

Election Briefing 2017

AN ANALYSIS OF PARTY POLICIES ON
ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO CHRISTIANS



christian.org.uk/election

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Voting records of all MPs

See christian.org.uk/election – this covers a specific range of moral issues and there may well be other issues you want to think about. Our voting records database only applies to MPs from the Parliament just dissolved. There are some MPs who are standing down.¹ Obviously you will want to ask the views of the other candidates in your constituency.



Candidate QuestionCards

Download at christian.org.uk/election – the questions help Christians find out the views of the candidates. You can get hard copies from our office on request – 0191 281 5664.



This Election Briefing

Further copies can be downloaded at christian.org.uk/election or ordered by calling our office – 0191 281 5664.



Introduction

ELECTION 2017

As Christian citizens, we should think carefully about how we vote in the General Election on 8 June 2017.

The Christian Institute is a registered charity and we cannot tell you how to vote. What we can do in this briefing is address:

- why should you vote?
- biblical priorities
- Brexit
- issues on the horizon
- two key factors in voting
- speaking to candidates
- party policies
- key background information on legislation and public policy.

Our analysis of party policies covers many issues where important Christian principles are at stake. They tend to be issues where biblical principles, and in particular the Ten Commandments, directly apply. In modern Britain they can be the hottest of political hot potatoes, yet in our view the Bible is perfectly clear about them.

We cannot be exhaustive. There will also be other areas of concern where much material is available (on subjects like the Developing World) or where there is honest disagreement amongst Christians holding to the Bible as their authority.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOTE?

The state is a means of God's 'common grace'. The Bible is very clear that the governing authorities act on God's behalf to restrain evil (see Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). This is for

the good of all people in this world – not just Christians.

As a general rule Christians follow Jesus' teaching recorded in Matthew 22:21: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (KJV).² Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and also of an earthly nation (usually where we are born). The Christian's duty is to obey the governing authorities. The exception is where they forbid what God requires, or require what God forbids (Acts 5:29).

It is our earnest prayer that Christians will have freedom to share the Gospel and live out the Christian life (1 Timothy 2:1-4). In praying "deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13) we are praying against the persecution of the Church as well as against personal temptation.

Common grace and the privilege of voting

God has ordained the governing authorities in every country – as Romans 13 makes clear – whether rulers are Christian or not. Thanks to God's common grace, there are many non-Christians who take the right view on a range of issues. Nobody's thinking is secular at every point. Even politicians who disagree with Christians about redefining marriage can still be strongly against assisted suicide or liberalising cannabis laws. Some atheists will strongly defend the free speech of Christians. The Christian Institute can testify that there are men and women of integrity in parties across the political spectrum.

Like the prophet Daniel, God's people must encourage leadership which promotes truth and righteousness, such as when he said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice:

Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed” (Daniel 4:27).

Unlike Daniel, Christians in the UK today get to play a part in electing their leaders. In our democracy we all have the legal right to vote. Billions of people around the world do not enjoy the same freedoms as we have in the UK. We elect Members of Parliament and so ultimately the Government. We help choose Caesar. So voting is a privilege and a serious responsibility.³

The General Election provides an opportunity for Christians to speak out and play their part in voting. Governments can make it easier or harder to be a Christian or to share the Gospel. Believers have to make a judgment about how their vote can be used to best effect.

BIBLICAL PRIORITIES

When it comes to a matter of public policy, Christians have to assess biblical priorities. We can distinguish those political issues on which the Bible is absolutely clear from those where the Bible is not clear.

The Bible is not clear on how to improve access to GPs’ surgeries or the most appropriate level of university tuition fees. To decide on these issues involves a detailed assessment of the facts and the exercise of judgment based on experience. Many situations we encounter in ordinary life are at this level and so are many political issues.

But at the other end of the spectrum the Bible is “clear, direct, and decisive”⁴ about a whole host of political issues. For example, a vote for abortion or euthanasia is a vote to break the sixth Commandment on the law of murder (Exodus 20:13). These are the kinds of issues that we focus on in this briefing – straightforward matters of right or wrong.

Archbishop William Temple famously used the analogy of an engineer who wants

to build a bridge.⁵ Christians can preach ‘make a safe bridge’ – that’s a clear moral principle – but it’s up to engineers to come up with the particular design.

