

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 159. Question Time: Sweden's Quran-burning crisis, Farage vs. the banks, and what is 'the establishment'?

So, welcome to the Rest is Politics Question Time with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And Alistair, you are seeing me now sitting here in the remains of my house in Amman.

I've got boxes all around me.

I can see.

This is the last time you'll be seeing me at this desk and we're putting a whole family on a plane first thing tomorrow morning with a loss of stress from the children about whether I have somehow not packed the right toys.

My attempts to secretly hide half their plastic crap is being exposed all the time.

So this is a major life move.

You're leaving the Middle East.

Leaving the Middle East, returning back to Blighty, where you and I could do more in person, I guess.

I'm sure we can do more in person, but is this also possibly about trying to follow Nick Timothy, who's just been selected as a Conservative Party candidate in Matt Hancock's seat?

I can categorically say that I am not running as a Conservative candidate, either to be Mayor of London or as a member of Parliament.

I am currently not a member of the Conservative Party.

Are you planning to run in any other shape or form for political office within the United Kingdom?

Well, I think part of the problem is, is it really compatible with a podcast?

I mean, if I'm suddenly sitting in Parliament, who's going to trust and believe that I'm remotely objective on our podcast?

Well, I can be the judge of that and I can pull you into shape whenever I feel your strength.

So that wasn't a no.

That was not a no.

Well, I don't know.

It just represents my anxiety about our podcast.

Okay.

Okay.

So you're not going to be a politician again.

Is that what you're telling me?

Well, I don't think not, not for this election.

Maybe next time.

And meanwhile, I suppose the other reason you're coming back to London is because politics on the edge will be published in September.

Thank you very much for reminding people of that.

And if anybody felt like pre-ordering politics on the edge, I would be hugely grateful.

We were going to talk about Sweden and the Koran on the main podcast, but we, we ran out of time because we talked a lot about Niger, but we did ask lots of questions.

So here's one from somebody who sounds moderately Swedish, I think, Marietta Bjerome.

How do you two feel about the public burning of the Koran in Sweden, which has caused

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an outrage in much of the Muslim world?

Sweden holds onto the freedom of speech and opinion.

In Finland, it would, oh, maybe maybe she's a Finn.

In Finland, it would not be legal, although Finland is also a solid democracy.

What should Sweden do?

Been fascinating this because of course it's a classic conflict, isn't it, between absolute core belief in freedom of speech and the natural desire, particularly for what's seen as a very tolerant country in the main, not to be seen as a very intolerant country, provoking massive protests.

We talked in the main podcast about the French embassy coming under attack in Niger.

Well, the Swedish embassy has come under attack in Baghdad.

It was an Iraqi Christian exile who applied to the police for permission to hold a protest, held the protest in which he set the Koran on fire.

And this has started a waiver protest, including economic protest now with countries calling for a boycott of Swedish goods.

And Sweden is a big, big, big exporter to that part of the world.

So let's say you were back in the foreign office, you were a foreign minister, but you're not the foreign minister now of the United Kingdom, but of Sweden and Denmark, which has also had the same problem.

What would you do?

Well, I think, let me take one step back before I get to that one.

I think it's a good question, but one step back, speaking here from Jordan, whatever the rights or wrongs of it, it is massive news here.

People in Jordan are very, very, very angry and they're angry in Malaysia, they're angry in Turkey, they're angry in Egypt.

I don't know how much has been covered in the UK, but it is huge front page news here.

The Swedish ambassador, who's a friend of mine here in Amman, a very good Swedish ambassador has been called in and almost threatened with being expelled from the country.

I think the Swedish ambassador in Baghdad has been expelled.

Right.

And then, you know, I've been talking to senior people in the Middle East who are due to address major conferences on Sweden who are boycotting Sweden because they don't want to be seen to be endorsing this.

So I think it's important to understand that whatever the argument around freedom of speech from the point of view of many Muslims, this is incomprehensibly offensive.

The Koran is not treated exactly in the same way the Bible is.

You know, if you handle a Koran in someone's house, it's often wrapped very carefully placed in a special box.

In many cultures, it's held high above your head when you take it.

And because the Bible is inspired by God, but the Koran is the direct word of God in the view of a Muslim dictated to the Prophet Muhammad.

So it's very, very difficult for many, many Muslims to see this as anything other than a deliberate assault on Islam.

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And it's not made needier by the fact that, of course, the people often stirring this up in Denmark and Sweden are, of course, from the far right.

