphalt waves. I first tried skateboarding after a friend asked if I wanted to have a go on his board. At the time, I had no idea how much I'd gain from the not-so-simple art of standing sideways.

First, skateboarding teaches tenacity, because the only way to improve is to work at it; to move through those initial nerves and hold fast. Visit any skatepark and no matter how proficient the crowd, how gravity-defying the moves, you'll see just as many tricks going wrong as right. Samuel Beckett could have been speaking for skaters when he wrote: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Skaters know that not only is it OK to try something and not pull it off, it's also unavoidable.

Perseverance has a huge part to play in growing self-confidence. I have a surfskate, which has a longer deck, bigger wheels and looser trucks. Initially, it gives the illusion of stability (erm, no). My first major fall was a couple of weeks in, before I'd learned any subtleties of balance. I was barely rolling along and the next thing I knew I was flat on my back, felled like an oak.

***Emylia Hall**
is the author of
The Shell House
Detectives
mystery series

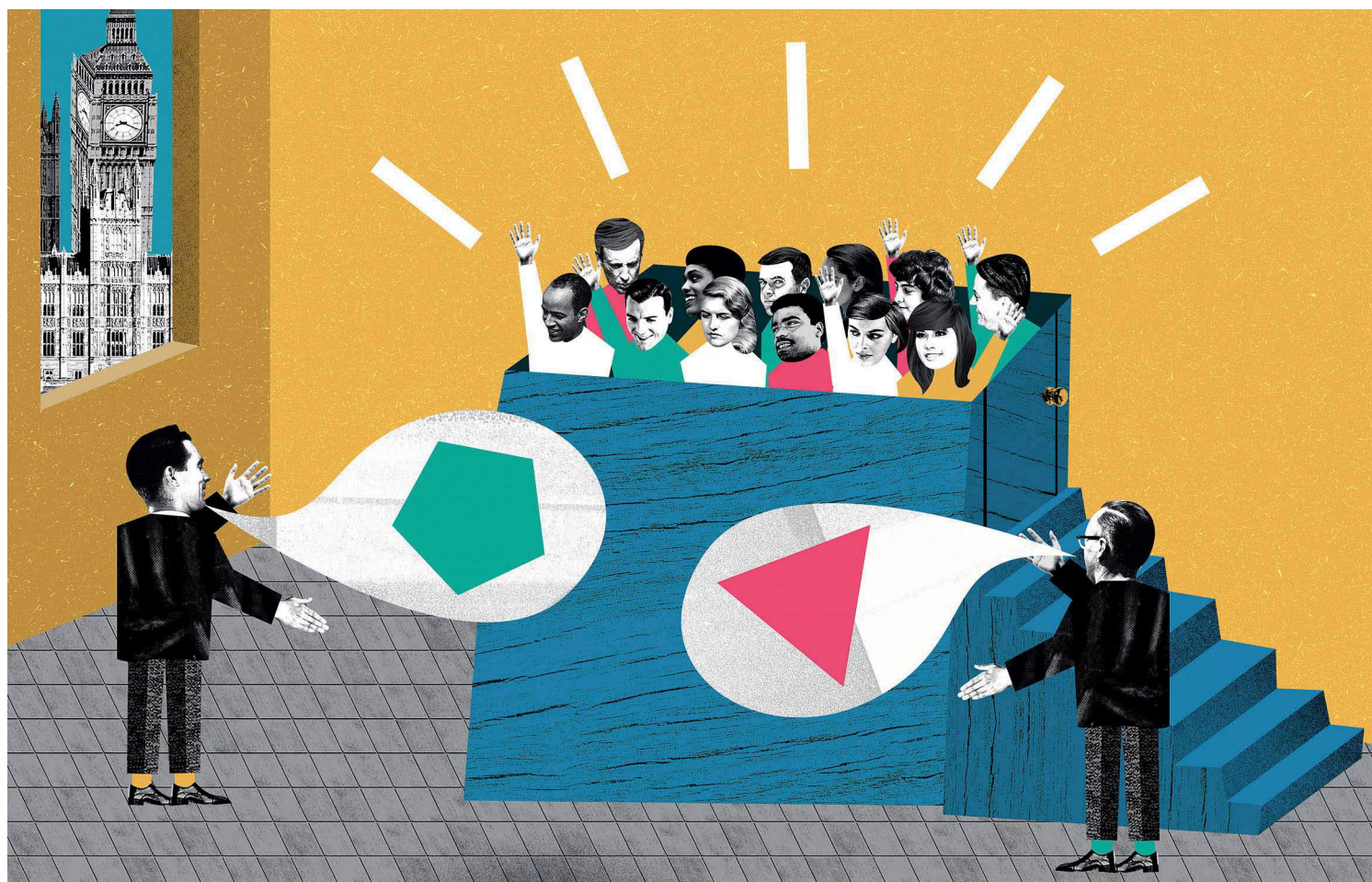
Three years on, I've still got the scar on my elbow - and I was wearing pads. But this fall didn't dissuade me: I'd already realised there was something about skateboarding that I loved beyond reason.

There are plenty of rational benefits too, not least mindfulness. When you're skateboarding, it's almost impossible to think of anything else. What magic, to step on a plank of wood with four little wheels and be transported to a place where your head is emptied and the outside world can't touch you. With mental health problems at an all-time high, not least among teenagers, skateboarding has so much to give if people can be encouraged to give it a try. While there are some brilliant girl-focused initiatives - and an incredible icon in the world champion Sky Brown - from my experience, skateparks remain male-dominated spaces. If making it an exam subject means more girls signing up to skate, then that can only be a good thing.

The best part though? The community. My husband, son and I are part of an informal group of parents and children who skate together. On a dry weekend morning, you'll find us down The Deaner. It's our neighbourhood spot and we love it, from the tinkling music of the bottle caps beneath our wheels, to the way the sun makes the graffiti-covered buildings pop with colour. The place is luminous with memories and we've plenty more to make together. So, when I think about teenagers choosing skateboarding for their exams, I immediately picture the readymade crew they'll gain. The friends who'll learn from one another. Facing down their fears, side by side; whooping the highs and sharing the falls. The value of that kind of camaraderie goes far beyond any graded achievement.

Z-Boys, Bones Brigade, My GCSE Class. Now, that's got a nice ring to it ●

BEN CURTIS/AP; ALAMY



UNITED
KINGDOM

Elections are a travesty of democracy – give the people a real voice

George Monbiot

Everything hangs on them but little changes. For weeks or months, elections dominate national life. Media reports and public conversations are monopolised by furious jostling and frantic speculation. All else – policymaking, problem-solving, reason itself – grinds to a halt. Unsurprisingly, when the frenzy is over, we discover we have solved almost none of our problems.

An election is a device for maximising conflict and minimising democracy. Parties gain ground by sowing division and anger, often around trivial issues. At the same time, as the big players seek to appease commercial

lobbies and the billionaire press, they converge disastrously on far more important issues, such as austerity, privatised public services, massive inequality of wealth and the unfolding genocide in Gaza. Many of those who seek election manipulate, distract and lie.

Communities are set against each other. The parties reduce complex choices to a brutal binary. Vast questions, such as the environmental crisis, the spiral of accumulation by the wealthy or the resurgent threat of nuclear war, remain unresolved and generally unmentioned. All that is left to us, except for a 10-second action every five years, is to sit and hope. We end up with a highly unrepresentative parliament and a perennial sense of disappointment.

General elections such as the one the UK now faces could be seen as the opposite of democracy. But, as with so many aspects of public life, entirely different concepts have been hopelessly confused. Elections are not democracy and democracy is not elections.

Earlier societies recognised the distinction. Aristotle and Montesquieu observed that elections generated (respectively) “oligarchical” and “aristocratic” rule. After the American and French revolutions, the designers of the new political systems chose elections as a way of excluding the majority, whom they did not trust, from a meaningful involvement in power. Some

Illustration Nate Kitch

of them insisted those elected should be a class apart, distinguished from the common people as a “natural aristocracy” of the wise, virtuous and competent. I think we can determine how well that worked out.

The UK’s political model was settled in the 18th century, when parliament regarded the people with a mixture of contempt and fear. It survived the introduction of the universal franchise almost intact. Why does our system keep electing people whose incomes, assets, interests and psychology are hugely at variance with ours? Because that is what it is designed to do.

There are many alternatives, stifled not by infeasibility but by the determination of powerful people to retain control. I don’t want to be prescriptive about the form that deliberative, participatory democracy should take. There are dozens of potential models.

In David Van Reybrouck’s excellent book *Against Elections*, he favours “sortition”: choosing members of political bodies by lottery. This is how much of political life was run in ancient Athens and in Venice, Florence and other European cities in the second millennium. Today, algorithms can be used to ensure the lottery results closely reflect the composition of society.

Hang on, you say. What if incompetent, corrupt, self-interested people, without expertise, found themselves in powerful roles? It’s likely. But deliberative processes possess the extraordinary property of transforming their participants. Ordinary citizens tend quickly to take responsibility, to inform themselves, listen respectfully and seek to build consensus. Their decisions tend to be fairer, greener, bolder and more inclusive than those of elected chambers.

✳ **George Monbiot** is a *Guardian* columnist

Every argument against participation can be returned with interest against elected representation. Incompetent, corrupt, self-interested? Don’t get me started. Those chosen by lot, whose selection cannot be influenced by money or lobbying, are likely to be more resistant to both.