There is a very large proportion of political issues where making a Christian judgment depends on the wise assessment of several biblical principles. This can result in Christians arriving at different conclusions. For example, we know for certain that the state has a right to levy taxes (Romans 13:7). But Christians who hold to biblical truth can legitimately disagree on the level of individual taxes.

BREXIT

A proper understanding of Britain’s membership of the EU has always involved questions of nationhood and sovereignty, economics and trade, democracy and accountability, defence and international relations, as well as the implications for Christian freedom.

As a registered charity, the Institute did not tell Christians how to vote in last year’s EU referendum. But we did encourage Christians across the UK to prayerfully consider their view and to cast their vote.

The outcome of the referendum saw a majority vote to leave the EU and the ‘Article 50’ process began in March this year. Christians must remember that, although this General Election has been dubbed ‘the Brexit election’, MPs in the new Parliament will pass laws affecting every area of life. As the well-known Eurosceptic journalist Simon Heffer said in April 2017, “there is much more to governing the United Kingdom than leaving the European Union, important though that be”.⁶

ISSUES ON THE HORIZON

The new Parliament elected on 8 June 2017 could vote on laws affecting religious liberty, freedom of speech, transsexual rights, abortion, designer babies, assisted suicide, teaching on marriage and relationships in schools, divorce liberalisation, drugs legalisation and prostitution.

These are all issues of concern to Christians. Some are 'conscience votes', where MPs are free to vote without a party whip, which underlines the importance of finding out where individual election candidates stand.

Biblical Christians believe that the Gospel is paramount. Salvation is only found in Christ, not in any political programme. Yet followers of Christ are to care about their world, being salt and light in our society. And in order for that to happen, and for evangelism, there has to be freedom for the Gospel. Religious liberty is a crucial issue.

Christians in Britain have enjoyed remarkable freedom for centuries now. It was hard won down the years, with setbacks and advances along the way. Many Christians elsewhere in the world do not have such freedom and we must pray for them. Our political leaders must do more to combat the persecution of Christians abroad.

Yet here in the UK religious liberty is being increasingly challenged. There have been cases where churches have come into conflict with the police because of a false accusation being made. Street preachers have been arrested. Christians have lost their jobs for answering questions about their faith or for taking an ethical stand. Christians in business have come into conflict with equality laws and faced fines for holding to the belief that marriage is between a man and a woman.

Many Christians are also gravely concerned about legislative proposals which

intrude into ordinary family life, evangelism and the running of the local church. Christians believe that governing authorities are established by God, but at the same time the Government is not responsible for everything. Indeed if there is to be freedom, it must not be.

It is important to say that society is more than the state. Society is made up of families and many institutions and organisations between the state and the citizen. In the West, unlike Communist countries, we do not equate society with the State. Government by itself cannot solve all our problems or even come remotely close.

Evangelicals are very concerned about the Conservatives' extremism policy, including the plans to send Ofsted into churches in England to inspect youth work, and the proposed Equality Oath. They have already seen the impact of the 'British values' programme for schools. This is aimed at countering "extremism" but instead there have been hostile Ofsted inspections of Christian and Jewish schools, with children and teachers being asked very intrusive questions.

The UK Supreme Court had to step in to protect family life from the Scottish Parliament's Named Person scheme, which appoints a state guardian for every child in Scotland regardless of whether they need one. A ban on parental smacking, proposed by the First Minister of Wales, would criminalise loving parents.

Many Christians were very concerned by Labour's attempt in 2010 to drastically restrict the freedom for churches to employ Christian staff outside of the position of a pastor. We were very glad that failed.

The marginalisation of Christians must be a vital issue for Christians at the General Election, and not only because we should have a special care for Christians who are suffering, including for their faith (Matthew

25:31-46; Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 13:3). Christ clearly taught that his followers are the salt which preserves society and the light which guides it (Matthew 5:13-16). If the salt remains in the salt cellar and the light is increasingly hidden under a secular bushel, then it will become very much harder for Christians to do those good works which transform society.

TWO KEY FACTORS IN VOTING: CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

In the 'first past the post' system for Westminster elections you vote for a particular candidate. So there are two key factors which we all must consider when deciding who to vote for. We must consider *the candidates* and we must consider *the parties* they represent.