It's not an accident that they're burning the Koran as opposed to burning the Torah or the Bible.

They're doing it to appeal to anti-Muslim supporters.

So back to the point about were you in office, because what the prime ministers of the two countries have had to wrestle with of Sweden and Denmark is whether they essentially sacrificed that sense of total commitment to freedom of speech by saying, I guess what they could say, because at the moment it is the police who decide whether or not people can hold protests, whether they actually say, no, the government is going to decide this and we've decided we're not going to allow protesters to burn the Koran.

Yeah.

I mean, I may be influenced by the fact that I grew up and spent a lot of my life in Muslim countries, but I definitely am more sympathetic to the British approach.

So you remember in Gateshead, some Korans were burnt and stamped on back in 2010 and the police took immediate action on the grounds of hate crime.

And I think that is perfectly legitimate.

I cannot see this except in terms of a deliberate hate crime designed to try to antagonize and alienate.

And I don't want to push this too far, but you can think of many other profoundly offensive things that could be done by far right groups, you know, dressing up in Ku Klux Klan uniforms and the like, which we would very easily see as hate crime.

I think it's partly because the progressive left in some countries are uncomfortable with religion that they're unsure how to react.

This particular incident in Sweden, though, wasn't somebody from the far right, though the far right had been exploiting it since.

It was an Iraqi Christian exile.

Yeah.

You may or may not be far right.

I don't know.

But it wasn't as we would say traditional Swedish far right.

There is a far right in Sweden and they did far better.

The Sweden Democrats, they're one of the most misnamed parties I would suggest, but they did very, very well.

62 seats, second largest party in parliament and basically a merge from a biologically racist party that actually believes that anyone adopted in Sweden this back in the 1980s, anyone adopted in Sweden who wasn't white should be sent out of Sweden.

So there's a huge background to this, which is very worrying.

And you mentioned, just to make it more complicated for the Swedish government, is that they, you mentioned Turkey and of course, Erdogan was somewhat reluctantly dragged to a position of supporting Sweden's membership of NATO, which is one of the big events post the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but is now, of course, starting to stir in relation to this and suggesting that well, perhaps Sweden isn't a reliable country because they've allowed this situation

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to get out of hand.

So it's a horribly complicated situation.

My hunch is that both Sweden and Denmark will move to a position closer to our own where you can actually say no, you are not allowed to burn the Koran.

Now, here's a very good question for you, Peter Dirk Dekker.

As a regular listener to your podcast from the Netherlands, I was somewhat surprised to see the political decline of one of Europe's longest serving prime ministers, Mark Rutte.

Go wholly unnoticed in your otherwise very international podcast.

What is your perception of the Dutch political crisis in the upcoming November elections?

Well, it's true that we didn't do a sort of big special on the Netherlands.

And we did, I think, mention Mark Rutte when he decided to step down.

That was when a few weeks ago now.

And in the main episode this week, we did talk briefly about the Netherlands.

And I think I made the point that they were giving a very good sense of becoming somewhat ungovernable.

I mean, look, all of the main players within the current coalition essentially have said that they're stepping down.

And there was quite a moving statement by the deputy prime minister who said that she was leaving politics in part because it had become so horrible.

And apparently her daughters went on television to say that they were urging her to stop because of all the threats that were being made against her.

Some guy in jail for turning up at her house, waving a torch in her face.

So I don't know, I think as to what happens in the election.

We talked yesterday about this farmers party that's doing very well.

The far right is, Vilders is back sort of, you know, making lots of noise.

And it's very, very hard to read how this election, which is not going to be for another few months yet, is going to play out.

We will definitely talk about it nearer the time when it becomes a little clearer as to what's going to happen.

One thing that's cheered me up a little bit, we often talk about how unpleasant politics has become, which is one of the reasons why I'm a little bit reluctant to dive back in in this election.

But I had the privilege here in Jordan of hosting for lunch a group of prospective parliamentary candidates for the UK elections from the Labour and the Conservative parties.

It was extraordinary.

They were all together by a coalition for global prosperity, which is campaigns around international development.

And they had brought this group of mostly young people, diverse, bright, interesting, pretty difficult for me to be honest, to tell going around the table who was Conservative and who was Labour.

And I was so impressed that notwithstanding how horrifying British politics has become, there were a dozen really bright, motivated, interesting people from interesting backgrounds who seem to be on track to become members of parliament, interested in international

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development, interested in visiting a refugee camp in Jordan.