We should not accept any change to our political system without evidence that it works. But plenty is accumulating, as citizens’ assemblies and constitutional conventions are used by governments to resolve issues that are too divisive, complex or long-term for the dominant system to handle. When well designed, they have proved highly effective at addressing issues that left elected representatives floundering.

Between 2021 and 2023, 160 new citizens’ assemblies were set up to resolve difficult problems. Forty of these bodies are now permanent. They help address, for example, homelessness in Paris, urban design in Lisbon and climate policy in Brussels. In the German-speaking part of Belgium, a citizens’ council forms the regional parliament’s second chamber.

A next step, as Van Reybrouck and others have suggested, could be to replace one parliamentary chamber with a people’s assembly. This could evolve towards an entirely participatory system in which everyone has an equal chance to make the decisions on which our lives depend. You care about democracy? Then you should hope to see an end to elections like this one ●

The joy of small museums: stories of what we have been and who we are

Have you heard the one about the museum of cuckoo clocks that may have to be wound up unless the two brothers who founded it 34 years ago can find someone to keep it ticking when they retire? Or the Musical Museum, set up in 1963 by an electrical engineer with a passion for the history of recorded sound, where you can listen to self-playing violins, and dip into one of the world’s largest collections of piano rolls? Or the UK’s newest natural history museum, at whose 2022 opening the ribbon was cut with the claw of a baryonyx – a large carnivorous dinosaur? They are located respectively in Cheshire, Brentford and Sheffield.

Of the 2,500 museums estimated to exist around the UK, the great national institutions take all the air, with their blockbuster shows and rows over funding, restitution of plundered treasures and – in the case of the British Museum – alleged thefts. Scepticism about their scale and their colonising impulses goes back to their earliest days, with the writer GK Chesterton opining: “The Museum is not meant either for the wanderer to see by accident or for the pilgrim to see with awe. It is meant for the mere slave of a routine of self-education to stuff himself with every sort of incongruous intellectual food in one indigestible meal.”

But there are hundreds of smaller ones, often founded and endowed by enthusiasts – from John Soane in the 18th century to Cuckooland’s Roman and Maz Piekarski today – that make an

incalculable contribution to cultural life. For those financed through local authorities, the past decade and a half has been brutal, with spending on England’s museums and galleries falling by more than a third. Yet collecting is a basic human instinct, and the will to share collections is strong.

The Musical Museum is a case in point. It was founded in an abandoned church by Frank Holland to house his growing collection of instruments, and he sold his home to endow it. It has since moved to a new building, from where it streams concerts on the Mighty Wurlitzer. But as Mr Holland’s legacy ran dry, and its business plan was decimated by the Covid pandemic, the museum had to lay off staff and cut opening hours. Volunteers rolled up their sleeves and responded by launching a 60th anniversary appeal, which is on the point of reaching its target.

This is a story that will ring bells with many small museums. They embody many different enthusiasms, from pens (Birmingham) to dog collars (Kent) and lawnmowers (Southport). But if proof of living value were needed, one of their number, London’s Foundling Museum, provided it two years ago when it gathered together 59 people from all walks of life who had spent their early lives in care, for a historic photograph. Such institutions are labours of love. They are also statements of what individuals or communities want to save of, and for, themselves – and the work they will put into preserving it. They are the stories of what we have been and who we are ●

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TO US

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Corrections

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Have SUVs been fuelled by a corporate conspiracy?

The International Energy Agency has warned about the soaring sales of large, heavy, fuel-hungry SUVs that, on an average per-person-carried basis, add disproportionately to carbon dioxide emissions (Science and environment, 7 June). In Australia, these huge SUVs are joined by even more popular giant dual-cab utes (utility vehicles, or pick-up trucks) that dwarf all cars and most SUVs. There is no streamlining to minimise fuel consumption: they could almost have been designed to maximise fuel consumption – and emissions. A sign of conspiracy between “big auto” and “big oil/gas”? Surely not.
*Dr Douglas Mackenzie
Canberra, Australia*

A church mired in the past that won't learn its lesson

The Church of England got it wrong and will no doubt wring its hands in faint apology (How Church of England's slavery ties went to top of hierarchy, Spotlight, 31 May).

But when will it learn from its mistakes? It has a history of being on the wrong side, of losing sight of the love and compassion of Jesus. It has supported war, been slow to ordain divorcees or women or homosexuals,

slow off the mark with apartheid, unwilling to recognise the possibility of gender being non-binary and been behind the times with same-sex relationships. When will it look ahead and ask: where is the injustice that pains the heart of God in our world today?

*Bill White
Macclesfield, England, UK*

The few, not the many, are to blame for Portal antics

How is it that the idiotic or triggering activities of a relative few get projected as a fun-house mirror to an entire society? Since the article did not state or imply otherwise (The internet makes juveniles of us all, Opinion, 24 May), I imagine that the vast majority of Portal viewers simply observed their overseas counterparts with some degree of curiosity and maybe signalled their hellos.

Maybe it has to do with what is considered newsworthy, which often does not include behaviours considered normal. A focus and bias towards the atypical may cause perceptions of the world around us to be distorted. Reporting from a more inclusive and proportionate viewpoint would have been more informative.

*Spence Blakely
Portsmouth, Rhode Island, US*

Trump's guilty verdict bodes ill for US election

It was Margaret Thatcher who, just a few months before being elected as prime minister in 1979, declared: “I am not a consensus politician, I am a conviction politician.” Following his recent trial (Spotlight, 7 June), Donald Trump can now certainly be described as the latter, and unfortunately this bodes ill for the forthcoming US election.
*Adrian Brodtkin
London, England, UK*

Alice Munro's request for help fell on deaf ears

When Nobel prize winner Alice Munro began her writing career, she applied for a Canada Council grant to help with babysitters so she could write (Culture, 24 May). She was turned down. Sometimes one wonders if those in authority always know what they're doing or what they're supposed to be doing?

*Douglas Cornish
Ottawa, Canada*

With no plans for Nigel, Farage has decided to run

Could Nigel Farage “changing his mind” about standing in this election (Global report, 7 June) be linked to the fact that Donald Trump no longer needs him?

*Kathrine Pattrick
Woodford Green, England, UK*

The dignity of Rob Burrow is a lesson to all politicians

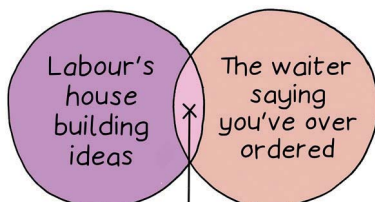
Rob Burrow's story is one of courage, determination and comradeship (Rugby league great turned MND campaigner dies at 41, 7 June). Over the coming weeks our politicians would do well to remember his inspiration, dignity and down-to-earth honesty.
*Toby Wood
Peterborough, England, UK*

Why your choice of career can affect life after death

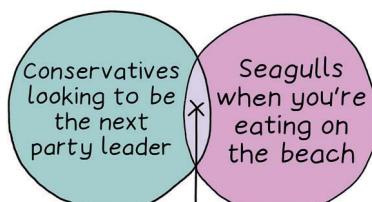
I've noticed an unfortunate trend in the Guardian Weekly's Deaths column. Out of a sample of 54 persons, 23 were from the arts, nine from sport, eight from politics and six from popular music. Only two were from science, engineering, mathematics and medicine. This seems to be a representative outcome for inclusion in Deaths and I hope it doesn't reflect the Guardian's view of the worth of these disciplines.
*Dr Ross Bowden
Murdoch University,
Melville, Western Australia*

CORRECTIONS

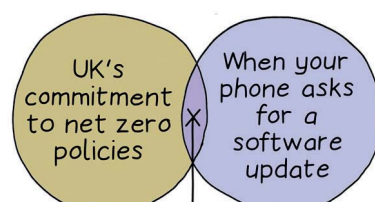
In a Culture article (Resistance is futile, 7 June), we said Oxford's Bodleian library was given Franz Kafka's papers by Max Brod; in fact, these papers were donated by Kafka's family.

A WEEK
IN VENN
DIAGRAMS
Edith Pritchett

Confidently committing
to the ambitious plan



Many hovering ready for a
mad tussle for the prize



Remind me later



MUSIC

Why festivals
keep playing the
same old songs

Page 55 →

Culture

Wild at heart

Knepp estate in southern England was deep in debt.

*Now it thrums with wildlife and visitors
- and its success is being celebrated in a new film*





INTERVIEW
By Patrick
Barkham
COVER
PHOTOGRAPH
David Levene

I found myself crying. All that effort. All those hopes and ambitions. It was horrible

TAKE A STROLL through the classic English countryside of West Sussex, and you'll notice things becoming strange just beyond the village of Dial Post. Here, a patchwork of tidy fields bordered by neat hedgerows becomes a bamboozling maze of flowery glades and thickets of hawthorn, blackthorn and sallow. Rabbits dart between billowing brambles, watched by a fallow deer sporting furry new antlers. Stranger than the unexpectedly abundant plants and mammals is the cacophony of birdsong - the common melodies of thrushes, robins and blackcaps but also songs virtually extinguished across Britain: cuckoos, nightingales and turtle doves. Oddest of all is a clacking noise that sounds like two hollow sticks being banged together.