It is very important to know what is going on in your constituency and to find out who your candidates are. The key to identifying your candidates is to be sure which parliamentary area (constituency) you live in. This website is helpful: whocanivotefor.co.uk

A lot may hinge for you on the individual views of your candidates. In some constituencies there will be the option to vote for a candidate who takes a firm stand on moral issues, though this is not likely to be the norm.

In casting a vote Christians are not necessarily endorsing every item of policy of the party they vote for. You may decide to back a particular political party which most approximates to where you stand. Or you may consider it is better to vote for an exceptional candidate who shares your Christian views across a range of moral issues, even if they are standing for a party which you would not naturally support. You may decide that the most important consideration is to vote for the candidate who is standing for a party which in your view

represents the 'least-worst' option. You may think that it is better to vote for one of the Christian political parties which may happen to stand in your area.

Sadly in some constituencies Christian believers may be in what feels like an impossible position. These are decisions which ultimately only you can make. Christians should prayerfully exercise their Christian conscience in these matters. Just because your parents or your work colleagues vote in a certain way does not mean that you need to do the same. It is your choice.

But you can't make an informed decision without knowing what the parties and the candidates stand for. Christians should make it their business to find out the policies of each candidate and party. You should seek to find out their positions on key moral issues.

It is unlikely that you will find a party or a candidate you believe has all the right views. For many Christians there is a genuine dilemma over choosing a party or a particular candidate. Whatever your decision it is relevant to consider how the parties fared in the last election in your constituency.⁷

SPEAKING TO CANDIDATES

Candidates or their canvassers may come to your door, call by telephone or stop you in the street to ask how you intend to vote. This presents an ideal opportunity to find out where the candidate stands on key moral issues. His or her opinions on these issues can be quite different from the position of their party.

More than at any other time the candidates will be open to listening to your views. Should they be elected, they will be representing you in Parliament. In 'safe seats', where the party of your current MP is expected to win, raising issues with candidates could have an even greater influence than your vote.

The Christian Institute has produced a handy-sized candidate *QuestionCard* (we can post you copies – just contact our office). Think through two or three issues and have the *QuestionCard* ready in case canvassers call or stop you whilst out shopping. Limit yourself to two or three issues with which you are most concerned. Be prepared to give a reason for your view. This *Election Briefing* will help you get to grips with the issues you are interested in.

If you speak to the candidate, ask if he or she is willing to raise your concerns in Parliament if elected. If they say they will, you can hold them to this promise should they be elected.

If you speak to someone canvassing on behalf of the candidate, ask for your concerns to be passed on. The very act of asking questions is a Christian witness.

CONTACTING YOUR CANDIDATES

You can contact your candidates by letter, email or social media in order to raise your concerns. This way you can be sure that all the candidates have been made aware of the issues important to you. Many candidates are active on social media.

For contact information about candidates, use this website: whocanivotefor.co.uk

Election literature put through your letterbox will also give the local addresses for your candidates. If your MP is standing again you may want to see how he or she has voted in the past, since this is a matter of public record (see christian.org.uk/election). If you contact a candidate, keep things short, but do raise specific points. Make sure you tell them that you are a constituent. You could swap notes with other Christian friends who have had contact with a candidate.

There are many ways of being a Christian citizen, but a General Election provides an excellent opportunity for Christians to be

salt and light in our society. We must pray for wisdom and speak out for the truth.

THE POLICIES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Since its inception The Christian Institute has sought to promote the Christian faith in the public square in six main areas – marriage and the family, medical ethics, education, religious liberty in the UK, matters of public morality, and constitutional issues.

Within these broad areas, this *Election Briefing* highlights some of the policies of the four main political parties at Westminster – the Conservatives, Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats. We also include some of the known policies of those parties which have significant representation at national or European level – Plaid Cymru, UKIP and the Green Party. Many Christians ask us about the policies of the Christian Peoples Alliance and the Christian Party. These have also been included. Space and time constraints have not permitted us to cover other parties fielding candidates at the General Election.

The parties set out their policies in their manifestos, official policy documents, or resolutions determined by their party conferences. The Christian Institute's website will link to the 2017 General Election manifestos of the parties covered in this publication as they become available: christian.org.uk/election

Obviously the Government's actions are there for all to see. Since the opposition parties are not in a position to implement their ideas, we can only note what they have said about the Government's legislation and the way they have voted.

Christians must weigh the evidence and exercise their Christian conscience.



