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Snap election announcement offers almost certain end to Conservative government, and a potentially pyrrhic victory for the Labour Party

- On 22nd May Prime Minister Rishi Sunak made a [surprise announcement](#) of a snap parliamentary election, due to take place on 4th July.

The move followed a steady stream of losses by the ruling Conservative Party, including in a series of MP by-elections, MP [defections](#) and recent [local council elections](#).

- It is widely expected that the opposition Labour Party will win the election by a considerable margin, and that there will be a large degree of continuity between the programme of the current government and a Labour one.

The Labour Party since 2020 has sought to position itself as an effective heir to the Conservatives and targeted its main backers - including in industry, foreign affairs as well as its voting base - through an emphasis on law and order, fiscal responsibility, social conservatism and militarism.

Its leadership has vocally [supported Israel's](#) ongoing genocide and been [more reticent than the government](#) itself in criticising Israel, while also maintaining complete deference to the US on foreign policy matters more broadly.

- Opposition to the Labour Party among its traditional voting base, including Muslims and its more left wing-inclined voters, has been growing gradually since 2020 and exploded since its support for Israel became apparent.

This has led to the success of [independent candidates](#) in previous Labour strongholds in recent months, particularly those with large Muslim constituencies.

- Independent candidates are also challenging the Labour Party in Muslim-heavy constituencies during the upcoming election, as well as those where Labour majorities are tight.

While there is unlikely to be many breakthroughs at this particular election - particularly as Labour are likely to compensate for lost votes among its base with traditionally Conservative voters - Labour's likely victory may well be a pyrrhic one, with long-coming disaffection from Labour votes leading to a haemorrhaging of core support bases that will damage it in the near future.

- Following the election announcement Parliament was dissolved, putting in question the fate of a number of pieces of legislation as well as policy announcements, including those featured below. Some may return or be picked up by the incoming government, while others may well fall from the agenda for the time being.

Long-awaited review of 'extremism' in protest movements offers charter for authoritarianism

- John Woodcock, also known as Lord Walney, the government's Independent adviser on political violence and disruption and former Labour MP, released his long awaited [report on 'extremism' in protest movements](#).
- Woodcock was appointed to the role by Boris Johnson in November 2020, in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter mobilisations, and the review was commissioned in 2021.

Its initial brief was to look at [supposed infiltration of protest movements](#) such as BLM and Extinction Rebellion by 'far left extremists', as well as movements of the far-right. It also turned his attention to pro-Palestine demonstrations in the months since October.

It was clear from inception that the review would take an overtly hostile and punitive approach towards direct action-oriented protest movements and develop new ways of policing them, in line with the major crackdown of protest rights since 2021.

- Akin to the framing of 'extremism' in the counter-terror lexicon, Woodcock poses these movements in terms of threats to democracy, stating that 'Extreme political activists are targeting core elements of Britain's democracy'.

- Taking particular aim at what it terms 'Far Left subcultures', the report identifies 5 movements - environmental campaigns, anti-racism, anti-government protest; anti-Israel activism, and anti-fascism - and argues that leftwing 'extremists' have not been dealt with sufficiently by authorities
- The review makes a number of recommendations that would sharply impinge on the right to protest, open protest organisers up for intolerable liabilities, and expand policing and intelligence-gathering on movements, including:
 - Expanding the scope for while a protest can be banned, including when police believe that it would 'will likely result in intimidation from threatening or abusive conduct, or where there is a demonstrable cumulative impact on serious disruption', penalising repeat demonstrations as has been the case for pro-Palestine demonstrations;
 - Consider charging protest organisers for policing costs 'when groups are holding a significant number of large demonstrations which cause serious disruption or significant levels of law-breaking';
 - Creating a mechanism to allow individuals and business who suffer person or economic harm from 'illegal disruptive protest to claim damages from protest organisers', another deterrent for protest organisers, as well as 'introducing a civil measure making it easier for businesses to pursue extreme protest organisers for damages';
 - Allowing police to impose a blanket ban on face coverings on demonstrations as a as a pre-condition of allowing it to go ahead;
 - Calling on the police and Crown Prosecution Service to interpret 'any celebration of terrorist acts, or praise for terror groups and individuals, is viewed as a form of indirect encouragement [to terrorism]', and thereby prosecuting it accordingly;
 - Reviewing existing undercover surveillance arrangements with 'a view to extending police use of covert surveillance to prevent serious disruption during protests';
- Encouraging a blacklist by local and national government of groups 'who do not commit to legal means to secure change or who engage in or facilitate intimidation or harassment', thereby including many direct action and extra-parliamentary groups;
- A form of 'soft proscription' sanctions on groups which use potentially unlawful direct action tactics, which would include 'restricting the group's right to assembly and its ability to fundraise';
- A number of measures pertaining to intelligence gathering online.
- The initial government [response to the review was positive](#), and stated that they would be looking at 'the thresholds for imposing conditions on protests, and how such thresholds could be applied...[including to] prevent protests from going ahead where there is the threat of intimidating or abusive conduct based on previous behaviour, or on account of cumulative serious disruption', as well as imposing charges and liabilities on protest organisers.
- It is not yet clear how the incoming government will respond to the review after the outcome of the election, though many of its themes will certainly find favour with the stridently authoritarian, law and order posture taken by the Labour Party.

Government move to criminalise BDS on campus halted by election - for now

- On the same day that Walney's review was published, arch-Zionist and government minister Michael Gove made [as speech in Parliament on Israel and 'antisemitism'](#).

Much of the speech comprised an ode to Israel and an attack on its opponents - with Gove stating that "Israel is transparently successful because of its democratic values, not a history of exploitation" and claiming that the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign was "explicitly antisemitic".

The speech took aim in particular at university campus encampments by students, smeared student action against IDF soldiers on campuses, and invoked standard Zionist tropes about a 'left-Islamist alliance' poisoning the well of public discourse.

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- Amidst his feverish praise for Israel, Gove announced that the government was introducing legislation to prevent universities from endorsing the BDS campaign, while also pressuring public institutions to sign up to a 'charter on antisemitism' and endorse the pro-Zionist IHRA definition of antisemitism.
 - The snap election was announced the next day, and Gove announced that he [was not re-standing for election](#) as an MP. The proposed legislation to criminalise BDS may have left with him for now.

However as it was apparently “endorsed by politicians from all parties as well as the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council”, it may return under a Labour Party that has explicitly embraced its pro-Israel credentials and deferred to Zionist organisations.