"Isn't it a great sound?" says Isabella Tree, landowner, author and now star of a new film, *Wilding*. "Storks have these pouches that make the sound echo and travel even further." And there, in an enormous hammock of sticks at the top of an ancient oak, stand a pair of bill-clacking storks looking proudly over a tiny chick.

The transformation of Knepp from a conventional 1,400-hectare farm into a place thrumming with wildlife in barely two decades is told by *Wilding*, as part of a growing filmic fascination - *Soilywood?* *Ploughcore?* - with environmentally minded farming. It follows the success of Clarkson's *Farm* on the small screen and *Six Inches of Soil*. The latter was an improbable documentary to show in cinemas across Britain, but *Wilding*'s cinematic release is less surprising because it has already been a popular book, written by Tree, which has sold more than 300,000 copies in Britain and been translated into multiple languages. Her tale is captivating because it is true, heartening and unforeseen, especially because it begins with failure.

Tree was 18 when she fell in love with Charlie Burrell, also 18. In his 20s, Burrell inherited the Knepp estate. He had studied at Cirencester's Royal Agricultural College and was determined to make the old family farm thrive. "He made all the brutal efficiencies of modern, smarter farming," says Tree. "He industrialised as much as he could, which is what

good farmers were supposed to do." After 17 years of new crops, technologies and chemicals, he still couldn't profit from Knepp's heavy clay soils, which were waterlogged in winter and baked concrete-hard in summer. They were £1.5m (\$1.9m) in debt.

Then, in 2000, Burrell and Tree took a big, unconventional step: they stopped farming. Such a radical move was probably only possible because they were relatively young and felt like outsiders (Burrell grew up overseas and Tree was adopted). As Tree comments in the film, abandoning farming was "weighted with guilt and pride". They couldn't bear to witness the auction of their farm machinery.

"I found myself crying," says Tree now. "Everything from semen flasks to shepherds' huts. It was generations of farming and a whole culture. And you were just saying, 'This hasn't worked.' All that effort. All those hopes and ambitions. It was horrible."

But alongside the mourning were moments of euphoria. As the film shows, Burrell and Tree had begun to question their farming methods a few years earlier, after meeting ancient tree expert Ted Green (nominative determinism looms large in this story). He told them that their ancient hedgerow oaks were species-rich arks but in poor health, because decades of intensive farming had decimated their soils, destroying life-giving networks of mycorrhizal fungi.

Green introduced them to pioneering Dutch rewilder Frans Vera. Inspired by his theories, Burrell and Tree decided to "let go" of their hectares, and introduce small numbers of cattle, ponies and pigs (and ultimately beavers) that would live wild and, through their grazing, engineer a new nature-rich landscape.

The film shows in full cinematic glory the burgeoning wildlife coming back. Alongside interviews with Tree and Burrell, there are reconstructions with actors playing the younger couple. The bulk of the film was made during 2020, the big lockdown year. "As if lockdown wasn't surreal enough!" laughs Tree. "We'd go for a walk and bump into someone who looked very like the 1980s version of me. I love the reconstructions. They are so good. They even got actor pigs in."

In one scene, Knepp's wild pigs run amok in a wedding tent. In another, an Exmoor pony called Duncan stages a one-horse pitch invasion during a game of polo. The film illustrates the uncomfortable transition from conventional farming to wilding, which Tree and Burrell experienced



▲ **Animal magic**

A still from the new film *Wilding*

PASSION PLANET



very personally. They were ostracised for creating a messy, chaotic-looking English arcadia. Landowning peers declared Burrell's grandparents would be rolling in their graves. The couple were accused of spreading ragwort, legally defined as an "injurious weed" because it is poisonous to livestock. They fretted about the proliferation of creeping thistle, too, but that proved one of many problems fixed by nature: an invasion of migratory painted lady butterflies saw their caterpillars munch the thistles into oblivion.

OVER THE PAST DECADE, Knepp has become a dramatic success story. This can be measured in nightingales (69 singing males across Knepp – conventional nature reserves are delighted if they attract five); storks (24 nests and 93 eggs this year for the reintroduced species); carbon (new studies suggest regenerating soil and scrub at Knepp sequesters as much if not more carbon as newly planted deciduous woodland); and full-time employees (from 23 on the conventional farm to 90 today). There has also been a stampede of farmers following their example: unlike most orthodox farms, Knepp is profitable even without counting government environmental payments.

The film will only increase another measure of Knepp's success: the visitors enjoying its 25km of footpaths, wildlife tours, glamping facilities, farm shop, cafe and restaurant. "When we started the project," says Tree, "we had no idea there would be alternative income streams. We just knew it was the right thing to do for the land. But we were still thinking, 'God, how are we going to make the estate work financially?' We certainly didn't think there would be tens of thousands of people visiting."

Today, Tree struggles to find the balance between "engaging people with nature, getting young people into it" and visitors overwhelming the wildlife. She worries about professional dog-walkers who bring six dogs each, given that a spaniel's nose is precisely the height of a nesting nightingale. Dog-walkers post delightedly on social media about Knepp's ponds being perfect for doggy wild swimming. But this is less perfect for aquatic wildlife, as anti-flea treatments spread from dogs to the wider environment.

"It's become people management now," says Tree. "I have an issue with Guy Shrubsole," she says, referring to the co-founder of the Right to Roam campaign group. "Who wouldn't want their child to be able to swim in every pond? But we haven't yet got enough countryside with

recovered wildlife in it to let loose the population – we've got to protect areas for wildlife too." She hopes a balance can be struck: one riverbank for a path, say, the opposite one kept for wildlife.

Tree is used to batting away arguments that Knepp's seismic shift is endangering our food security. "On the planet," she says, "we're producing enough food for 11 billion people. We are eight billion people now – we waste 30-40% of our food. We've got to stop that. The agriculture we have is not sustainable. We've got to move away from intensive livestock. We've got to think about our intake of meat and where it comes from."

For Tree, "rewilding is farming's most natural ally and they shouldn't be separated or pitted against each other". Food production requires the natural services that wilding provides: pollination, healthy soils, clean water, fewer floods. "Unless we have ribbons of functioning nature running throughout our cities, countryside and agricultural areas, we're missing that life-support system for food production."

Where next for Knepp? Tree is writing a book about its storks, which she and Burrell hope are a symbol that can reconnect people and wildlife. Both of their grownup children are involved in Knepp's wilding too – son Ned overseeing the restaurant and daughter Nancy researching soil and carbon sequestration.

What if the next generation rebelled against Tree and Burrell's labours? "Rewilding teaches you to let go," says Tree. "Charlie feels very strongly that the next generation will have to respond to all sorts of pressures we can't imagine. Maybe we do suddenly have to grow food on inappropriate land again, like Dig for Victory. Our children have grown up with rewilding and they love it but it's really important not to saddle the next generation with something you have come up with. If they think it's great, they'll continue it." ●

PATRICK BARKHAM WRITES ON NATURE FOR THE GUARDIAN
Wilding is on release now in the UK and Ireland

“We’ve got to move away from intensive livestock. We’ve got to think about our intake of meat”

▼ **Flying high**
Wilding is based on Tree's book
PASSION PLANET





Paddington is back – and he's gone immersive

The bear from darkest Peru has donned his wellies and duffle coat for a live 'experience' that is half-theatre, half-party, with lashings of marmalade

By Kate Wyver

▼ Bear witness

Paddington's stories brought to life at County Hall in London

ALEX BRENNER;
PIERS FOLEY

An almighty crash sounds from above. "Everything's fine, Mrs Brown!" a voice calls out. I peek my head round the door of 32 Windsor Gardens. On the winding stairs sits a pair of little red wellies, as if someone rather small and accident-prone has just slipped them off and scampered upstairs.

This is The Paddington Bear Experience, which has just moved into London's County Hall, on the banks of the Thames. A cross between a film set, a theatre show and a party, the 70-minute experience presents a rose-tinted world spun from Michael Bond's beloved stories about the bear from darkest Peru, slightly heightened and slightly magical.

"It's all about the warm Paddington welcome," says director Tom Maller, who is collaborating with designer Rebecca Brower. The pair previously made *Peaky Blinders: The Rise*, recreating the world of the TV crime drama. Maller, who spent years working with immersive experts Secret Cinema, took on this project because he wanted to make a show his three-year-old son would enjoy. When he goes home, he takes back messages from his friend Paddington.

With the site build still in progress, hard hats are required when I visit the team at Mr Gruber's antique shop, the entryway to Paddington's world. Inside, we're whisked to Paddington station, where our sweet bear is waiting to be found – although the appearance of Paddington himself is something they are eager to keep secret.

Bond's bear goes back more than 65 years, but the team have drawn heavily upon the recent movies. Half of the props and dressing are from Studio Canal's hit films. Having secured the lease for 15 years, everything is built to last. They even have their own marmalade on sale at the end.

When audiences travel through an immersive experience, purpose is key. "Mrs Brown said to

Paddington, 'Why don't you invite your friends for Marmalade Day?'" producer Nathan Brine explains, of the imaginary festival that gives us a reason for being here. "But of course everybody Paddington ever meets are his friends," he smiles, "so he's invited everybody."