The Conservatives have been in Government since 2015, with a working majority of 17. From 2010 to 2015 they were in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. They had 330 MPs at the dissolution of Parliament.

CONSERVATIVES' RECORD IN GOVERNMENT 2015-2017

Extremism – As well as countering terrorism, the Conservatives' policy seeks to tackle 'non-violent extremism'. Prime Minister Theresa May has spoken of the UK leading the world in tackling extremism⁸, which is defined as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs".⁹



Prime Minister Theresa May

The Conservatives' 2017 manifesto says: "we will establish a Commission for Countering Extremism to identify examples of extremism and expose them, to support the public sector and civil society, and help the government to identify policies to defeat extremism and promote pluralistic values".^{9a}

Ofsted inspections of churches – The Government has proposed that any group teaching a child for six or more hours in any week should have to register with the state, and be subject to inspection by Ofsted for their compliance with 'British values'.¹⁰ This could include various forms of church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, some summer camps and even Sunday Schools.

'British values' in schools – First introduced under the coalition Government in 2014, Ofsted's 'British values' regime has continued. Inspectors have been using the rules to ask intrusive questions of pupils and have failed to respect the ethos of Christian and Jewish schools.¹¹ No apology has ever been given.

The Conservatives' plans for **Extremism Disruption Orders** have not yet gone ahead, amid reports of a failure to agree on a legal definition of 'extremism'.¹²

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid MP has publicly backed the idea of an **Equality Oath** for public office holders.¹³ The Government has continued to implement the controversial

anti-radicalisation programme, *Prevent*.

Transsexualism – Conservative ministers have committed to reviewing the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to “look at ways of streamlining and de-medicalising the process for changing a person’s legal gender”.¹⁴ This would scrap the two-year procedure involving the consent of two doctors and fast-track changes of legal birth sex.

Religious freedom – Theresa May has said Christians should be able to speak about their faith in the workplace, saying that “our Christian heritage is something we can all be proud of”.¹⁵

Relationships Education – Government ministers announced plans in March 2017 for ‘Relationships Education’, a new compulsory subject for all primary schools in England. It will mean teaching young children about “different types of relationships”.

The Government says that parents will not have the right to withdraw their children from the classes. Activists are pressing for the subject to cover LGBT relationships. A secondary school subject called Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) – covering “intimate relationships” – is also planned, for which some right of withdrawal is expected.¹⁶

Free schools – The Government has promised to allow free schools with religious character to select 100 per cent of pupils on the basis of faith (currently capped at 50 per cent). But the 2017 manifesto says new faith schools will be required “to prove that parents of other faiths and none would be prepared to send their children to that school”.¹⁷

Abortion – The Department of Health announced that a new test for Down’s



◀ Former Prime Minister David Cameron

syndrome will be available on the NHS from 2018.¹⁸ In response to a campaign by BPAS to allow abortion up to birth, the Government said it had “no plans” to change the law.¹⁹

Drugs – The Government has resisted calls to legalise cannabis.²⁰ In 2016 the Government introduced a ban on ‘legal highs’, which mimic the effects of banned substances such as cannabis and heroin.²¹

Gambling – The Government launched a review of the maximum stake and prizes for gaming machines in October 2016, focusing particularly on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs).²² The review also included gambling advertising. The response will not be published before the General Election.

Prostitution – In response to a Home Affairs Committee report in 2016, which recommended that soliciting for sex should no longer be a criminal offence, the Government said it plans to commission research into the “scale and changing nature of prostitution”.²³

Pornography – The Government’s Digital Economy Act 2017 imposes age-verification checks on pornographic websites.

Sunday trading – In 2015-16 the Conservative Government attempted to liberalise Sunday trading. The plans were voted down in the House of Commons in March 2016 by 317 votes to 286.

Sharia law – The Government commissioned an independent review of Sharia councils in May 2016.²⁴ It has yet to report.

CONSERVATIVE PARTY POLICIES

Abortion – The Conservatives allowed a free vote on Fiona Bruce's amendment in 2015 to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion. Theresa May voted for the amendment.²⁵ It was defeated by 292 votes to 201. The Conservatives voted 123 to 17 against a Ten Minute Rule Bill promoted by Diana Johnson MP to remove all criminal laws relating to abortion. Theresa May did not vote.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008

Abortion – Conservative MPs had a free vote on abortion. Theresa May voted to lower the abortion time limit to 20 weeks.²⁶

Hybrid embryos – Conservatives were allowed a free vote on animal-human hybrid embryos. Theresa May voted against allowing their creation.²⁷

Saviour siblings – Conservatives were allowed a free vote on 'saviour siblings'.²⁸ Theresa May did not vote.

