Welcome to The Rest is Politics with me, Rory Stewart.
And me, Alistair Campbell.
And a lot to be getting on with. Of course, we're going to focus a great deal on what's happening in the Middle East. But there's also been a series of very remarkable events around the world. So in the second half, we will touch on an incredible result that seems to be emerging in Poland, where the right-wing populist government that's dominated Poland since 2015 looks like it's been pushed out. New Zealand, where Chris Hipkins, who we interviewed on Leading, lost the election by a pretty large margin. And the voice referendum, which we've been hearing a lot about in Australia, on rights for indigenous peoples, which has also been lost. But, Alistair, quick reminder of people where we are. So we're talking on the 17th of October. On the 7th of October, Saturday, Hamas crossed the border from Gaza. It now appears that 1,300 people were killed, many of whom were civilians, and 199 hostages were taken. Then Israel began to respond with bombardments. 6,000 bombs were dropped in six days on Gaza. So to put that in context, that's 7,700 were dropped in the whole Libyan war. So 6,000 bombs in six days. If you see the footage which CNN and others are producing, that means that you're often seeing bomb after bomb after bomb if you're sitting in Gaza, just going off in different buildings again. It's a colossal number. To put another fact in context, when the UK was talking about being the second largest contributor to air operations in Syria, the UK was flying two bombing missions a day. This is 6,000 bombs in six days. And then October 12th, Israel told 1.1 million people in the northern bit of Gaza that they had 24 hours to evacuate. And very difficult to get figures out, but there is a total siege. So the water supply for Gaza comes from Israel. The electricity for Gaza comes from Israel. That's been cut off. So people are reliant now on trying to find what water remains. In some cases, that is dirty water. That can be water, which people are trying to bottle water smuggled across borders. That's in some cases, apparently salt water. The generators are now what people are relying on to keep hospitals going, but of course, they're running out of fuel. And according to the government in Gaza, 2,750 people have been
killed since the bombardment started and 9,700 wounded. Over to you on what you're picking up in terms of conversations around the Middle East in Britain at the moment, for example?
Well, I think maybe we should start with some of the things we've been talking about on the podcast with the interviews we've done, first with Yuval Noharari. And then most recently, went out yesterday, the Palestinian ambassador. And I think what I'm getting a sense of, both in that region and here, is how quickly this issue has become so polarized, how hard it is for people to get a sense of what's really happening. I think that we're seeing some really bad stuff on social media in particular. I think a lot of the mainstream media as well, there's been some great stuff from places where you might expect it, but also some pretty bad stuff as well. But I think in the UK context, I think Rishi Sunak started out in a very bad place, kind of Israel right or wrong. I think Kirstama reflected that a little bit too much as well. But I thought by yesterday in the statement in the House of Commons, they were in a better position.
You mean that both Rishi Sunak and Kirstama started by sounding as though they were not really pushing for restraint in Gaza, and now they've moved to a position where they're saying,

we absolutely recognize Israel's right to defend itself, but we call it to uphold international humanitarian law in the way it deals with Gaza. And Rishi Sunak, I guess, has announced over 10 million pounds worth of humanitarian relief now to Gaza. European unions now announced over 70 billion euros of humanitarian relief from Gaza. So that's what you're talking about, right? Yeah, I think at the start, last Saturday, it was so horrific. It was so awful. The scale of terror was so horrendous that I think that the politicians around the world felt the need absolutely to be with Israel. But I think one of the things that came through, actually with Yuval, but also certainly with the Palestinian ambassador, was the worry that Netanyahu would take that and only hear the bits that said, essentially, green light for whatever you do. And I think what's happened over the last few days has been a recalibration. And I do think a lot of that was down to the fact that Joe Biden and Anthony Blinken, the Secretary of State, have been so much more balanced and shown in a way that it's possible to be unequivocally supportive
of Israel whilst at the same time pointing to the need for restraint, the need to obey the norms of international law, the need not to go to the depths of the terrorist as it were.
And maybe a good point to kick off is the fact that Joe Biden, when our podcast, which we're recording today, Tuesday, goes out, Joe Biden is likely to be either on his way to or in Israel itself. Now, it's so rare for a president to go to a war zone, but he did go to Ukraine as well. Honestly, we've talked before about about Joe Biden and you've been saying for months that, you know, we think he's too old. And but I really think the guy's got incredible leadership skills and his experience in this area is, I think, going to be absolutely vital. And I think we should also give a little, you know, word of praise to Anthony Blinken as well, because the guy has, you know, he's been touring the region. He's working really hard to get humanitarian routes opened into Gaza. He's absolutely supportive of the Israelis. But at the same time, cognizant of all the other tensions in that region, the need to, you know, to keep easy, they've got so many pressures on them, so many balls in the air. But I think they're, I think he and Biden did a pretty good job. So yeah, the problem, though, I guess, is that they really took their eye off the ball. The US has massively disengaged from the region. The two state solution has seemed less and less important to US politicians over the last decade. This started really with President Obama, who wanted to get the US out of the Middle East, focused more on China and Asia Pacific.