So maybe they've been reading, but what can I do?

Well, that's very heartening to hear.

Look, I do think the next generation has got to be better than this.

I mean, I agree with Chris Bryant's assessment in his book Code of Conduct that this has been the worst parliament in probably, well, certainly in our lifetime, possibly ever.

Just very briefly on the other thing that's maybe worth saying on Holland, I talked about the Deputy Prime Minister, Zegrit Kach, who's stepping down.

And there was a piece in, I think it was the Times earlier this week, about the Dutch equivalent of MI5, who are warning that what they call anti-institutional extremist movement targeting democratic authorities.

And these are basically people who think that there's an evil elite running the country, that it controls the government, the big companies, the judges, science, newspapers, the TV channels.

You know, I think we often think of the Netherlands as sort of, you know, sane, sensible and so forth.

But there's a real kind of underbelly there at the moment that the authorities are clearly very, very worried about.

And the statement made by Zegrit Kach when she stepped down was pretty sad.

Well, here we are for a question that's really going to irritate you and one that you've been trying to avoid.

And you can tell us what you've been trying to avoid it.

So, David Crozier, the Farage fiasco.

Just remind listeners, Farage fiasco is David Crozier referring to the fact that Nigel Farage had his bank account closed by Coots Bank, which is a subsidiary of Nat West.

He protested it.

Number of statements were made by Nat West and the chairman of Nat West has now resigned.

So the Farage fiasco, is this a real story or a prime example of a populist playing the victim to advance his polarizing agenda?

And I suspect we will disagree on this, Alastair, which is always good on this public cast.

Over to you first.

Well, I think it's both.

It is a real story.

However, something happens to our media, particularly when it's about figures who are very, very well known on the right.

I've actually written my new European column about this.

It's not that I don't want to talk about Nigel Farage.

I just think this story has been talked about far too much.

But the point I've made in my column is that we don't have a serious government at the moment.

We don't have a serious media.

And the combination means that we just go from one spasm to the next.

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So we had the Gary Lineker spasm a few months ago, when all that the media could cover was Gary Lineker's tweet about refugees.

We then had the Hugh Edwards spasm, and that lasted for days and days and days, and then it just went.

And now we've had the Farage Koot spasm.

And the other thing that I don't believe that Nigel Farage should be allowed in front of a microphone anywhere without being grilled rigorously, robustly on Brexit because he was such a major player in it.

And what I think the media is allowing him to do now is sort of reinvent himself as a consumer champion, just because he couldn't get an account with Koot's bloody bank for God's sake.

So I'm not saying they didn't make mistakes, but honestly, it's not that big a deal.

Well, let me sort of slightly agree with you, but slightly disagree.

I think what happened was pretty outrageous.

So Koot's took away his account.

He questioned it.

They then leaked to the BBC that the reason that his account had been suspended is he didn't have enough money.

This turned out to be completely untrue.

It turned out when they managed to get hold of a more than 40-page document that they actually accepted in the document that he did have enough money to have his account at Koot's.

And the head of NatWest had briefed the BBC.

She'd leaked stuff that broke clients' confidentiality, but more importantly, she'd lied so that the CEO of this big bank had told a direct lie to the BBC.

And so I think it's absolutely right that she went.

I thought it was a bit odd, in fact, that NatWest originally tried to keep her and drop her bonus, which was the worst of all worlds.

I mean, the board must have gone mad.

And I think the hero of this story is our friend John Sopel, who produced a tweet saying, Dear Nigel, always believed when I get things wrong, I own up to it.

I got it wrong.

Sorry.

That will teach me to trust reporting of my old employer, Smiley Face, the BBC.

If your political views were even part of the reason why the account was suspended from Koot's, that is totally reprehensible.

John, so well done, John Sopel.

Yeah, fair enough.

Fair enough.

But I still think there's a wonderful clip of Matt Fry, Channel 4, chasing Nigel Farage down the street, trying to find out where Nigel Farage gets all his money from, which is a legitimate question.

And I think if there was a little bit more focus on that and a little bit less focus

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on where he can bank his bloody money, we might know more.

Nigel Farage, he's a very, very effective communicator.

He's a very effective campaigner.

But his role in our national life as one of the creators of a project, which has gone horribly wrong, he now barely talks about it anymore.

He moves on to his next populist cause, and I don't believe we should help him to do that.

Very good.