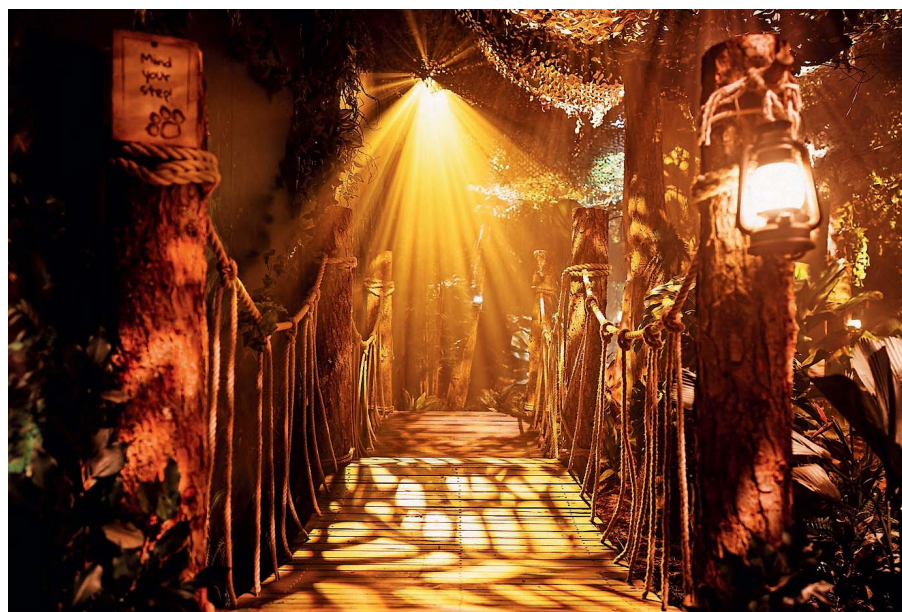
The experience is guided by 49 performers, but there's space to rummage and roam. "We don't want everything screwed shut," says Brower, sweeping sawdust off a table as we move into the living room, where detritus indicates Paddington has found himself in another pickle. "We love making everything tactile and free to explore." Much of the space is designed to give the impression of Paddington having just been there – meeting a hero requires patience.

When I visit again, a few weeks later, it's a tech rehearsal and the three floors are bustling with busy hands, saws and cardboard now replaced by computers and wires. With groups of 30 starting the experience every seven and a half minutes, there is an extremely strict schedule. As we pass through to the nearly finished kitchen, you can almost smell the cake Mrs Bird will be baking.

Just as the books were originally written for children but loved by all, there is no age limit here. "We want to treat children how they want to be treated and not talk down to them," Maller says. "But if we have a group of 30 adults, the script allows the actor to change their tone." As he speaks, London vanishes and we emerge into a Peruvian jungle of mostly real trees.

Soon, visitors will arrive for audience testing, to push the experience to breaking point before the public pours in. "Our audiences don't just go home and say they saw something," says Maller. "They leave and go, 'I made marmalade in Peru!'"

KATE WYVER IS A WRITER AND THEATRE CRITIC
The Paddington Bear Experience is booking at County Hall, London, until 30 March 2025



Play it again Why festival line-ups sound so familiar

Nostalgia events with big R&B or punk names from decades past are selling out immediately while ticket sales for the legendary Coachella are plummeting

By David Renshaw

For anyone with a love of early-2000s R&B and hip-hop, the line-up poster for this year's Lovers & Friends festival in Las Vegas is a dreamland. Janet Jackson, Usher, Alicia Keys, Gwen Stefani and Lil Wayne are among the big-name acts at the top of the poster with Craig David, Brandy, Monica, Eve and Sean Paul lower down. It would be impossible to see all the big names at the one-day event.

Fans commonly ask when they first hear about the festival whether it's real or a convincingly Photoshopped poster. Lumidee, whose song *Never Leave You* (Uh Oooh, Uh Oooh) is a staple of any R&B playlist, says she only believed last year's Lovers & Friends was real when the deposit from the organisers landed in her bank account.

"It's crazy backstage," Lumidee says, recalling last year's event. "I ran into Lil' Mo and Omarion, who I hadn't seen since 2003. Boyz II Men were there, too. It's hard not to be a fan when so many of your heroes are in the same place." She adds: "Everyone was looking great. We've all held up really well."

She had been due to perform again at this year's event in May before it was dramatically cancelled on the day due to bad weather. Ticket holders and some performers were only told on the morning of the festival.

Lovers & Friends is one of a number of new festivals across the US designed to serve nostalgic music fans: those who remember the era as well as those jealous that they missed out. A California festival, *Just Like Heaven*, revives the height of the mid-2000s indie era while the aptly named *When We Were Young* will bring hordes of emo and pop-punk fans to Las Vegas

this October to see My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy and Jimmy Eat World.

When We Were Young and Just Like Heaven both launched in 2022 and target elder-millennial audiences. They are the people with disposable income who find themselves ageing out of the reflex of keeping up with new music. There are boomer-fied nostalgia festivals, too. August's *Fool in Love* is a celebration of R&B headlined by Lionel Richie and Diana Ross while *No Values* asks ageing punks to squeeze into their black drainpipe jeans and pogo to Black Flag and Iggy Pop.

"Just Like Heaven was awesome," says Lindsay Knight, 36, who attended this year's festival to see the headliners Death Cab for Cutie and Phoenix. "The crowd was super friendly and welcoming to all of the bands. I went with a friend from high school and we got to see so many of the artists we grew up listening to. To be honest, we never stopped listening to them."

While there have been plenty of independent music festivals dedicated to one genre or style, this opportunity to cosplay a past time or scene is relatively new. All of the throwback events in this article are put together by just two companies: Goldenvoice (which is owned by the live entertainment giant AEG) and Live Nation. Both Goldenvoice and Live Nation declined to comment but Jesse Fayne, VP of international festivals at the talent agency Wasserman, says events with unique selling points are increasingly attractive during a time of "market correction" in the festival marketplace.

"Genre-based and community-led events will persevere and be able to run through any wider issues," he says. He points to a Deftones and System of a Down open-air event in San Francisco this summer that sold out 50,000 tickets in 24 hours. "If I'm a System of a Down fan, then that's the event I'm going to be at," he says. "I'm going to be with the people that look, talk and act like me. I know I'll have a great time."

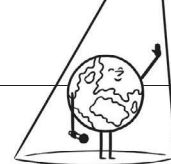
It all speaks to the changing face of nostalgia. There was a time when this kind of thing might have been much less high-profile, but the streaming revolution has had a flattening effect on musical eras and what is perceived as "old".

According to Luminate's year-end music report, back catalogue music, as opposed to new releases, accounted for 72.6% of album consumption in the US last year. Now festivals, like streaming platforms, are finding out that many fans are more interested in golden oldies than new acts.

In 2022, the 125,000 tickets for Coachella's first weekend were snapped up in 40 minutes. This year, it took Goldenvoice 27 days to shift the same number. Just before the 2024 festival, Billboard reported that approximately 80% of the 250,000 tickets available for purchase had been sold, representing a 14%-17% fall year-on-year. In contrast, Lovers & Friends and When We Were Young both sold out immediately, with Live Nation adding a second date for the latter.

The industry hasn't reached a





consensus on the reasons for the decline in more contemporary pop festivals. Some point to the rising cost of tickets, travel and accommodation while others point to a lack of A-list headliners. Artists such as Harry Styles and Beyoncé are no longer inclined to headline festivals when greater creative control and a bigger bottom line are available under their own names. This leaves festival promoters on an awkward middle ground.

Festivals like Coachella and Lollapalooza have always offered some nostalgia, too, with perennial headline acts such as the Killers and Foo Fighters relying on decades-old songs for their sets' biggest moments. No Doubt, for example, were paid a reported \$10m to reunite and play Coachella this year. Forcing the past on audiences isn't a surefire hit, though, as Blur's disastrous appearance goes to show: the band were left performing their 90s hits to an unenthusiastic crowd waiting for headliner Tyler, the Creator.

That's another reason heritage acts might rather play themed festivals: more curated line-



**We saw artists we
grew up listening to.
We never stopped
listening to them**

ups should help create a better synergy between performers and audience. They also work for artists lower down the chain as they contend with the eye-watering cost of playing live in 2024. "A festival always anchors a tour, so every band tries to tour around festival dates," says Ana Rezende of the nu-rave group CSS, who played Just Like Heaven and will be touring the US and UK this summer to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their debut album. "That's the reality if you're doing a reunion or if you're a brand-new band."

Rezende called the live-music industry unsustainable - which feels like the elephant in the room. Looking back is fun but also revives some of the issues of diversity and inclusivity that plagued past line-ups, while furthering the "pipeline problem" organisers have been warning against for years - essentially, that there aren't good ways for a new act to get on the headliner track.

In 2023, Emily Eavis, co-organiser of the Glastonbury festival, said the festival's all-male line-up of headliners that year (Arctic Monkeys, Guns N' Roses and Elton John) reflected a wider problem in the music industry and called on record companies to invest in more female musicians. In other words, there will be no nostalgia in the future if the present is not properly tended to. But if the way people listen to music has fundamentally changed then it makes commercial, if not artistic, sense to target those who remember the way it used to be.