It accelerated under Donald Trump, who supported moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, which was a very, very provocative act because of course, Jerusalem is meant to be an international city, and East Jerusalem is very much meant to be part of the Palestinian territory. So that was very provocative. And Joe Biden hasn't really, since he's come into office, brought the focus to the Middle East. And we saw it with Jake Sullivan, his national security advisor, who's along with Tony Blinken, the Secretary of State, and Joe Biden, the President, gave a speech saying that the Middle East seemed to be more peaceful than it had been in two decades just before this all happened. With the caveat, he did have a caveat, Roy. He said, but the one thing you know about that region is you never quite know what's going to happen. Good caveat. But I think that the basic story is that the populism of Trump led to a form of isolationism. And Jake Sullivan wrote a big piece just before they came into office, arguing for a foreign policy for the middle class. And this basically was a foreign policy in the US, which was going to focus much, much more on thinking about American interests. And it was going to be more cautious about global free trade deals. Biden's really backed off a lot of the free trade stuff. And

we've seen that in the Pacific Partnership. But more generally, the liberal global order that we talk about a lot cannot work without the US. And it's fine that the US is now getting involved, but the pattern has been with Ukraine, with Israel, with the coups in Africa, with what happened in Sudan, that the US is coming in once the crisis has happened. But it's not leaning in before the crisis. No, I mean, look, Trump, as the Palestinian ambassador indicated, and I think we all recognize
and Zaid Raad said the same, Trump has a disaster on so many fronts, but in foreign policy and in this area, absolutely a total disaster. We've also talked before, and this again, I think we've seen through this lens as well, the extent to which the Middle East has not in recent years been about Israel and Palestine. Also, I'm just interrupting for a second, but I guess what you're saying is it's more about the Gulf. So Qatar, UAE, Saudi have all become the central gravity. That's where the wealth has been. That's where the focus has been. That's why Antony Blinken is having to sort of, you know, tick all of those boxes as well. No, you're absolutely right.
This has been a failure of global strategic leadership. My point about Biden and Blinken is that now that we are in this crisis, and crisis, it really is, that they thus far,
I think, have handled it extraordinarily well. And I think that of itself has had an impact upon the other leaders, including our own. We should probably put in the newsletter an interview I saw, I think it was on the BBC, with the mother of one of the Israelis who'd been killed. And we, you know, I think that one of the reasons we've gone to talk to Yuval and the ambassador, they both had families who'd been involved in this. Yuval had members of his family directly caught up in an attack on one of the Kubutsin, and the ambassador, Hussam Zomlat, who lost several members, close members of his family in the early strikes on Gaza. He told us the story of his sister who was opened her home to people who were fleeing, and she now had, I think he said, 150 people living there. And I do think these human stories are incredibly important. And the interview that I'm talking about was a woman who said that even though she'd lost a child, she did not want her child to be used as an excuse for vengeance. And the last thing that Israel needed is war. And I think, I think there are more Israelis saying that than maybe we realize from the media coverage, because obviously the political leaders and the military action dominates this debate. And if you look at Netanyahu and you look at Galan, the defense minister, their language is so kind of militaristic. Likewise, when we talk to the Palestinian ambassador, it is so much about what they feel about what's being done to them. And we had a very interesting discussion with him about whether you can be a victim and a perpetrator
at the same time. Well, I think he actually was pretty reflective. I mean, it took us a while to get there, but I think he became quite reflective about that. So what's happening inside the public opinions of both Israeli and Palestinian? If you think about Gaza, one of the points that,
I thought one of the points that Bokeh, Starman, Rishi Sunak made is we must not confuse Hamas with Palestine. We mustn't confuse Hamas with the people who live in Gaza. There will be many, many, many supporters of Hamas, but a lot of these people who are fleeing, they are as angry about Hamas as many, many Israelis are, because they realize what they're doing to their country as well. So I think that is trying to sort of explain to people the nuances and the complexities in the way that people now communicate in politics and the way that the media conducts itself in politics is very, very hard. But that's, I think, what we're trying to do. We talk a lot about the way in which social media polarizes and creates this kind of populist environment. And one of the

problems here is that ex-Twitter is really out of control. I mean, one of the things that Elon Musk seems to have done is made significant cuts to the staff when he took over. And part of that has affected attempts to really moderate and put content in context. So I open up my phone this morning
and I read, Hamas ripped open a pregnant Israeli woman's stomach, killed the fetus, then killed the mother. Hamas raped women and girls, mutilated their bodies and then shot them. And I then try to go
online to find out whether this is true or not. And this is not just, I mean, and that this is, I'm not, it's not a random post. This is a post with 1.1 million views,
which a lot of people who I know have liked and forwarded and shared. So that's on the Israeli side. On the Palestinian side, equal news is going out, pictures of Israelis using phosphorus bombs, pictures of injured civilians, interviews with Israeli soldiers saying they're going to kill or reservists saying they're going to kill every woman and child and then posted back to this thing. And there is not any proper content moderation. So we were in a situation in which a story went out, really important story, went out claiming that Hamas had killed and beheaded 40 babies. And this was five days ago. And this really dominated the news cycle and was a very, very important part of people's perceptions of what Hamas had done. So much so that Joe Biden himself said that Hamas had beheaded babies, which was seen as a U.S. confirmation, official confirmation, from which he's now had to backtrack and admit that actually the present United States was going on social media seeing this stuff and not actually checking with the CIA. Well, if you remember, when we did our first discussion on this, I mentioned it because I had thought it was true. And then you made the point straight away, well, that has not been verified. It shows how easy it is to fall into the traps of seeing stuff and believing it.