Fatherhood – Conservatives had a free vote, though party spokesmen stated that children conceived through IVF needed a male role model.²⁹ Theresa May voted for keeping the 'need for a father' requirement.

Assisted suicide – The Conservatives had a free vote on Rob Marris's Bill to legalise assisted suicide in 2015.³⁰ Theresa May voted against.

LGBT rights – The Conservatives' 2015

manifesto said: "Our historic introduction of gay marriage has helped drive forward equality and strengthened the institution of marriage. But there is still more to do, and we will continue to champion equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people".³¹

The Conservative Party under Michael Howard gave a free vote to its MPs on the **Civil Partnership** and **Gender Recognition** Acts, though the frontbench spokesmen supported both pieces of legislation.

Incitement to religious hatred – The Conservatives backed the Lords amendments in 2006 to narrow the scope of the offence and include a robust free speech protection.³²

'Incitement to homophobic hatred' – The Tories allowed a free vote on the issue, but the shadow cabinet supported Lord Waddington's free speech clause. Only two Tory Peers voted against the clause in any of the four votes. In the final vote no Conservative MP voted to repeal the Waddington amendment.

Hate crime – In 2016 the Government published a four-year hate crime action plan for England and Wales, which was drawn up by Theresa May when Home Secretary. This included requiring the police to record all reported incidents, and, for the first time, record 'transgender' as an aggravating factor.³³

Equality Bill 2006 – In the House of Lords, Conservative Peers voted against plans to introduce religious harassment laws in the provision of goods and services following concerns about free speech and religious liberty.

Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007 (SORs)

– A third of Conservative MPs at the time voted for the SORs, meaning that Roman Catholic adoption agencies would have to secularise or close.³⁴ Conservative MPs and Peers were given a free vote.

Equality Act 2010 – Conservative MPs and Peers were whipped to support an amendment by Lady O’Cathain maintaining existing employment exemptions for churches, but the party gave its general support to the Bill as a whole.³⁵

Persecution of Christians – Theresa May has said the UK must address “the persecution of Christians and religious minorities around the world”.³⁶

Named Person – The Scottish Conservatives’ Shadow Education Secretary has spoken out against the Named Person scheme, saying that it is “completely unworkable and unwanted”.³⁷

Blasphemy laws – The Conservatives regarded repeal of the blasphemy law in England and Wales as a matter of conscience and allowed a free vote.³⁸

Constitution – The Conservatives’ 2017 manifesto says: “We will not repeal or replace the Human Rights Act while the process of Brexit is underway but we will consider our human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes.”³⁹

House of Lords – The 2017 manifesto says: “Although comprehensive reform is not a priority we will ensure that the House of Lords continues to fulfil its constitutional role as a revising and scrutinising chamber which respects the primacy of the House of Commons.”⁴⁰

THE RECORD OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT 2010–2015

The General Election in 2010 was the first since 1974 to provide no overall majority for any one party. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed a coalition Government, led by David Cameron and Nick Clegg, consisting of 306 Tory MPs and 57 Lib Dem MPs.

Same-sex marriage – The Coalition passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 for England and Wales, despite the fact that the redefinition of marriage was not a manifesto pledge for either party nor in the

Coalition’s Programme for Government. Theresa May and Tim Farron voted for the Bill. Though it was supposed to be a free vote for Government MPs, there were reports of undue pressure put on Conservative MPs.⁴¹ More Conservatives voted against same-sex marriage than for it at Second Reading. The Liberal Democrats allowed their MPs a free vote.⁴² Four Lib Dem MPs voted against the Bill at Second Reading.

The Government allowed a free vote on amendments seeking to protect religious liberty and freedom of speech, but these were all rejected by MPs. In the House of Lords, the Government conspired with the Opposition frontbench (Labour) to



David Cameron and Nick Clegg formed a coalition Government in 2010.

manipulate the Parliamentary timetable and rush the legislation through.⁴³

Although having originally said religious organisations would be exempt from the legislation,⁴⁴ the Government allowed religious organisations to opt in to performing same-sex marriages if they choose to. The Church of England was exempted from taking part.