Right, let's just stick with Farage for a moment, Rory.

Stu Balma, dear Rory and Alastair, could you please explain to me, Farage and that lot always go on about the establishment.

Who are the establishment?

I always thought they were the establishment coming from very expensive private education as they have the power.

Stu, that is a very good question, and it relates to something we've talked about before.

They are the establishment.

Unlike Farage and the right-wing newspapers that yet again are doing his bidding, they are the establishment.

But what they do is they persuade people that they're there for the little people, and that is why I make the link to Brexit.

That Brexit was a victory for people who represent a big part of what I define as the establishment, and their political and economic forces on the right, and they only won by persuading people that actually they're with them against this mythical elite.

I think we've got to be careful here, because I think that there's a risk of saying the elite is mythical, but the establishment is real.

I think these are all different ways of struggling with where power lies, and there are different types of power in Britain's economic power.

There is cultural power, there's governmental power, and I think there's a perfectly good case to be made that Britain, like any diverse modern society, has a lot of competing establishments.

There's definitely a type of an establishment that you and I are part of, there's part of an establishment that Farage is part of.

Even Nigel Farage's best pals cannot say that he doesn't represent a form of elite establishment power.

He does.

That's the tragedy, of course, for all these populist movements, that they all involve just new forms of elite trying to present themselves as anti-elite.

I agree.

All right.

Let's take a quick break there.

We'll be right back in a minute.

Welcome back to the Restless Politics Question Time with me, Rory Stewart.

I'm Elisabeth Campbell.

Okay.

Senkaisia.

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Senkaisia is a British student who's in California at the moment.

What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of Tony Blair's central government machinery units, like the delivery and strategy units that were abolished by Cameron?

Does Alistair think their work improved policy implementation?

Rory suspicious them, centralizing power and micromanaging Whitehall.

Are these units a good model to deploy to other countries as advocated by the Tony Blair Institute?

There we are.

Over to you.

Well, I think they're also advocated by those countries which have adopted them.

I think it was a mistake of David Cameron to get rid of them.

Look, strategies, whether you have a strategy unit in the way it's set out in the question, I think it's probably less important than a delivery unit.

The strategy has to come from the people at the top who define a strategy, execute the strategy, narrate the strategy, take that forward.

But I think delivery, it's so difficult in public services, it's become more difficult and you can only do it if you're constantly on top of keeping track of it.

Look, the delivery unit model that we brought in, headed by Michael Barber, who was terrific and...

Sir Michael Barber.

Sir Michael Barber.

Yes.

I don't always feel I have to give people their title.

But Sir Michael Barber, a very fine man, and look, it's true that I visit lots of different governments in different parts of the world.

It is interesting how many of them have his book on their bookshelves because I think they realize that what the public want from their governments these days is delivery.

How do you track delivery?

Well, you do.

It's not micromanaging, but you have to have somewhere within government where you're tracking it.

And I think the center is the place to have that.

And also, it means that you can track thematically across the government.

If you have a strategy for public service modernization, that's not just about one public service, it's about a general approach.

So I'm a big fan of delivery units.

Yeah.

Well, I'm quite a fan too.

And I'm actually quite a fan of Michael Barber.

I got him in to talk to my Yale class.

And in fact, he very kindly came to see me when I was running to be Prime Minister.

He's written a great book.

People haven't looked at it called How to Run a Government so that citizens benefit

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and taxpayers don't go crazy.

He's tried like you.

He's, along with your Persevillians, he's invented his own word, which is Deliverology, which I'm not quite sure how far Deliverology is going to go.

I think Persevillians wins.

What do you think, Rory?

I don't like Deliverology.

I've always been a bit suspicious of sort of overly technocratic approaches to politics because I think it was one of the problems in the 90s that we didn't think enough about emotion, identity, values.

It's not all about sort of technocratic approach to delivery, but a lot of it is.

And I think Michael Barber was very good at it.

I think it's also, unfortunately, although I'm tempted as a conservative to mount a very nostalgic defense to civil service and say, we don't need any of these special advisors.

We don't need delivery units.

It can all be done by the civil service.

I think the truth of the matter is the world has got more and more complicated.

The civil service faces so many legal challenges.

It's very, very helpful.

I felt in 2010, and a lot of politics on the edge is actually about what happened when those units were got rid of, I really felt that Cameron struggled in those first five years because he didn't have those kind of units to help drive through policy.

Philippa Vance, Rory mentioned party discipline a few weeks ago.