We should also share with people a very long article that I sent you from Bellingcat.
They did an amazing job at focusing on specific stories that they have been able to establish were not true. And again, as you say on both sides, so they're all doing this. And the use of video, the use of old video footage that is being presented as of now. And I think this is a terrible thing to say because we both argue against being overly cynical. But I think at the moment when we're looking at social media, I think it's wise to start from the possibility that what you're seeing is not often what it says it is. It's so difficult, isn't it? So when I read this thing, it's got 1.6 million views. It's got 7,000 retweets. So you sort of assume
that it might be true. But then you get into it and there are statements on the web saying that this claim that a woman's stomach was cut open and the fetus was killed is actually lifted from a 40-year-old allegation made in the Lebanon War. And then as you say, I mean, social media is dominated by reposting old footage. So some people may have seen this
some mesmerizing footage of a man being stalked by a cougar on a run in America.
But it then turns out that it's three years old. Now, that doesn't matter so much for a comical thing as somebody being stalked by a cougar. But what's happening here, and there's been great stuff, I really want to recommend BBC Verify, where BBC Verify is taking these videos, using image capture, going back on the web and finding that often this is footage from previous Hamas-Israeli fights from years ago, or it's footage from Ukraine, which people are pretending is footage from Gaza. So the white phosphorus bombs that people were posting on the Palestinian side to accuse the Israelis of war atrocities turn out to be footage from Ukraine being applied to Gaza, et cetera, et cetera. The other thing I wanted to do, or you've

did a brilliant job in one of your explainers in the start of the thing. But once I got a question this week from somebody who said, please don't read out my name, I'm embarrassed to ask this publicly. But when I hear people say Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, I actually don't know what they mean.
So if I can just give a very brief explainer so as people understand the difference. Arabs are people who speak Arabic as a native language. And there are around 470 million of those. Muslims are people who practice the religion of Islam. And there are somewhere between one and a half and two billion. That's around 25% of the world. And it's the fastest-growing religion of the world. But fewer than 15% of Muslims are Arabs. Palestinians are Arabs who live and have lived through history, as it were, in a certain geographical region in the Middle East.
And that's something that we talked about to the ambassador. And there are around 7 million Palestinians in the area, 5.3 in what's called the state of Palestine, that's 3.2 million in the West Bank, 2.1 million in the Gaza, 1.7 million in what are known as the 1948 territories, and around 7 million in the diaspora.
Of which we're just quick on that. Of which are lost in Jordan.
So one of the reasons why people are really nervous about the conflict developing and becoming regional is that by some measurements, almost the majority of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian descent. And the links there are very strong. But also, of course, links very, very strong into Lebanon. Many Arabs are not Muslims. Not all Muslims are Arabs. Most Arabs are Muslims. But there also are Christian Arabs, Jewish Arabs. And then if we talk about the Arab world, the Arab world is basically 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. So when we talk about Iran, Iran is not an Arab country. Turkey is not an Arab country. And when we talk about the Middle East, usually includes the 22 Arab countries. And then Turkey is sometimes viewed as part of the Middle East and sometimes part of Europe. And when we talk about Afghanistan,
India, Bangladesh, they are basically South Asia.
It's good to do because I think we underestimate this. There's a book actually that's just been written by Barnaby Rodgerson on the Sunni Shia split, which I think is another very important thing to understand. But I remember all the way through over the last 20 years working on Iraq and Afghanistan, how often I was in meeting with senior politicians who didn't know the difference between Sunni and Shia, for example, and would have struggled with a lot of the things you just said. And I think finding the space for politicians, many of whom have spent their lives in domestic policy and suddenly find themselves in foreign policy positions to take the time to understand things that, of course, everybody in the region understands or takes for granted, but people internationally are really struggling to disentangle.