In May 2014, the Department for Education issued guidance which stated: “No school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples.” It also reaffirmed teachers’ rights to hold views about sexual orientation and express them in an appropriate manner.⁴⁵

Civil partnerships – In 2011 the Government passed regulations allowing civil partnerships to take place in churches in England and Wales if their trustees opt to allow this. Following a 2014 review of civil partnerships

triggered by the same-sex marriage legislation, the Government decided to maintain the status quo rather than open up civil partnerships to heterosexual couples.⁴⁶

Marriage allowance – The Government introduced a tax break for married couples worth around £200 a year from April 2015. Despite describing the marriage tax break measure as “patronising drivel” before entering into coalition, the Lib Dems agreed not to block its introduction.⁴⁷

Legal rights for cohabittees – The Government declined to introduce Law Commission proposals for new legal rights for couples who cohabit.⁴⁸

Abortion – The Department of Health confirmed the biggest liberalisation of abortion practice since 1967, in updated guidance published in May 2014. The

document for abortion providers says there is “no legal requirement” for doctors to see women seeking an abortion before approving it.⁴⁹

GM babies – The Coalition passed regulations legalising genetically modified babies with three or four parents, making Britain the only country in the world to officially permit the practice.⁵⁰

Reform of Section 5 – Following a long campaign spearheaded by The Christian Institute, the Government accepted reform of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 so that it no longer catches “insulting” words or behaviour.⁵¹

IPNAs – In 2013 the Government proposed to create injunctions against “conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any person” in public as a replacement for Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). After a big defeat in the House of Lords, the Government dropped its plans.⁵²

Lobbying Act – In January 2014 the Coalition passed a law restricting the legitimate campaigning activities of charities and other organisations during elections.

Education – Then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced in 2014 that schools would be given £2 million to tackle homophobic bullying.⁵³ Nicky Morgan also passed regulations banning state funding for nurseries that support creationism, suggesting that such people have “extremist”

views.⁵⁴ The Government did not close down any school connected to the notorious Trojan Horse scandal involving some Muslims in Birmingham, but Nicky Morgan did close a Christian school in Durham for failing a ‘British values’ inspection.

Modern Slavery Act – The coalition Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015 which gives greater protection to victims of human trafficking.

Gambling – In December 2013 the Government passed regulations that raised the maximum stake and prize levels on various gaming machines.⁵⁵ Stakes and prizes for fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) were left untouched, despite calls for them to be reduced.⁵⁶

Blood donation – In 2011 the Government overturned the National Blood Service public safety policy of banning men who have ever had sex with men from giving blood.⁵⁷

Constitution – The Succession to the Crown Act 2013 changed the law relating to royal succession, allowing a future monarch to marry a Roman Catholic.⁵⁸

Council prayers – In 2012 the Government fast-tracked legislation to restore the right of local councils in England to hold prayers as part of their formal meetings. This overturned a High Court judge’s ruling that councils had no lawful power to hold prayers during official business.⁵⁹



Labour had 229 MPs before dissolution for the General Election. The leader of the Labour Party is Jeremy Corbyn.

LABOUR PARTY POLICIES

LGBT+ education – Jeremy Corbyn has promised to: “Advance LGBT+ inclusion in the education system by updating the national curriculum to reflect LGBT+ historical figures and LGBT+ rights.”⁶⁰

Sex education – Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner announced that she was “absolutely delighted” with the Government’s new statutory ‘Relationships Education’ subject planned for primary schools.⁶¹ In its 2017 manifesto, Labour pledges to make sex and relationships education “a compulsory part of the curriculum” and to “ensure that the new guidance for relationships and sex education is LGBT inclusive”.⁶²

‘Gay rights’ envoy – The Labour Party has promised to appoint the first international envoy for LGBT rights.⁶³

Transsexualism – Labour’s 2017 manifesto says: “A Labour government will reform the Gender Recognition Act and the Equality Act 2010”.⁶⁴

Extremism

Ofsted inspections of churches – In 2016 a Labour spokesman said the Government’s plans for registration and inspection of out-

of-school groups were unnecessary and would only impose an additional bureaucratic burden on Sunday Schools.⁶⁵

Jeremy Corbyn has described *Prevent* as “counter-productive” and too focused on Muslims, saying it should be focused on “all communities”.⁶⁶ Labour also criticised the proposal for public office holders to swear a ‘British values’ oath.⁶⁷

Same-sex marriage – Labour strongly supported the introduction of same-sex marriage. It did not formally impose a whip, though there were reports of MPs coming under pressure from the leadership at the time to support the Bill.⁶⁸ Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour of the Bill.

