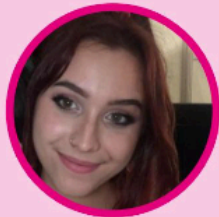


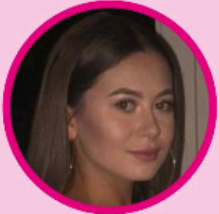
POLITICS



Katherine Seymour



Francesca Ionescu



Jade Heath



George Gourlay

ELSEWHERE
IN POLITICS

-UK Government release bill on illegal immigration

The bill is controversial as there are questions as to whether it is compatible with the ECHR.

-Some train strikes halted as workers vote on new pay offer

The UK's biggest rail union RMT has suspended strikes at Network Rail and will hold a vote on a new pay offer.

Israelis protest far-right government over threats to judiciary

George Gourlay reports on recent protests in Israel

George Gourlay
Politics Editor

Israel's new government, a 'Religious Zionist' coalition between the returning Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and an assortment of right-wing extremist parties has sparked widespread protest over its proposals to overhaul the state's judiciary. The incoming legislation is viewed by many as an attack on democracy which has prompted worry that the Jewish state is teetering on authoritarian rule by religious extremists.

The protests, which have been going strong for over two months, have witnessed over 200,000 people taking to the ancient streets of Jerusalem and other cities across the state. Demonstrators have blocked roads and massed outside the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and several industries have held strikes.

Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, has denounced the outcry against his new government, stating: "The people made their electoral choices and the representatives of the people will exercise their right to vote here in the Knesset. That's called democracy." Those representatives have also reinforced their position on the

" The legislation is viewed by many as an attack on democracy which has prompted worry that the Jewish state is teetering on authoritarianism **"**



Previous protests are depicted here where similar scenes have been seen in recent days Source: Nir Hirshman (via Wikimedia Commons)

intended overhaul of the judiciary, with the Justice Minister stating that the public dissent "will not stop the legislation". In Tel Aviv, protestors staging a 'day of disruption' were attacked by police with tear gas and stun grenades.

Israel's 'new' government, elected in December, is headed by a returning Netanyahu, who had previously served as Prime Minister from 2009 to 2021 and, before that, from 1996 to 1999. However, as the state has shifted rightwards through decades of increasing violence with its displaced Palestinian populations, the returning incumbent has allied himself with the extremist Religious Zionists and other far-right parties to solidify his anti-Arab, Zionist-Nationalist rhetoric. Alongside UN condemnation, there is a mounting international

consensus that the sacred homeland of many of the world's faiths has lost a moral standing.

Some of the voices from the new coalition include Bezael Smotrich, head of the Religious Zionist party and now Finance Minister, who has called for the incorporation of traditional Jewish law into Israel's legislation. Also in government is Itamar Ben-Gvir, the populist leader of the Otzma Yehudit ('Jewish Strength') party which pledges a hardline approach to ridding the state of all "enemies of Israel", previously calling for the deportation of all Arabs from Israel.

Though the demonstrators' fervent waving of flags donning the blue Star of David may present a united opposition - even persuading figures from industries not publicly in-

" There have also been reports of violence between Israelis and Palestinians during the protests **"**

volved in politics to join them on the streets; from those in tech to bankers, and representatives from the army and intelligence - the protests have also brought to light the state's tarnished relationship with democracy as it pertains to its Palestinian population.

Notably absent from the white and blue ripple of flags are the Palestinian colours, banned by the organisers as a result of right-wing speakers refusing to share the stage with Israeli-Palestinians. There have also been reports of violence between Israelis and Palestinians during the protests, despite the two sides sharing some common ground on the issue of Israel's governance.

The organisers of the demonstrations have reinforced the need for a focus on the single issue at hand, side-lining the wider debate on the Israeli government's latest atrocities against Palestinians. Israel's recent raid of Nabulus in the West Bank resulted in 11 dead; it was followed by bombing of the densely populated Gaza Strip. The recent violence prompted condemnation by the UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, Tor Wennesland, who said he was "deeply disturbed by the continuing cycle of violence and appalled by the loss of civilian lives."

Child benefits should be cut to solve truancy, says Gove

Jade Heath
Politics Editor



Michael Gove has been known for making controversial suggestions to address problems in the country. Source: UK Government (via Flickr)

In Gove's speech, he emphasised 'parental responsibility', something he argues the proposed penalties would restore. He stated: "Particularly after Covid, we need to get back to an absolute rigorous focus on school attendance, on supporting children to be in school." During the COVID-19 pandemic, issues regarding attendance (and therefore the distribution of non-attendance fines) were diminished due to lockdowns and ever-changing self-isolation rules. However, the BBC obtained figures for

the academic year of 2021-22 which revealed that almost 1.8 million children regularly missed school, resulting in parents being fined £3.7m.

At the Onward event, the Levelling Up Secretary linked persistent absenteeism to involvement in antisocial behaviour. A month prior he had claimed that antisocial behaviour should be considered a gateway path to more serious crimes, and that reducing truancy is central to preventing this. The Times has reported that Gove is preparing an action plan for

" The idea was originally introduced by Tony Blair in 2002, but the current fining system was introduced instead **"**

Rishi Sunak to reduce antisocial behaviour, which is believed to include the benefit cuts proposal.

Gove's suggestion has received criticism, including from Liberal Democrat education spokesperson, Munira Wilson. Wilson argued: "if Michael Gove thinks that the solution to encourage children back to school is to impoverish them, then he is living in a different century." The NAHT union (which represents school leaders) also condemned the proposal, stating that it was "likely to be counter-productive". General Secretary Paul Whiteman said: "Persistent absence can only be successfully tackled by offering help, not punishment."

" At the Onward event, the Levelling Up Secretary linked persistent absenteeism to involvement in antisocial behaviour **"**