Please can you explain what's the point of having MPs if the expectation is they vote with their party?

I appreciate that two can rebel, but that's at a cost and lead MPs choosing their votes against wisely.

Let me try to answer that.

The answer is that in systems where there is no party discipline and every legislator can vote as they want, which was the system in Britain in the 18th century, paradoxically, you often end up with even more corruption because each one of those individual votes is open for manipulation and buying.

That's why traditionally in the US before there were strong party systems, when senators and congresspeople voted very independently, you had this pork barrel politics, MPs become very, very vulnerable to saying, oh, I'm going to hold back my vote unless you build a bridge to nowhere in my constituency or you put an army base in my constituency.

Because often when there isn't party discipline, yes, of course, in certain cases, the MPs are using their vote for the public good, but they can often be simply trading their vote for various types of reward.

The second problem with a system without any parties is that when you are a voter in your constituency, you're usually not voting for the individual MP.

In some cases, you may not even know who your MP is, you're voting for a party.

You're voting for the manifesto of that party.

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Say you're voting in 1997, you're voting to bring in new labor and you've read their manifesto or you've got some sense of it, you're expecting them to do the kinds of things that Tony Blair says they're going to do.

And if you wake up the next morning and find your labor MP is deliberately voting against Tony Blair's policies repeatedly so he can't get his policies through, you feel a bit disenfranchised. So there are strong arguments for why parties matter and why party discipline matters because it brings a bit of order and structure to what would otherwise be 50 million individual voters and 650 individual MPs.

Yeah, and we've talked recently both about Holland, Netherlands and Spain, where it would seem that it's impossible to form a government.

And when we talk about forming a government, when we have a general election and people say which party leader is able to quote form a government, close quotes, that means do they have enough people in the new House of Commons that can be expected to vote, particularly for a budget, but for other things that that party has been promising in a campaign.

So I broadly agree with that.

I think sometimes perhaps MPs should be allowed a little bit more freedom in terms of what they say and do, but I think the broad approach that you're electing a party as well as an individual MP, I think still serves as reasonably well.

And I think the way to resolve it is that you let the MPs rebel.

I mean, I did rebel, but you put the cost on it quite high so that they rebel on one or two issues that really matter to them existentially.

The public understands that looking at their voting record doesn't tell you very much because 95% of their votes you can expect to be in line with their party.

And when they really find something in the way that I did about a no-deal Brexit, yeah, at that point they resigned from the government, they leave the cabinet, they rebel against their party, they get thrown out of their party and they have to have the option to do that.

Otherwise, you won't be able to stop extreme injustice, but there has to be that balance between freedom and discipline.

Now, United Nations Security Council, ASA Stanley, a few weeks ago, Rory said that if the United Nations Security Council was picked today, the UK would not be on it.

Who would the major five be today if the council was going to be changed now?

Okay, so I think that the normal argument is you'd give much bigger space to the BRICS because they represent the big regional powers, Brazil and Latin America, India, in Asia, obviously China and Russia already on the council, South Africa or Nigeria in Africa, one of the fundamental problems at the moment is, Sub-Saharan Africa is not represented at all, Latin America is not represented at all, South Asia is not represented at all and that makes less and less sense given the populations, the economic size of these countries.

Yeah, I think the countries that would think that they deserve a place would be India, Germany, Japan or Misty, Brazil possibly.

If it was being set up in terms of power today, I think actually if you were going to revisit it, perhaps you'd sort of say, well, the only two, I mean, you'd probably start a world war, which I don't think would be a very good idea. You probably would kick off Russia and the UK

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and France. And bring in the EU?

You bring in the EU on there. You probably have the United States, European Union, China and then a body that brought together something that represented Africa and then Latin America. I think that's how you work it.

You can have an African Union seat and a Latin American seat, yeah.

Now, let's see, here's my final one, Rory.

Go on then.

A bit lighter than what we've been talking about.

Charlie O'Neill, can Rory please share his favorite experience of Theresa May and call Alistair share his favorite experience of Gordon Brown?

They are both good, hardworking PMs who were dealt a bad hand.

So what's your favorite experience of Theresa May?

My favorite experience of Theresa May is when she was up in my constituency and seeing her come up as a very, very busy woman working the tables.

She's not a big extrovert. She's quite an introverted person.

But just showing the dedication late at night to getting around, meeting party members, listening to people, taking their experiences seriously.