Can I just move you on quickly onto the question of the ground invasion? So the question now is, what will Israel do next? The clearing of the announcement that people had 24 hours to evacuate moved from northern Gaza to southern Gaza, moving a million people, was also combined with hundreds of thousands of Israeli reservists being mobilized and very large Israeli military presence around the Gaza border. So the assumption is that the next stage following the bombardment
will be an Israeli ground offensive targeted particularly at the tunnels. Hamas has tunnels running all the way under Gaza City and around, which cannot really been accessed purely through aerial bombardment and will require special, if the Israelis want to tackle them, special

engineering teams going into this very dangerous fighting in tunnels. That, of course, is also almost certainly where many of the hostages, many of these 199 hostages, will be being held at the moment. So this is, I think, something that is at the center of what Joe Biden and other international leaders are trying to get involved in, which is to say, be very, very thoughtful about what the next stage is because, yes, Israel can mount a ground offensive, it can go in, but it will be brutal urban warfare because Hamas has presumably been expecting this for some time and will have prepared with booby traps that will be like the fight around Mosul. There will be inevitably very, very large numbers of civilian casualties and that won't just be, well, it won't be because Israel is trying to avoid the rules of war. It's because it's impossible really to fight in urban areas without civilians being killed and that's partly to do with the way that civilian casualties are defined. During the fight in Mosul after 2014, the RAF, for example, claimed that it only had record of one civilian casualty, despite the fact that thousands of civilians have been killed. Why is that? That's because they define a civilian casualty as somebody who is nowhere near a military installation or command post. If there's a command post or a military installation under the way in which wars conduct at the moment, civilian casualties are not counted, it's considered proportional. One of the moments at which Hussam, the Palestinian ambassador, seemed to me to get really quite angry and emotional was when he was talking about those politicians, including some of our own, who were saying that Hamas hide their soldiers inside hospitals. The reason that he was so kind of emotional about that is because he said that in the current climate Israel takes that as, well, if they're using hospitals, that then becomes a military target. And I did think amongst all the messages around the evacuation when there was sort of dropping leaflets and putting out messages on social media and on television and radio, the one that was asking people to vacate hospitals was in a sense the most alarming. But that's what the thinking is, is that they're basically saying, well, if you're going to have Hamas soldiers inside hospitals, they become a legitimate target. So I guess you're right, that when then that gets bombed and people die in there, that they're not necessarily counted as a civilian in a way that we would expect it.
So I was in Mosul a few months ago and the most striking thing, and this is the second city in Iraq, which was taken by ISIS, the most striking thing that you see there is the hospital on the river, which was hit very, very hard. I mean, it's a kind of shattered building because the coalition, the US, the UK, the Iraqis argued that it had become a bomb-making factory. And that ISIS were making bombs in the middle of this hospital.
The one thing they will not do, I imagine, is launch this whilst Joe Biden is in the region. I wonder if perhaps the most significant reason why Joe Biden himself wants to go there is, of course, to show solidarity with Israel. But it's also that he can be there. He will presumably get pretty fully briefed on exactly what the plan is likely to be.
And this will allow him perhaps to influence and shape that.
Yeah, exactly. And the questions that the American administration will be asking is what next? And it will be influenced also by the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, which is that they will be saying, look, you can win potentially the military stage of this, but what's the post-war plan? So let's say Israel goes in and it kills a lot of Hamas terrorists and deals with their stockpiles of weapons and gets rid of their command centers. What happens next? Who's going to govern Gaza? Because Hamas was the government to Gaza. So who's Israel going to bring in as a government? Are they going to try to occupy it and govern it

themselves, in which case Israel would be directly responsible for the water supply, the electricity, the sanitation, and find itself dealing with a very, very angry insertion population that will almost certainly be attacking them all the time. And it will then feel very much like an extreme version of the occupation of Iraq. I mean, much more extreme, because the occupation of Iraq, the US and the UK did not have the history that Israel has in Gaza. If, on the other hand, they're not proposing to do that, then the dangerous they leave a vacuum behind. And who fills that vacuum? Is that going to be Hamas? Is that going to be Fatah? And when is Israel going to provide the support to rebuild the infrastructure which is being destroyed? Because, obviously, at the moment, Israel is very, very angry. They've cut off the water supply. They've cut off the electricity and they've dropped at least 6,000 bombs. But at some point, Israel needs to work out whether they want there to be a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. And we're in a very odd situation in which, at the same time as Israel is bombing, the UK and the European Union are providing humanitarian support to provide the water and fuel and electricity that Israel is cutting off. So, it's a very strange thing. These two apparent allies, one of them cutting off the water and electricity and the other spending money trying to get water and electricity in. I think we sit in the first podcast on this that we did that at a time when the Israelis have been quite happy that Qatar has been helping guards and life kind of go on. And the other question I think we have to start asking is what happens in terms of rebuilding the place? Who takes responsibility for that? And the world, let's be honest, the world has had months focused on the war in Ukraine. People were starting to think there about cost of rebuilding infrastructure and so forth. Well, you've now got two parts of the world where you're having very, very similar problems. Ultimately, the big powers in the world are going to have to come together and have a plan for them. And the costs are unbelievable. You will have seen some of the estimates out of Ukraine, which were well into the hundreds of billions of dollars. The estimates on rebuilding Afghanistan were very high, but this is much more extreme because the amount of heavy explosives that's being dropped, cost of rebuilding is going to get well beyond any conceivable international development budget. To put it in context, the whole world overseas development assistance a year is about 200 billion a year and that's covering all the extreme poor in sub-Saharan Africa, in parts of Asia, that's all the health programs, education programs. Almost certainly, we will end up with comparable amounts of damage done in Gaza and Ukraine and where that money is coming from, I have no idea.