DAVID RENSHAW IS A MUSIC JOURNALIST

FILM

The Dead Don't Hurt

Dir. Viggo Mortensen

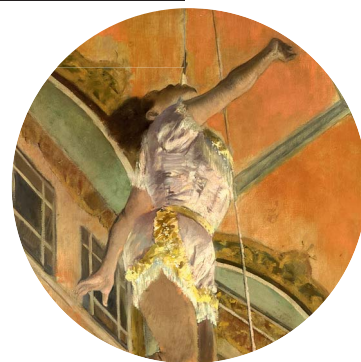
★★★★☆

This sinewy, sombre and beautifully shot western is Viggo Mortensen's second feature as a director, an impressively authored movie in which Mortensen is also writer, composer and star. This could have been a recipe for narcissism, and yet that self-effacing quality in Mortensen's screen presence works against that danger. He is, however, certainly working within the traditional strong, silent template of the old-school western hero.

Holger Olsen (played by Mortensen) is a Danish immigrant to the prewar United States of the 1860s, who ends up in San Francisco - a rough-hewn outdoorsman and military veteran. He finds himself meeting the frank gaze of Vivienne Le Coudy (Vicky Krieps) a French-Canadian woman who has just broken off an understanding with a wealthy but obnoxious man (Colin Morgan).

Olsen and Vivienne move in together in a shack near a frontier town; Vivienne is soon going to give birth to a son. But before their family responsibilities arise, Vivienne finds a job in a saloon bar, where she comes into fateful contact with the town's weaselly mayor, Rudolph Schiller (Danny Huston).

The story ingredients may seem obvious. And yet Mortensen remixes them into a structure of flashback/flashforward that is intriguing, makes for a delayed revelation and endows Vivienne with a poignant dimension. Violence and tragedy is where the story is heading, and this trajectory is plain in every scene: a world where aggression must either be violently and dangerously resisted or accepted. *Peter Bradshaw*
On release in US, UK and Irish cinemas



VISUAL ARTS

Discover Degas & Miss La La National Gallery, London

★★★★★

We think of late 19th-century Paris as all cancan and chansons, but this show reveals circus was just as essential to the city of light.

Most famous of all was the Cirque Fernando, where Edgar Degas saw the acrobat Miss La La and was inspired to paint a dizzying masterpiece of this young woman in empty space, framed against orange, green and gold heights as she swings from a rope by her teeth. She is the star, with spectacular illustrations of her celebrated exploits.

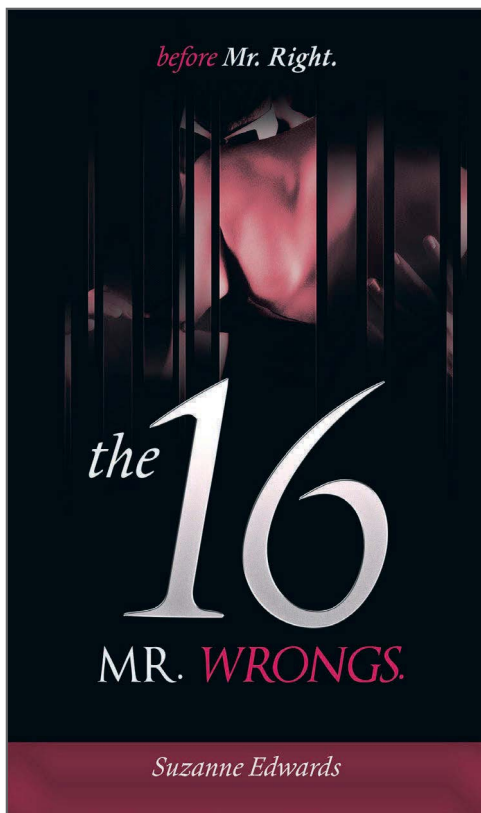
Photographs introduce us to the real woman behind the act, Anna Albertine Olga Brown, daughter of a German mother and African-American father. In the winter of 1878 Miss La La was the talk of Paris, her act seen by everyone who was anyone. Degas joined the crowds, but sketches on the scene weren't good enough for him. Instead he set up a trapeze in his studio.

This, surely, should be one of the legendary scenes of the Paris avant garde: the aerialist patiently hanging by her teeth in the studio while the enigmatic impressionist master draws her. The results are captivating. *Jonathan Jones*
To 1 September

Podcast of the week *Come By Chance*

Clarence Hynes and Craig Avery were 52 when they learned they were both born in Newfoundland's Come By Chance hospital on the same day. Piecing more clues together, they realised they'd been switched at birth. Host Luke Quinton tells the story skilfully, recognising their discovery is just the beginning. *Hannah Verdier*

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Suzanne Edwards

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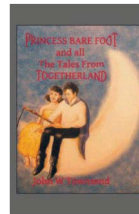
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Tilted Days

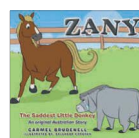
A September Gathering of Fair Isle Poems

Shirley Nicholson

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MEMOIR

Parallel lives

The Blondie guitarist charts his drug-fuelled journey from young New York punk to pop pioneer with charming nonchalance

By Alexis Petridis

▼ **Having a ball**
Chris Stein on the
Heart of Glass
video shoot

ROBERTA BAYLEY/
REDFERNS



Even before he co-founded Blondie – who swiftly transcended their roots in the New York punk scene to become one of the biggest bands in the world, selling around 40m records in the process – Chris Stein had lived quite a life.

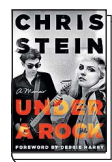
His father died of a stroke in Stein's first year of high school; thereafter, as his bandmate and former partner Debbie Harry notes in *Under a Rock's* introduction, his adolescence was spent "on a very long leash" in late 60s New York. By 14, he had gravitated to the bohemia of the West Village and MacDougal Street. He became a hippy, acquired a set of friends with names like Mortician George and Action, formed a band who supported the Velvet Underground, holidayed in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury and took so much LSD that he ended up in a psychiatric hospital before his 18th birthday: after being discharged, he went to Woodstock, where he proceeded to take more LSD. Thereafter, he briefly flirted with Scientology and the Unification Church, colloquially known as the Moonies, and fell into the milieu of radical drag queens and sundry oddballs around Greenwich Village's Mercer Arts Center. Stein is one of very few people who could reasonably suggest that his life got a little less nuts after forming a hugely successful rock band.

In *Under a Rock*, all of this is related in a drily funny, but wilfully understated style – every sentence feels like a shrug. In fact, Stein's writing echoes the way he looked in Blondie: with the visual attention on Debbie Harry, the band's

other members settled for embodying a certain so-what? New York cool, epitomised by a fabulous moment in the video for *Heart of Glass*: as the song's disco-fied pulse bubbles along and Harry sings about love being a pain in the ass, a bored-looking Stein stops miming guitar and holds up a mirror ball, in which bassist Nigel Harrison distractedly checks his hair. There's something telling about the fact that, in her introduction, Harry professes herself "astonished" at the stories from his adolescence: it implies that he'd never told her any of it, despite them being a couple for more than a decade.

Equally, you wonder whether some of the book's nonchalant tone may be down to the fact that Stein seems to have been more or less permanently stoned from about 1965 to 2008, on weed, acid, coke, heroin, or methadone. You could never accuse him of glamourising drug addiction: more than anything, he makes addiction sound like an irritation and a bore.

He applies the same insouciant tone to Blondie's rise from the squalor of punk club CBGB to international superstardom. Blondie were a rock band, but they were resolutely focused on singles, rather than albums. They were blessed with a very keen pop sensibility – Stein elects to cover the Nerves' obscure 1976 track *Hanging on the Telephone* when he hears it in a taxi and notices the elderly cabbie tapping his fingers as it plays. But only on 1978's *Parallel Lines* did they manage to make an album that maintained the standard of their singles from start to finish. They could



**BOOK OF
THE WEEK**

**Under a Rock:
A Memoir**

By Chris Stein

FICTION

Chaos theory

The world is turned upside down in an experimental novel about art, observation and making stories

By Lucy Atkins

Rachel Cusk's repeated attempts to exterminate the novel while still writing one are impressive. Ten years ago, frustrated by what she called the ridiculous act of "making up John and Jane", she wrote *Outline*, followed by *Transit* and *Kudos*, a compelling trilogy in which the narrator, whose biographical circumstances seem to match Cusk's, reveals almost nothing about her life or feelings, and instead recounts the monologues of people she encounters. In an interview in 2018, after the publication of *Kudos*, Cusk told the *New Yorker*: "I don't think character exists any more." She then wrote *Second Place* about a detached, Cusk-like character who opens her glorious home to a destructive artist. And now there's *Parade*, an icy thought experiment in which an unnamed narrator, whose scant biographical details map Cusk's, moves between nameless European cities, visiting exhibitions and thinking about artists.

The narrator's thoughts are woven with stories about various artists, all called "G". Among them is the famous painter who decides to represent

the world upside down. There's the major artist with a wild past, now trapped unhappily in marriage and motherhood and haunted by shame; or the film-maker, who discovers people are often "baffled or angered" by his work: instead of the "strange authority of the camera's prying eye", he offers neutrality, an "absence of what might be called leadership". The narrator, meanwhile, reveals almost nothing about herself. This artistic absence of "leadership" is central to *Parade*.

The novel is divided into four parts (*The Stuntman*, *The Midwife*, *The Diver*, *The Spy*), each of which examines the complexities of artistic identity. There are mini-essays on the relationship between art and subjectivity, art and madness, dreams, terror, violence, the female body, marital politics, mother-child entanglements. Sections have appeared in print elsewhere: a version of *The Stuntman* was a 2023 *New Yorker* essay; an iteration of *The Spy* appeared last year in *Harper's Magazine*. There is a definite feeling that the novel has been stitched together from vignettes, stories, articles and musings.



