

A new political landscape?

CIARÁN KELLY



The Christian Institute's Director, Ciarán Kelly, highlights a few things to look out for from the new Labour Government.

The United Kingdom has a new Government. Sir Keir Starmer swept into Downing Street on 5 July on the back of a remarkable 172-seat majority.

As a quick reminder, Labour won 411 of the 650 House of Commons seats. It received 34 per cent of votes cast on a turnout of just under 60 per cent; that's backing from one in five registered voters. (BBC News online, 5 July 2024, see [bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c886pl6ldy9o](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c886pl6ldy9o) as at 19 July 2024).

At the time of writing, Sir Keir has been Prime Minister for just two weeks. Can we really make any sensible predictions about what he may do with such power? Well, yes. There are some clues, in fact more than clues, from the Labour Party manifesto, (did you read the manifestos before voting?), from senior Party figures, from Starmer himself and of course from the King's Speech delivered on 17 July.

After 14 years of Conservative government, the political landscape is set to change in all sorts of ways that we don't have time to go into here. But for Christians longing to see biblical standards upheld in society, there are areas where it's worth paying particular attention.

'CONVERSION THERAPY' BAN

Labour's manifesto promise to introduce 'a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices' made it into the King's Speech. While most people associate the words 'conversion therapy' with abhorrent practices that have long been illegal, a 'no loopholes' ban risks going much, much further. In short, it's a direct threat to gospel freedom. The sort of law being proposed is aimed at preaching, prayer, pastoral care and casual conversation that seeks to help people live in accordance with biblical sexual ethics. Some even want to ban calls to repent. This would extend the criminal law into the ordinary work of churches and to parents raising their children.

Importantly, this will be a draft Bill, which means a public consultation and additional scrutiny. Taking that extra time should make clear what the previous Government realised and what all of our legal advice we have received makes very clear – legislating in this highly controversial area threatens the human rights of responsible parents and faithful pastors. (Human Rights Implications of Proposals to Ban 'Conversion Therapy', Jason Coppel KC, April 2021, available at www.the.ci/jasoncoppel as at 19 July 2024)

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GENDER

The manifesto also pledged to 'modernise, simplify, and reform' gender recognition law. Activists will take this as a green light for legal sex change by self-declaration.

More encouragingly, new Health Secretary Wes Streeting wants to make permanent the temporary ban on dispensing puberty blockers to children put in by his predecessor. This reflects serious concerns raised by the landmark Cass Review about the safety of giving these drugs to under-18s. (The Cass Review: Independent review of gender identity services for children and young people, April 2024)

SEX EDUCATION

Before the election, the previous Government published draft guidance on Relationships and Sex Education for schools in England. Helpfully, it stated that gender ideology should not be taught, that sex education must be age-appropriate, and that teachers should not use materials claiming that 'gender is a spectrum'.

It will now be up to Labour to decide whether to implement the guidance. But they are already under huge pressure to ditch it – from the Methodist Church of Great Britain as well as from pro-LGBT groups like Stonewall. (Joint statement on new draft RSHE guidance, RSHE.uk, see [rshe.uk](https://www.rshe.uk) as at 19 July 2024)

SANCTITY OF LIFE

The Government won't bring in its own Bills to introduce assisted suicide or further liberalise abortion, but it does get to decide how much parliamentary time gets given to backbench Bills seeking to do those things. Sir Keir has promised to make time available for both and is crystal clear that he backs assisted suicide. For Christians and others who uphold the value of all human life, this is very worrying.

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GAMBLING

I've just written to new Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy about reining in the Wild West that is gambling in this country. Disappointingly, the King's Speech was silent on it, but the Labour manifesto did commit the Party to 'reducing gambling related harm'.

Gambling has become an all-pervasive part of life in modern Britain but leaves a trail of personal and social chaos in its wake. The gambling industry profits by making false promises of easy money to those who are desperate to escape poverty, and disproportionately exploits those suffering from poor mental health. It's time for urgent, meaningful action. I hope the new Government is up for the challenge.

PRAY FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY

After reading this you may feel overwhelmed. First, remember that our God is good, faithful and sovereign over all things. Then join with me in praying for the Government, Parliamentarians, the judiciary, and all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Finally, do what you can to make your Christian voice count. The Christian Institute (christian.org.uk) is here to help you.

CIARÁN KELLY

Ciarán Kelly joined The Christian Institute in 2014 after a successful career in the financial services sector. He became Director in August 2024 following the sudden death of Colin Hart in March 2024. Ciarán is the author of the Bible study materials for the Living Christianity series (livingchristianity.org.uk).