I thought that one of the most impressive parts of the interview that we did with Yuval Noharari was when we talked about Ukraine and President Zelensky. Yuval had been very, very pretty damning about quite a lot of the prominent leaders in the world, notably Netanyahu, but also Trump and others. But the way that he spoke about Zelensky and the leadership he'd shown in Ukraine and now the leadership that he was trying to show in support of Israel as a Jew, but I also think that part of that with Zelensky must be that he and the Ukrainians will be worrying that the international eye is taking off his struggle. And you can see that happening already. You can see almost a sense of fatigue around the Ukraine situation in a way that there isn't currently with the Middle East because the Middle East feels less normalized. It's more of a shock and there is this fear that it's going to develop into something even worse, even bigger, and quite quickly. But I think that does put Zelensky in a very, very vulnerable place. And this is why I

think people do worry that we're getting into a situation that we haven't seen for 70 or 80 years, haven't really seen since the end of the Second World War because, of course, this is now the moment where nobody is going to be paying attention to the fact that we've had seven military coups in sub-Saharan Africa. There's going to be very little appetite to respond to the famines that are inevitably coming. Martin Griffiths, who's the UN Assistant Secretary General, who we're going to be interviewing on leading quite soon, is in the region now, moving between Egypt and Israel. And he's been very, very strong in his statements. Yeah, but he will be very worried that he's also the guy who's responsible for trying to mobilize billions to try to deal with the forgotten conflicts with what's happening in Congo, what's happening in Yemen. And as things spiral out of control, you get to a place, unfortunately, where if China were to invade Taiwan, people simply don't have the bandwidth all the time to think about how to respond. So anyway, a lot, a lot to keep discussing. Let's take a break and then we'll come back and talk about
happy news in Poland from the Progressives point of view. Thank you.
Welcome back to the Restless Polities with me, Alistair Campbell.
And me, Rory Stewart. Now, Poland, Rory, I'm going to give a shout out to my
book publicist, Isabel Ralfs, whose parents are Polish and who was so mistrustful of the PIS government that she traveled to Poland to vote because there was all these stories doing the rounds that the Polish government were going to make it difficult for the diaspora to vote.
So the results are, you know, the PIS remain, they are the right wing law and justice party.
They've been very right wing. They've done all sorts of stuff on abortion, on judicial reform.
They've got an incredible grip on the media, including the state broadcaster whose
coverage during the election, according to Isabel, has been so biased as to be absurd.
And although they were the biggest party, they did not get the sufficient votes,
then plus the Confederation, the very hard right party that we've talked about before.
So it looks like Donald Tusk, who was one of the key figures at the European
Union when, during the Brexit negotiations, it looks like he's going to be able to form a government. His party came second, and with two of the other smaller parties, it looks like he's going to be able to form a government and get rid of this right wing Polish government, which has caused an awful lot of celebration in most of the capitals of the European Union.
Unbelievable, because anybody wants to read about this in detail, there's some wonderful work by Ann Applebaum, who's a Polish-American journalist who's been brilliant on populism in Poland. But essentially, the PIS got in in 2015, so right at the beginning of the age of populism, just after Narendra Modi in 2014 had been elected in India and before Donald Trump got in the US, and it very much was part of the central populist playbook. It was all about the people against the elite, and then as soon as it was in power, it started trying to make sure it would never ever be removed from power by changing the constitution of the rules.
So it basically, as you said, turned the whole of state television, their equivalent to the BBC, into a government propaganda machine. It used state-owned companies to fund its political campaigns. It totally tried to politicize the civil service. It did horrifying stuff on the judiciary, so obviously normally in a country, the judge is supposed to be independent, but in the case of Poland, they managed to use commissions and other ways to make sure that they had judges who were favorable towards them. They then tried to change electoral laws, leak top secret military documents in order to try to win this election. So it felt, from the opposition's point of view, as though it was impossible, as though this was almost a Zimbabwe

situation, where the thing was so rigged against the opposition, they'd never be able to win. But they did it, and it's really encouraging. And of course, it makes many polls remember 1989, where the Communist Party tried to rig the elections and would defeat it.