I felt in every engagement with her, whether it was going to see her in the cabinet room when she was appointing me to a ministerial position or sitting in the cabinet with around a table or the National Security Council, that this was somebody who was a serious human being, doing her best. I was very, very proud to serve in her government.

Over to you on Gordon Brown.

I'll tell you what, Rory, because I'm very keen for both Theresa May and Gordon Brown to come on as guests of leading, I'm going to link my favorite experience of Gordon Brown to direct invitation to give me my tie back. Because on Gordon's last day as prime minister, and I'd been in there helping on the campaign and then was around for those rather strange days when the coalition was being put together. So when Gordon finally decided that he was calling it a day and he was going to go and see the Queen and resign as prime minister, Gordon came down with Sarah, his wife and these two boys. And he sort of said goodbye to people. And then before he went out, he suddenly realized or somebody pointed out to him that he's wearing a blue tie. And he thought, come back, I can't go out wearing a blue tie. And he looked around to see if anybody was wearing a red tie. I was wearing the closest thing to a red tie.

It wasn't quite Trumpian red, but it was pretty red. So we should maybe share a picture in the newsletter of Gordon walking out, as he designed from number 10, in my tie. Now that was 13 years ago. Now Gordon, I want my tie back. So I suggest that when you sit down with me and Rory for an episode of Leading, that we have the handover of the red tie. Very good. Final question, Johnny P. What books are you currently reading? What have you just finished reading? We haven't had any cultural recommendations for a while. So when I give you a second to think about the answer, Johnny, the answer is because it's been a long time, I've been reading a lot of books. So here's a quick, quick selection of books. Great book on trauma called The Body Keeps the Score by a person called Bessel van de Kolk, a novel called The General by C.S. Forester, who wrote the Hornblower

series, which is about a First World War general. It's ironic, strange, moving. I think a really

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sort of weird troubling insight into the mentality of First World War generals recommended by my friend Mark Behan. If people have young children and want a gentle way of introducing at least those more interested in samurai into Japan, there's a great book I'm reading my children at the moment called Young's Samurai by someone called Bradford. People want politics things. I've been looking at this child will be great, which is mesmerizing by Ellen Johnson-Serleaf, an account of her going through a coup d'etat. She becomes president of Liberia, but in 1980, she goes to a coup d'etat where all but three of her cabinet colleagues are lined up on posts on the beach and shot. And finally, a little shout out to Ben Riley Smith, who's a telegraph correspondent, just written a book called Right to Rule, which I think you might find quite interesting, which is an attempt to answer the fundamental question. How on earth did the conservatives remain in power given catastrophic catalog of errors over 13 years just coming out? So over to you. Any thoughts from you? Sorry, in that one, you say catastrophic errors over 13. Is it a book saying never vote for them again? Because I definitely will read that. He's a telegraph journalist, but it's a book saying it's a bit weird, given everything that happened, austerity, Brexit, Liz Truss, that the conservatives remained in power. So it's a question of what is the resilience of the Conservative Party? What is it that against all the odds meant that they kept winning elections through that period? Oh, I see. I've got it. I've got it. Okay. Now, I have just finished a book, which I think you would enjoy. It was published 96 years ago. Oh, yes, very good. It was given to me as a gift by my editor of my book, which as you know, is called... Yeah, it's called, but what can I do? I almost said politics on the edge. I'm sorry. So my editor, Nigel, went, but what can I do? Reach number one. My editor, Nigel, decided this was worthy of some sort of celebration. So he dug into his collection of very rare first editions, because there used to be such a thing, Roy, there isn't any more, but there is such a thing as a rare first edition. And he found this book called The Piper in Peace and War. And it's just fantastic. It's a, as you know, I love the bagpipes, but the bagpipes have been an instrument of war, right? Do you know when the bagpipes cease to be officially recognised as an instrument of war? No, when? 1996, not till 1996. The Labour government should have reversed that. But it's full of stories of amazing heroism of pipers in war. So I thoroughly enjoyed that. And I think you would. I'm reading a book called Das Leben ist Gut. Life is Good. Gosh. By a guy called Alex Kapus, C-A-P-U-S. And is that an ironic title or is it a self-help book? Well, I'm only halfway through. It's a book about a couple who have never spent a night apart, and the wife goes off to Paris for a week. And it's the guy, well, we don't know where the rabies go to. Oh, goodness gracious me. I think we know what's going to happen there. I don't think that's the road it's going to go down. But it's one of those things where the guy who runs a bar, he's also a writer, but he runs a bar. And where I am at the moment, he's just sort of reflecting all these different personalities who come into his bar. But I'm thoroughly enjoying it. And then the other book I read recently, also out of Deutsch, is called Der Anhalter. But if I tell you that the author was Lee Child, you'll probably realise that it's a translation of a book that Lee Child wrote called The Hitchhiker. I've taken to reading Agatha Christie in French, because that's about the level of language I can do. And Shashana, my wife, is reading Harry Potter in Arabic. Oh, wow. The other thing to tell you is that if you want a good French novelist, that I think if your French is not sort of mega good, but I think you would really like is Amélie Nott-Homme. She's a wonderful writer, but she