Parade
By Rachel
Cusk

be groundbreaking: a keen photographer and film-maker, Stein spots the music video revolution years before it happens; they picked up on hip-hop early on, hence Rapture, technically at least the first hip-hop No 1 single.

Incredibly, a combination of poor financial management and their continuing heroin issues meant Stein and Harry exited Blondie broke. Their five-storey Manhattan townhouse and collection of Warhols goes in the process, and so, eventually, does their relationship. A late-90s reunion devolves into an “incessant”, and still ongoing, round of live shows. In the 21st century, he finally marries, starts a family and cleans up: in a distressing epilogue, he discusses his 19-year-old daughter’s death from a drug overdose in 2023. “I thought that I presented my own drug experiences in a negative light to our kids,” he writes, “but I’m racked with guilt that any discussions might have been misconstrued.”

It’s a horrible coda to a weirdly charming book. For all his shrugging, Stein emerges as genuinely likable – you could certainly never accuse him of pompous self-aggrandising. He’s also genuinely fascinating. An early adopter of everything from the internet to the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, he occasionally seems more invested in making arty video shows for public access TV than being in Blondie, while the hippy era’s penchant for the esoteric clung to him, not least a fascination with magic, particularly that of occultist Austin Osman Spare. Stein could have gone on at greater length, but *Under a Rock* is that rare thing: a music autobiography that leaves you wanting more, not less.

ALEXIS PETRIDIS IS THE GUARDIAN’S HEAD ROCK AND POP CRITIC

Early on, the narrator is violently knocked on the head by a stranger as she walks down a city street (Cusk has also written about this happening to her in Paris, where she now lives). The female assailant flees, pausing briefly to observe the pain and confusion she has created. The notion of the artist as an observer runs through *Parade*: the artist is a spy, hidden, invisible, effaced. The act of observation isn’t straightforward though – nothing is with Cusk. The watcher/artists perceive the world upside down, at an angle, or partially, through windows or lenses. And the world itself is off-kilter: midwives are murderers, the child contains the mother, the storyteller offers not clarity, but confusion.

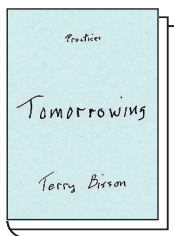
Intellectually, these thoughts can be exhilarating. Instead of plot or character development, Cusk offers a gimlet-eyed analysis of what it is to be the creator of a world in which nobody really exists, not even the creator. Novelists who question the point of novel-writing are hardly new, of course. Cusk withholds cohesion. This deepening of chaos is Cusk’s artistic project here, and she delivers it coldly. No doubt she’s pausing now to observe our pain.

LUCY ATKINS IS AN AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The best recent science fiction, fantasy and horror

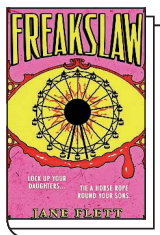
By Lisa Tuttle



Tomorrowing

By Terry Bisson

The final book by this popular American SF writer, who died earlier this year, is a compilation of the monthly feature he wrote for *Locus* (the genre’s trade journal) from April 2004 to July 2023. Inspired by *Today* in History columns in daily newspapers, Bisson imagined them written from the perspective of two centuries ahead. For almost 20 years he created four micro-fictions every month. The result is a collection of pure, distilled science fiction at its best, perfect miniatures that combine social satire with prediction in stories surreal, disturbing, thought-provoking and hilarious.

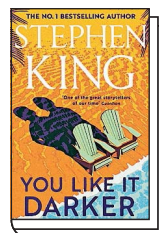


Freakslaw

By Jane Flett

This debut novel by an award-winning short story writer is set during a hot summer in the 1990s, when a travelling funfair called *Freakslaw* arrives in a gloomy Scottish town. A band of outcasts and deviants, some with magical powers, they

swoop in and uncover the hidden truths of local people. Their targets include a boy repressing his desire for other boys, a girl obsessed with her studies, men who drown violent urges in drink and their meek, oppressed wives. Gloria the fortune teller has a plan for revenge if the town folk turn against them. Her 16-year-old daughter, a contortionist and self-taught witch, doesn’t care who gets hurt, so long as she has her own dangerous fun. A transgressive, inventive dark fantasy with believably complex characters.

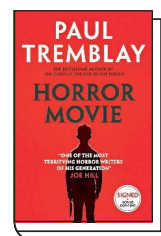


You Like it Darker

By Stephen King

This new collection of 12 stories opens with *Two Talented Bastards*, which questions how two ordinary guys from a small town in Maine managed to become famous almost overnight; one as a writer, the other an artist. They always denied any mystery but, after their deaths, the writer’s son discovers a notebook that seems to explain the secret of their success. In the collection’s afterword, King puzzles over similar questions: where do his stories come from? And why are so many of them concerned with dark matters? Horror stories, he writes, are “best appreciated by those who are compassionate” and in his stories he has

“tried especially hard to show the real world as it is”. Danny Coughlin’s *Bad Dream* is about a man who feels compelled to find out if a murder he dreamed about is real. He discovers a body and tips off the police only to be suspected of the crime himself. *Rattlesnakes* looks at the later life of a character from King’s 1981 horror novel *Cujo*, as an old man visiting Florida, where he’s pursued by the ghosts of an old tragedy. King is still the king.



Horror Movie

By Paul Tremblay

The latest from the bestselling, award-winning author of *A Head Full of Ghosts* is about an experimental horror movie made by amateurs on a micro-budget in the summer of 1993 and never screened; yet over the decades it becomes the stuff of dark legend. There are plans for a big-budget remake, with help from the only surviving member of the cast, who knows the whole, terrible story. Slasher movies are seen by some as kitschy fun, but this is a seriously disturbing novel, delving into the sacrifices art demands, psychological trauma and how monsters are made. Sometimes painful reading, it’s also incredibly gripping, smart and scary.

LISA TUTTLE IS A SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY AND HORROR AUTHOR

ASK

Annalisa Barbieri



My daughter took her life, and I can't talk to anyone about it

A year ago I lost my beautiful daughter, 21, to suicide. It was unexpected, and from the outside she appeared to be a normal, kind and happy young woman. We knew she had some anxieties, but we never dreamed it was causing her so much pain. She did it while I was in the house, and I discovered her. I tried but could not save her.

I struggle to control my grief. I would join her in an instant, but I need to be here to support my wife and my family, who are equally in pain. I wake regularly with nightmares of that day. My mood is generally OK, but I know I put on an act in front of people, and I go to work to distract myself. I sometimes want to scream at people to tell them what I'm feeling, but I can't. If I didn't remain calm and try to act normal, I would simply break down and cry and, I think, preferably die.

I'm told regularly to go and see someone, and I've spoken to my GP, but I can't imagine what speaking with someone like a specialist can possibly do. It's not getting any

easier after a year. I'm seeking advice because I can't face talking about it with anyone.

I am so sorry to hear about your daughter's death. I could feel the pain and anguish in your letter.

I went to consultant psychiatrist in psychotherapy Dr Jo Stubbley from the Tavistock and Portman NHS trust to discuss it. She felt it was interesting that you were repeating what your daughter did by "letting everyone think everything is OK on the outside and not letting them know how awful you feel inside".

Stubbley said: "Sometimes, when you lose someone, it's too unbearable to let them go, and so you take them inside of you. But what you're also holding on to is the suicidal part of your daughter, and that may be stopping you from really being able to grieve."

Stubbley and I discussed how allowing yourself to grieve may feel as if you're letting your daughter go. This is not uncommon. "To grieve her may seem like letting her go all over again, and that feels like such a terrible thing to do, so it seems better to stay in a state of frozen grief."

In your longer letter, it seemed you were carrying a lot of guilt. "The terrible thing," said Stubbley, "is that there are those unfinished conversations and you think that if you could have just finished them, you could maybe have done something to stop the person."

If you would like advice on a family matter, email ask.annalisa@theguardian.com. See theguardian.com/letters-terms-for-terms-and-conditions

I wonder what you fear will happen if you tell people how you feel

When an emotion is so big it threatens to engulf us, it's tempting to try not to process it at all. But as you're seeing, that's impossible to do without harming ourselves and those around us. I wonder what you're afraid will happen if you do scream and tell people how you feel. Maybe it would help them help you?

You may not feel like talking now, but that may change. Stubbley thought you might consider listening to others who have been through what you're going through. It's important to know you can live through it and flourish without that being a betrayal.

You may find it helpful to listen to Difficult Conversations Around Suicide, the podcast I did with Stubbley. Stubbley suggested looking at online support such as Sobs - Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, Calm (Campaign Against Living Miserably) and Cruse, and also looking up what local bereavement groups there are for you. She also recommended the great free booklet Help is at Hand, in which 8,000 people were asked what was useful and helpful after a loved one took their own life.

Grief and loss are enormous emotions to process - and a year is no time at all. "Suicide-bereaved people are more at risk of suicide themselves," said Stubbley, "and their support networks are one of the most protective factors."

Please take a small step today to get help.