One of the best things about this election was, and it shows that when people realize that elections really have something important on the line, they turn out. And for the first time ever, the youth vote was larger than the, in terms of a share of the population, was higher than that of older people. And it's the same in Poland as historically, as it is in most democracies, the older you are, the more likely you are to vote. And in fact, the younger voters were above 70% turnout and older voters below that. And one of the other things that they did, Rory, I think we talked about this briefly before, the government added these four referendums to hold on the same day as the election. And they weren't really necessary from a constitutional point of view, but it was a way of getting more money into the party machine. And it was also a way of sort of, they were almost like leading questions in the political debate. And so people went out to vote in the general election at 73%, armed with all these other ballot papers, which most of them then just ignored. So I think the turnout for that was, was around 40%, which meant that they even if they'd won, they would have had no, no standing because it's below the threshold for it to be valid. So I think this, I think there's a lesson in this for all politicians around the world is the elections, people have to feel that there's something really important at stake. And I think, you know, that maybe there's a lesson in there as well for, for labor at the moment in the UK context, that, you know, that people want to know the differences as well as the similarities. And it's on the differences ultimately that you will be able to motivate people to, to get out and vote. Now they will, by the way, they will try, I think, to hang around. There's now quite a long process to see what happens. We'll wait and see whether the PIS will just sort of go gracefully, or whether they'll try to delay things and form their own coalition.
But I think, you know, we've talked about so many votes and so many elections in fact we're about to talk about to where, you know, maybe didn't go the way that certainly I would have wanted in the antipodes. But this I think is a very, very significant moment. And it is a real, it is a, to be fair to Donald Tusk, that is quite a thing to have fought in that environment, and to have kept his head up and kept going. And it would seem now coming back as prime minister, that is quite a clue. And actually, he did it in a rather wonderful way too. I mean, one of the striking things, so just to remind people a little bit who Donald Tusk was, Donald Tusk is somebody who represents the, I guess, the liberal center right. He's the kind of hero for people like me and David Gork. And he ran the European People's Party, which is the right wing faction, the European Parliament. And he then became president in Europe. And in that context, he was very central people remember him during the Brexit negotiations, because he was there from 2015 onwards. And he ran a campaign, which was rather wonderful. He made a lot of use of some very incredibly talented women candidates at a time when the right wing populists were trying to weaponize the abortion issue, because of course Poland is a Catholic country with quite a lot of conservative views. He didn't get down to polarizing politics. He had a pretty impressive kind of unifying, moderate message. And as you said, he mobilized a lot of young people.
So it was quite an idealistic campaign in some ways. And it's rather sort of wonderful that it wasn't a sort of cynical, brutal, bare-knuckle fight. It was a campaign appealing to people's better nature. And really matters, because of course Poland is the giant population terms, economic terms of Eastern Europe, will be very central to the future of the European Union,

and was being locked out of a lot of European Union funding because of its attacks on the rule of law and judiciary. And of course, what Vladimir Putin was hoping, having all banned in Hungary, we just had the election in Slovakia, which went to another populist. And then if you get Poland in there as well, that locked in, as you say, into a third term and then possibly a fourth term where they, I think Zimbabwe might be overstating it, but certainly they become almost like sort of, you know, one party state. That has been halted for now. There's no doubt they'll come back. And it will be the other thing we should say about Donald Tusk. It will be difficult to govern because the PIS remain the most, the biggest party, they will be the biggest party in the parliament. So he's going to have to use all the political skills that he's developed. But I agree with you. It was an example of Michel Obama's famous, you know, when they go low, we go high, but happily this time it seems to have worked. Well, really, really exciting. And the other thing, of course, he'll be dealing with, and we talked about this a little bit on some of the interviews this week, that one of the things that populism is associated with is corruption, because when you start taking out the independent judiciary, silencing the media, you inevitably end up with corruption. And that's definitely been true in Poland. And one of the things that's driven voters out is the sense of just how corrupt this government is.
Yeah. Now, less happily, Australia.
Just remind people, and then you've been following it much more closely, but just remind people, the voice referendum was a referendum to give Indigenous Aboriginal Australians a voice in national events. And it was a relatively moderate proposal, which was that there would be a body set up. It's not entirely defined, but the idea was that these people who were the original inhabitants of Australia, who from the late 1700s onwards, when essentially the British Empire took over Australia, found themselves more and more marginalised, and have found themselves in much more difficult poverty statistics, health statistics, marginalised in what was originally their own country, should have more of a voice in the way things were run, in a way that actually Maori's do much more in New Zealand. Anyway, over to you on the result.
Well, I think one of the reasons why I think a lot of Australians are feeling very, very down about this now is because New Zealand, Canada, other countries do appear to have been able to handle much better their relations with Indigenous populations. This is the 45th referendum in Australia's history, and only eight have been successful. And when they have been successful, it has always been because there has been unity between the government and the opposition. Now, when Anthony Albanese was campaigning to be Prime Minister, he was very clear that this referendum was going to be part of his program. And at the time, it seemed that he had the opposition broadly on side. And I think in the reckoning and the sort of soul searching that's going now, obviously, the opposition has the benefit of being able to say Albanese called this referendum and he lost, and he's, you know, and it was divisive, it tore the country apart, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. On the other hand, I think the opposition leader, Peter Dutton, is playing quite a dangerous game, not just for the country, but I think for his own political strategy as well. There's an element of Trump and Brexit to what he's been doing. And part of the soul searching has also been about the way that the media debate developed in this referendum. So to give you one thing, that Dutton at one point, for example, he put out this statement that the referendum was being rigged because they were going to accept ticks as well as crosses inside the ballot box, okay? Now, it sounds sort of relative, well, so what? The so what around that that I think is important is that it wasn't true. And yet it became, it just got fed into

this whole thing about the confusion about what was going on. And the media didn't really challenge him over it. They sort of covered it as a big row. And a little bit like we had in Brexit where, you know, lies were told, and the lies then become part of the narrative. And the media is no longer part of that self writing process within politics. And this, I'm afraid, has been one of the consequences of Trump, Johnson, Berlusconi, et cetera.