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writes in very, very clear, simple French. People looking for things to listen to, I really recommend fantastic recordings by Gareth Armstrong, who's an English actor, of Magre, Georges Simonon's Magre novels. And I've been through seven of these so far. And Gareth Armstrong beautifully uses English accents to capture different French personality types with Altu really noticing that seamless transition. And it's fantastically translated. And Simonon, I mean, I'm still staggered by the man. He wrote something like 500 books. He was generating nine or 10 of these a year, and every one of them would have taken me two years to write at that kind of quality. Have I mentioned before, Wendy Joseph, the Old Bailey Judge? No, you've not. It was usually about listening, because we actually listened to this recently on a long drive up to the late district. Wendy Joseph, Old Bailey Judge, and her book is called Unlawful Killings. And it's written like a series of short stories, really, because she takes cases that she's been involved in, she disguises names and so forth, but is beautifully written. But it also gives you a sense of the complexities of what goes in to a murder trial, and the number of lives that are affected by that. And she comes over as an incredibly sort of empathetic, sensitive woman. But you really get a feeling for, you know how when we're following court cases, and you sort of, you know, you think, oh, well, he's obviously guilty, oh, he's not guilty, whatever. It really takes you into the complexities of the stories and the situations, and ultimately the judgments that she has to make. I think we're going to get in huge trouble from our very intimidating producer, Dom, who if people could see him, I think they would be scared. But luckily, it's an audio presentation, who's going to telling us off for giving more book recommendations, as you'd say, then the British Library. That's not how he speaks. He doesn't talk at all like that. Shut up, boys. Leave it till next week. He's also a Manchester City supporter. And as you know, Rory, Manchester City are set to lose their first game of the season because they're playing against. Oh, wait, wait, wait, they're playing against Richmond FC, Ted Lasso's club? No, they're playing badly. Have you watched Ted Lasso? I have. I love it. I love it. I love it. I absolutely love it. Do you like it? Yeah, yes, I do. I love the positivity and because usually watching stuff about football, actors just can't do football because they're not good at football, but actually they do it. They do it pretty well. Are they playing football? Okay. How do they actually play the football? Are the actors being forced to actually pass the ball or are they got stunt doubles doing that? Yeah, I think they do a bit of that and they have a bit of stunt double and they have a bit of CGI and all that stuff. AI, Rory, you know, AI is going to take over football. We've been watching something called The Offer, which is about the making of The Godfather and as a result of which, having watched it, we rewatched The Godfather because he's 50 years now since The Godfather and it was kind of okay. It was a bit dated. Really? Did Marlon Brando remind you a bit of Dom, our producer, that terrifying figure who keeps intervening? No. When Dom says, Rory, I want to make you an offer. I found Al Pacino more convincing than Marlon Brando. And also, I know it was all part of the app. I'm 66 now, and maybe it's just my hearing, but I couldn't really work out what he was saying a lot at the time. And I think it's awful when you're watching films in your own language and you want the subtitles. My sister once said that she felt with one of her boyfriends that she'd got together with the young Marlon Brando and ended up with the old Marlon Brando. Anyway, The Offer is quite good,

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although it was based on a book by somebody called Albert Ruddy, who was also the executive producer of the series. And the one thing I'll say about the series is that Albert Ruddy, who produced The Godfather, comes out as an utterly heroic figure. Extraordinary. Amazing. Absolutely. Absolutely. It's a bit like me in politics on the edge. Right. Okay. Here we get to wrap. Thank you very much, Alistair, for this. And it's a goodbye to everyone from Jordan and my slightly never again for some time when you hear the call to prayer or the gas van driving past playing its own ice cream tune. All right, guys. Love it to talk to you. All right. Bye-bye.