International helplines can be found at befrienders.org

STEPHEN COLLINS

Stephen Collins COLILLO.COM



THE WEEKLY RECIPE
By Benjamina Ebuehi

No 271
**Passion fruit
and ginger tart**



Prep	20 min
Cook	25 min
Chill	2hr
Serves	8

If you like key lime pie, you'll like this. It hits the same notes, but is even more fragrant and fruity, thanks to all the passion fruit, lime and the crunchy ginger biscuit base. Condensed milk is one of the best things that comes in a tin and I welcome any opportunity to use it. Incorporating it into the filling helps this tart bake much faster than a traditional custard, and brings a delightfully creamy, silky texture.

Method

Heat the oven to 190C (170C fan)/gas 5, and line the base of a loose-bottomed 23cm cake tin with baking paper.

For the base, crush the biscuits in a food bag (or use a food processor) until they are mostly fine. Put the crumbs in a large bowl, add the melted butter and sugar, and stir well to coat. Press the biscuit mix into the base of the lined tin, then bake for 10-12 minutes, until the edges look lightly browned. Remove and leave to cool a little. Turn down the oven to 160C (140C fan)/gas 3.

For the filling, put the egg yolks, passion fruit juice, lime juice and zest, and salt in a bowl and mix to combine. Stir in the condensed milk and mix again until smooth. Pour the filling on to the biscuit base, then bake for 13-16 minutes, until the custard is set with a very slight wobble in the middle. Leave to cool completely, then chill for one to two hours.

To make the topping, lightly whip the cream to soft peaks, then spoon dollops on to the tart. Top with some of the reserved passion fruit seeds, then slice and serve.

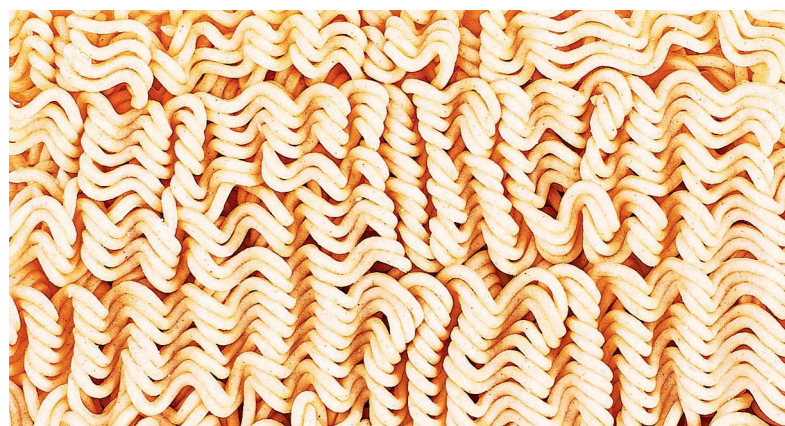
Ingredients

For the base

200g ginger nut biscuits
80g unsalted butter, melted
1 tbsp caster sugar

For the filling

4 large egg yolks
100ml passion fruit juice, strained from 10-12 passion fruit, seeds reserved
Zest and juice of 2 limes
¼ tsp salt
397g tin condensed milk
150ml double cream



Soba so good: speedy sauces to whip up as your noodles cook

What sauces can you make in the time it takes to boil noodles?

"You can bash together a decent yakisoba sauce from soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, a little mirin and oyster sauce," says noodle connoisseur Tim Anderson, author of *Microwave Meals*. "But it does beg the question: why not just buy yakisoba sauce? Most Japanese noodle sauces come ready-made and are as good as or better than anything you'd ever make at home." Much the same goes for *mentsuyu*, a concentrated, dashi-based sauce that can be used as a dip for chilled noodles (soba, udon, somen) or diluted with hot water for a broth. "Make that from soy sauce, mirin, sugar and dashi, though the bottled versions are good, so you may as well buy one of them."

If the goal is to reduce the number of bottles in your cupboard, however, Yui Miles, author of *Thai Made Easy*, would knock up a honey-soy number: "Mix them in a 1:1 ratio, then add sesame oil and sesame seeds, if you want." Toss that through rice or egg noodles, and, if it's the latter, add peanut butter for body. Miles' lemon and basil dressing will also take noodles from basic to brilliant - "crush fresh basil, add lemon juice, brown sugar or honey, plus a little soy".

All that said, different noodles have different cooking times. If, like Erchen Chang, chef and co-founder

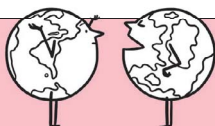
of Bao in London, that's a white wheat noodle, you're looking at about three minutes, "which is tight to make a dressing", she says. "Cooking the noodles is so important and you need to focus, so I'd make the dressing first." This is not to say you can't keep things simple: Chang heats two generous tablespoons of rapeseed oil, then adds a diced knob of ginger, two diced spring onions (both green and white parts), and seasons generously with salt and sugar. "Take off the heat, season with soy sauce and vinegar, and that's it."

Another shortcut to flavour is Chang's crispy shallot goose fat dressing: "It's super-savoury, but also simple," she says. Heat 100g goose or duck fat to about 120C, then chuck in 100g thinly sliced shallots and some salt and pull the pan off the heat just before the shallots turn golden. "Take a good tablespoon of the onions, and add soy sauce and a drop of rice vinegar to combat the fattiness."

Finally, there's ponzu, the tart citrus- and soy-based sauce, which Anderson says is always a good idea. Start with something sour - "lime, lemon and yuzu are classic choices" - and add soy sauce, mirin, sugar, vinegar and maybe dashi to taste. "The soy and citrus should dominate, though," Anderson says.

ANNA BERRILL IS A FOOD WRITER
Got a culinary dilemma?
Emailfeast@theguardian.com





Notes and Queries

The long-running series that invites readers to send in questions and answers on anything and everything

QUIZ

Thomas Eaton

- 1 Which UK scandal did Computer Weekly expose?
- 2 Which lake contains about one-fifth of the world's fresh water?
- 3 Which actor flew combat missions in the second world war and Vietnam?
- 4 Grupo Globo is a media giant from which country?
- 5 Which 20th-century prime minister won four general elections?
- 6 What phenomenon was launched by Bloomsbury on 26 June 1997?
- 7 The quagga is an extinct species of which mammal?
- 8 Which attraction is on

the site of the Coppergate archaeological dig?

What links:

- 9 Beethoven (16); Brahms (3); Haydn (68); Elizabeth Maconchy (13)?
- 10 Cuckoo; house martin; nightingale; osprey; turtle dove; swallow; swift?
- 11 Ironside; Kurtz; Raeburn; Rayner; Sanders; Stoppard?
- 12 La Presse; Le Soir; El Watan; Le Quotidien?
- 13 Gripit; Reggae Reggae Sauce; Skinny Tan; Tangle Teezer; Trunki?
- 14 Griffin; Harold Hill; Howard Kirk; Harry Lime; Sean Thornton?
- 15 Houses of Parliament; Newgate prison; Skerne Bridge; Salamanca?

PUZZLES

Chris Maslanka

1 Wordpool

Find the correct definition:

JABUTICABA

- a) Snafu
- b) type of antelope
- c) trebuchet
- d) tree whose fruit grows directly from the trunk

2 Same Difference

Identify these two words

differing only in the letter shown:

(misappropriation)

S*****

(blue sky thinking)

3 E pluribus unum

Rearrange FUTURE LAND to make a word.

4 Riddle-mee-ree

"What has 4 letters, never 5 and sometimes 9?"

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CINEMA CONNECT

Killian Fox

Name the films and the female actor who connects them.



Answers Quiz 1 Post Office Horizon.
2 Lake Baikal. 3 James Stewart. 4 Brazil.
5 Harold Wilson. 6 Harry Potter. 7 Zebra.
8 Jorvik Viking Centre. 9 String quartets
(number written). 10 Birds that migrate to
the UK from Africa. 11 Agony aunts.
12 French language newspapers outside
France: Canada; Belgium; Algeria; Senegal.
13 Bushmenses
Canada and Luxembourg. 14 Titular
that featured on Dragons' Den. 15 Fictional men: The Invisible Man; The Music
Man; The History Man; The Third Man.
The Quiet Man. 15 Depicted on £5 notes:
Winston Churchill; Elizabeth Fry; George
Stephenson; Duke of Wellington.
Cinema Connect Under the Skin, Ghost
World and Asteroid City all star Scarlett
Johansson. Puzzles 1 Wordpool (d).
2 Same Difference SPECULATION.
3 EPU RIDDLE-mee-ree. Yes, they do!

CHESS

Leonard Barden

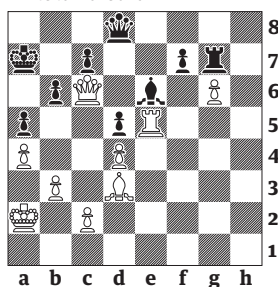
Faustino Oro, just 10 years old, is already known as "the Messi of chess". The Argentinian boy made the record books in 2023 when he became the youngest ever 2200-rated master level player at nine years, three months, followed by passing the 2300 mark just three months later.

Oro's surge is continuing apace. This month, at the Continental American Championship in Medellín, Colombia, he secured the second of three norms needed for the International Master (IM) title by reaching the

required total of 6.5/9. Oro then won his final two games to advance into a tie for second prize.

Oro has another two months to break the age record for the youngest IM, held at 10 years, nine months, by Abhimanyu Mishra of the US, who

3923 Fabiano Caruana v Ruslan Ponomarev, Dortmund 2014. White to move and win.



later became the youngest ever grandmaster at 12.