Presumably, you are now really reeling from from referendum. I mean, you were obviously heartbroken by Brexit. You were thrown off balance very much by the referendum in Columbia, which was supposed to confirm the peace deal, which was then lost. Now the voice referendum in Australia. I mean, you come into the view that you are not a great fan of referendum.
Well, I never was. But I think you have to have them for major, major, major constitutional change. But I think they're becoming impossible because what happened with this one? If you look at the polling graph on the voice, it started when the debate started, there was an overwhelming majority in favour. And it's just gone steadily down and down and down and down as it's been taken over by other issues. And then by social media and then by lies and then by social media, which ventilate the lies and then what do you do about it? I mean, if you were called in for a referendum in the future, I know some other country asked for advice, how would they do it better? How do you win these things? How would you have won the voice referendum?
They could have done it differently. And in fact, there was a very, very strong possibility at one point that they might have done it just as a legislative change. We are campaigning on this, and if we get elected, we are going to legislate to have a voice for the Indigenous people in our parliament. The reason why Anthony Albanese didn't want to do that was because of his worry that a future government would get rid of it, which they could. So that's why he felt he had to have a referendum. But the other thing, I don't know whether they could do this. This would also require a referendum, I guess. But the rules of referenda in Australia, you have to have this double majority, you have to have a majority of the votes, and you have to have a majority of the six states, which means you have to win four or two. Well, on this one, they lost six nil. So the reason they've got those rules, of course, is to stop things like the Brexit referendum of a 52-48 victory, changing something dramatically. So it's setting a higher bar for what you need for a referendum. It's also very relevant to us in Britain because you and I think I'm certainly passionately in favour of changing to something more like a New Zealand electoral system.
But when the Lib Dems tried under the coalition, Nick Clegg tried to do it when he was deputy prime minister. Of course, it went to a referendum and it lost. The only way that we'll really be able to get that change through is to get parties campaigning in a manifesto to say, if we're a lax, it will change the electoral system, and then taking it to a legislation.
I agree. I don't think you could do it with a referendum. I really don't. I think it would be, I think it would... Look, what happened with AV is that once it got into a referendum, when you had the conservatives in the coalition who didn't really support it, so they weren't putting much energy into it, it was a big thing for the Lib Dems.
But so the Labour Party didn't particularly want to help the Lib Dems out too much.
And the media sense that it wasn't cutting through with the public and it just didn't become a big thing. I always say, when people say to me, why can't we change the electoral system? I say, well, did you bother to vote in the AV referendum? And most people say, no. But I think the other thing, this is just the nature of what our politics is. Maybe our politics has always been like this, but I think it's been exacerbated. What you've seen with the way the Australian

opposition has approached this, this guy Peter Dutton, it has been... He's been working out how this is going to help him build a bigger base as he goes into a general election.
There is a massive lesson in that. Of those eight referendums that have been successful, they've always required the government and the opposition to be in the same place.
Getting the government and the opposition in the same place on any major issue at the moment in pretty much any democracy in the world is very, very hard.