Ten-year-old Oro is already a celebrity; his parents have moved from Buenos Aires to Catalonia, Spain, to further his career. A group of Argentinian business people have joined the Argentine Chess Federation to provide funds for a team of five GMs to coach him. Half a century ago, Argentina was one of the strongest chess nations, but that has not been so in the 2000s.

Oro has exceptional achievements in online chess too, where his blitz rating is close to 3000.

3923 1 gxf7 Bxf7 2 Re7! Qxe7 3 Bg6! Kxg6 4 Qa8 mate.

COUNTRY DIARY

STROMNESS

Orkney, Scotland, UK

It's been a week of clear skies and luminous evenings – a stretch of calm, still weather that has been felt as a physical release, even an act of mercy, after a seemingly unending winter. Now the days have stretched and warped into their long summer shape, the seabirds have been returning to the cliffs, and the uplands are gilded by a low sun long after I head to my bed.

As the days have been lengthening, our short-eared owls have been increasingly active. This is the time of year when they must hustle to feed their young; here, their diet largely consists of Orkney voles, a plump, hamsterish subtype endemic to the archipelago. I often see these owls out hunting while driving, cruising the fencelines, or moon-faced and watchful from a standing stone.

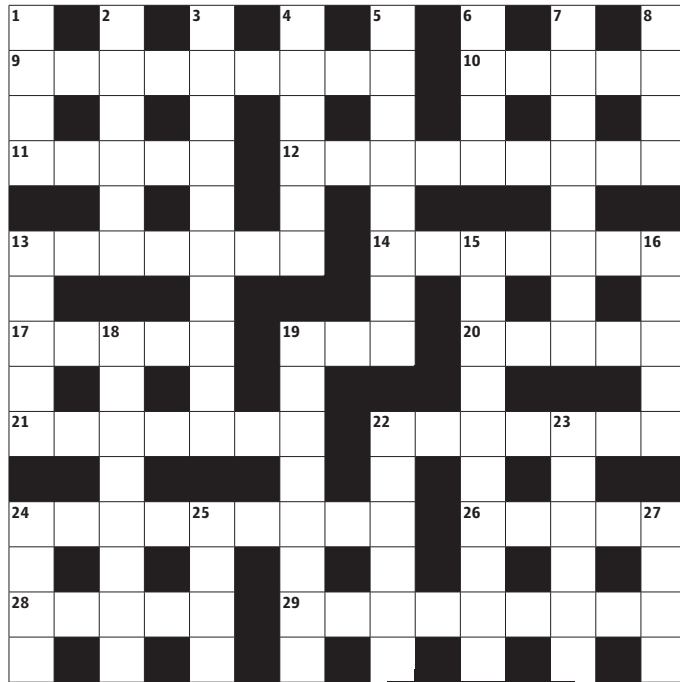
A few days ago, as I was hiking up a steep track that rose into the rugged heathland above Grimbister, a pale individual lifted from a nearby hummock to inspect the ground for prey. For a few moments we kept pace, he moving smoothly and silently, looping back on himself, wide amber eyes alert for the faintest trace of movement.

As my route climbed, the ground beside me dropped sharply away. Soon I was watching him from above as he glided, wraithlike on the slow breeze, the dark scallops on his upper wings flashing as he flapped stiffly up then corkscrewed down.

But then he dived into the grass as if through water. All in an instant. He was there, and then he wasn't. Then he was back, wings beating, ascending slowly. In his bloodied grasp, a ball of soft, wet flesh. Vole no longer. The owl's round face turned to me as it passed: eyes wide and remorseless, beak blackened with gore. Catlike, sharp-clawed – a most beautiful murderer. *Cal Flynn*



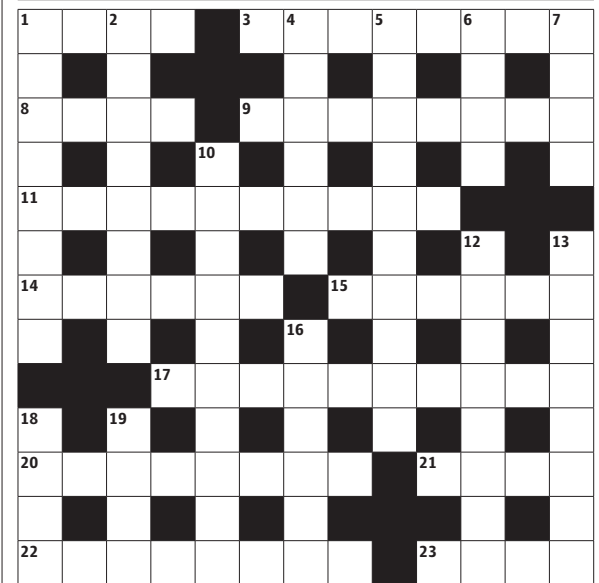
ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER



* All solutions published next week

Quick crossword

No 16,873



The Weekly cryptic

No 29,400



By Brummie

Across

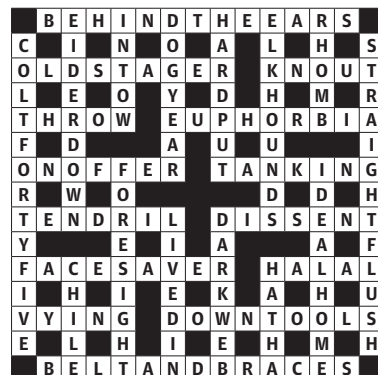
- 9 Don't eat after this Tuesday - be perverse! (3-2,4)
 10 Unfashionable party cap (5)
 11 Grizzly, being initially bankrupt? (5)
 12 Rescue tank one installed in exhibition room (9)
 13 Start getting ill after toxic element (4,3)
 14 High road at last gets uneven (7)
 17 See 19
 19/17 On director's debut, Titanic offers possible star role (3,5)
 20/6 Great month to get a brilliant body transformation (9)
 21 It's wrong to bind hands, causing distress (7)
 22/8 Classic film - when Jack is dropped (1,4,2,4)
 24 Shock absorber from wagon that is circling trail (9)
 26 Latin 'h' (not 'i') equals 'lock' (5)
 28/27 Book shortage predicament: there's no escaping it (5,4)
 29 Key European city: it's about to get US city backing (9)

Down

- 1 Check roadside's sound (4)
 2 Mounted a Grease production finally, in which, potentially, 22 ac./8 (6)
 3/13 'Journey's end ... night of drifting into bliss', a poetic death (5,2,3,5)
 4 Mountain area service provided (6)
 5 Private duel botched by duke after a brief time (8)
 6 See 20 Across
 7 Way to call someone 'Lynch' (6,2)
 8 See 22 Across
 13 See 3

- 15 Tungsten's unstable around lithium - troublesome (10)
 16 Flights requiring instrument's rotation (5)
 18 Subcontinental city before rain spread about the land (8)
 19 Put off taking vehicle to north, went back the same way (8)
 22 Discrimination shown by moving images (6)
 23 Bar hosts film marketing activity (6)
 24 One with little experience to lead a country (4)
 25 Trendy state, 28 (4)
 27 See 28 Across

Solution No 29,394



Across

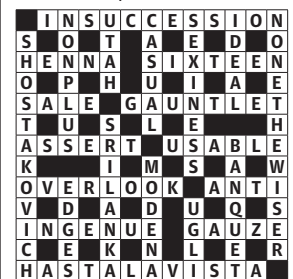
- 1 Salacious (4)
 3 Intimidate (5,3)
 8 List of options (4)
 9 Cheap (3-5)
 11 Extremely close (of a race) (3,3,4)
 14 Expel (6)
 15 Fascinate (6)
 17 Miner's daughter in a US folk ballad (10)
 20 Farewell (2,6)
 21 Prejudice (4)
 22 Surreptitious (8)
 23 Overly studious student (4)

Down

- 1 Fruit-based drink (8)
 2 Trachea (8)
 4 Dekko - if thus (anag) (6)
 5 Where Barry Manilow's Lola worked (10)
 6 Roman poet (4)

- 7 Archaic object pronoun (4)
 10 Suitable for beginners (5-5)
 12 Dwelling (8)
 13 Preoccupied (8)
 16 Mischievous (6)
 18 Its capital is Vientiane (4)
 19 Gratis (4)

Solution No 16,867



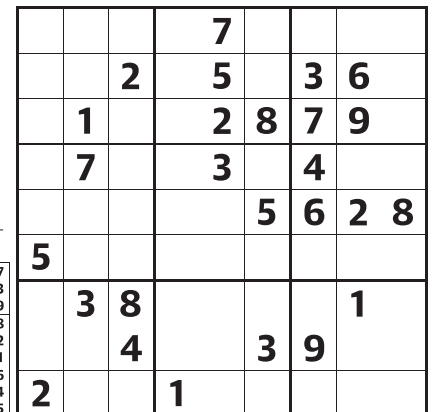
Sudoku

Hard

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Last week's solution

6	2	8	3	1	9	5	4	7
5	9	1	8	4	7	2	6	3
7	4	3	6	2	5	8	1	9
1	6	5	2	7	4	9	3	8
3	7	4	1	9	8	6	5	2
9	8	2	5	6	3	4	7	1
8	3	9	4	5	1	7	2	6
2	5	7	9	3	6	1	8	4
4	1	6	7	8	2	3	9	5



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