Well, to then go on to, I guess, a story that's disappointing for you, but I think actually is quite a good sign for New Zealand democracy, which is the New Zealand election. And one of the good things about the New Zealand electoral system, which I'm a great fan of, as a friend of yours pointed out in an email that you shared, is it's led to a much more even balance between the parties. Five all. That's right, 10 elections, five all. So this time, the National Party, which is equivalent to Conservative Party, has won. Been a big swing. Many people will have listened on leading to our interview with Chris Hipkins, who was the New Zealand Prime Minister going into this election. Do you remember, Rory, I pointed out to him that there were five prime ministers, I named them, who had taken office in the middle of the term, at every single one of them lost at the next election. And he said, well, I intend to reverse that trend and I'm afraid he hasn't. I mean, I thought he was very, very likable guy, but boy, did he get a trouncing. So the National Party increased from 25% of the vote to 45% of the vote, 34 seats to 50 seats. And his party, Chris Hipkins' party, had a collapse from 50% of the vote to 31% of the vote from 62 seats to 34 seats. So it now looks like Chris Luckston, who we have a promise. I mean, I hope to be able to deliver him as the next New Zealand Prime Minister to be interviewed on leading... Not quite as impressive as the Conservative that I've delivered this week, Rory. Tell our listeners who I've managed to persuade to come on the podcast. Well, we haven't even discussed this. I can't believe who asked me to do it without asking me. Do you not want to? I'm not sure about that. We need to discuss that. Okay. Anyway, we'll talk about that. Talk about that on another occasion. Anyway, come back. So Chris Luckston, who's the new Prime Minister in New Zealand, who hopefully we'll get on leading soon. Very interesting guy because like many other politicians we've been talking about recently, he's very, very recent to politics. He's the absolute opposite of Chris Hipkins. Chris Hipkins been in politics since he was a student there all the way through, much more like sort of David Cameron or George Osborne or Ed Miliband, kind of professional politician. Chris Luckston worked at Unilever with the CEO of Unilever Canada and then the CEO of Air New Zealand. Then he only entered politics in 2019 and he's already managed to become Prime Minister and New Zealand politics
is fascinating. There are two parties that will matter. One of them is the New Zealand first party run by a man called Winston Peasers, who is a very, very, I think the word is colorful, veteran New Zealand politician who's been in New Zealand politics since the 1970s, Father Maori, who was initially very associated with the Maori cause and swept Maori constituencies
in his early political career, but has since become, as New Zealand first implies, associated with anti-immigration movements, challenging the Maori language, standing up for English as the language
attacking wokeness despite the fact he's a Maori heritage. Then on the other side, Act, which is the Association for Consumers and Taxpayers, which is a sort of Liz Trust-like party, which is all

about tax cuts, cuts to welfare, but is also confusing because it's New Zealand because it was largely inspired by somebody from the Labour Party, Roger Douglas, who was a Labour MP, brought in a lot of the economic reforms in the early 90s, over back to you.
You say that it's sort of like a Liz Trust party. I mean, they're sort of arch-libertarians really, and it won't be that easy to manage them. There are two views about them. One is that they're, you know, they sort of reflect the modern world and post-globalization approach to the economy and so forth. The other is that a bit like, I think most people in Britain now see Liz Trust, they're kind of a bit unhinged and dangerous. But also that what the PR system has done, and you're a massive fan of the New Zealand PR system, but what Jacinda Ardern did, the last election, was remarkable by New Zealand standards. She, you know, the Labour Party got an overall majority. That is why the scale of this defeat is so big because they've gone from that, as you say, to virtually halving the number of seats in the Parliament. Yet even with that, the opposition have not been able to get to a majority without the coalition deals that Luxembourg is now going to have to have to do. The mutual friend of myself and Chris Hipkins, who set up our interview with him, Darren Hughes, who's Kiwi, who's based in Britain, and he made quite an interesting observation about, we talked about Poland, and he wondered whether actually what's happening here is that incumbents are in real trouble everywhere, in part because of what they had made the countries do during lockdown. Jacinda Ardern got loads of praise globally for handling of COVID, including, you know, here and including from us. But clearly in New Zealand, it didn't go down as well as we perhaps thought. And the other issue he pointed to is that we talked about the voice in Australia, but in relation to the Maori population in New Zealand, there is a view on the right that Labour do too much for the Maori's, and there is a view on amongst the Maori's that they don't do enough for them. And they sort of got hit on that as well. Darren also, understandably, coming from progressive side, underplayed the significance of law and order and crime in this election. But it was very significant, or at least in terms of the right wing parties in the way that they campaigned. Because the Labour Party, the previous governing party, Chris Hipkins' party, had committed to reduce the prison population by 30%, which is something that you and I broadly favour. And in fact, I think in question time, tomorrow we'll go on and discuss a little bit, moves to reduce the prison population in Britain. But this has coincided with a very dramatic increase in certain types of crime. There's been 533% increase in RAM rating, for example, 42% increase in violent crime, and well over 70% in New Zealanders, including over 70% of Labour voters, want harsher sentences for young people, want more offenders than jail. And look, it's uncomfortable for progressives because elections where people talk about being tough on law and order or being tough on immigration are extremely uncomfortable. But there's no doubt at all that these are, I think, issues that do matter to a lot of voters around the world. Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime, Rory. That's the approach. Well, there we are, Chris Hipkins, no longer Prime Minister. A debate now, I guess, as to whether he stays on or whether he does a David Cameron and just moves off into the sunset. I suspect he'll stay on. It's always a difficult call after you lose the election, but it was a very, very big defeat. I think it's one of those strange things that he's actually very, he's a very popular politician in New Zealand, but that doesn't always equate to people wanting to vote for you and your party. No, and I think the scale of this defeat is pretty dramatic. I mean, to have the nationals go from 25 to 45, I mean, it's the sort of scale of defeat that Rishi Sunak currently looks like he's on course to face. And it'd be difficult to

imagine the British context Rishi Sunak staying on after that kind of defeat. So I wonder whether Chris Hipkins will survive. Well, on the happy note of Rishi Sunak suffering as big a defeat as the New Zealand Labour Party just did. Let's say goodbye for now. Thank you very much. Speak soon.