In the House of Lords, the Labour front bench conspired with the Government to manipulate the parliamentary timetable and rush the legislation through.⁶⁹ Labour whipped its MPs and Peers to oppose various amendments seeking to protect religious liberty and freedom of speech. The amendments were all defeated.

Same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland – Jeremy Corbyn has said: “This is a devolved issue, but we must put pressure on the unionist parties that have resisted this change”.⁷⁰

Heterosexual civil partnerships – Labour tabled an amendment to the same-sex marriage legislation to require a consultation on extending civil partnerships to heterosexual couples, which the Coalition agreed to.⁷¹

Divorce – Labour’s 2017 manifesto promises to introduce a no-fault divorce procedure.^{71a}

Marriage allowance – Prior to the 2015 election, Labour promised to scrap the tax break for married couples.⁷² In 2016 shadow minister Jonathan Ashworth branded it “perverse and unfair”.⁷³

Smacking – Welsh Labour is proposing to criminalise parents in Wales who smack their children.⁷⁴

Assisted suicide – In the House of Commons, Labour allowed its MPs a free vote on Rob Marris’s Bill to legalise assisted suicide.⁷⁵ Jeremy Corbyn did not vote.

Abortion – Labour wants to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, according to its 2017 election manifesto.⁷⁶

In 2015 the Labour leadership strongly opposed Fiona Bruce’s amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion. Then Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper wrote to the party’s MPs urging them to vote against it, and, though the party claimed there was a free vote, Fiona Bruce said her amendment was defeated “by Labour Party whipping”.⁷⁷ Jeremy Corbyn was one of 178 Labour MPs to vote against the amendment, while 27 voted for.

In March 2017 Labour MPs voted 146 to 6 in favour of Diana Johnson’s Ten Minute Rule Bill to remove all criminal laws relating to abortion. Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour.

GM babies – Labour gave its MPs a free vote on the plans to allow genetically modified babies with three or four parents.⁷⁸ Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour of GM babies.



◉ Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

'Incitement to homophobic hatred' – In its 2010 manifesto Labour pledged to repeal Lord Waddington's free speech clause, and to invoke the Parliament Acts if necessary to overcome the opposition of the House of Lords.⁷⁹

Lobbying Act – The 2017 Labour manifesto pledges to repeal the 2014 Lobbying Act, citing the 'gagging' of charities.⁸⁰ In 2016 a Labour shadow minister proposed an amendment to the Act to reduce the impact on charities.⁸¹

Home education – The Labour Government's Children, Schools and Families Bill, debated in 2009-10, planned to introduce an invasive regulation and monitoring system for parents who homeschool.

Persecution of Christians – In its 2017 manifesto, Labour promises to appoint a 'global ambassador for religious freedom'.⁸²

Prostitution – Jeremy Corbyn said in 2016 that he backs decriminalising prostitution.⁸³

Drugs – Jeremy Corbyn is in favour of legalising cannabis for medicinal purposes.⁸⁴

Labour pledged to ban 'legal highs' in its 2015 manifesto.⁸⁵

Modern Slavery Act – Labour supported the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which gives greater protection to victims of human trafficking.⁸⁶

Gambling – Labour has pledged to reduce the maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2.⁸⁷

Blood donation – Jeremy Corbyn would completely revoke the current twelve-month deferral period on giving blood for men who have had sex with men.⁸⁸

Sunday trading – In 2016 Labour voted against the Government's plans to liberalise Sunday trading and has promised to "protect the current compromise".⁸⁹

House of Lords – Labour's 2017 manifesto states: "Our fundamental belief is that the Second Chamber should be democratically elected. In the interim period, we will seek to end the hereditary principle and reduce the size of the current House of Lords".⁹⁰

LABOUR'S RECORD IN GOVERNMENT: 1997-2010

In 2008 Labour passed the controversial **Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act** which:

- ❶ legalised the creation of **animal-human hybrid embryos** for research;
- ❷ allowed the creation of **'saviour siblings'**;
- ❸ abolished the **'need for a father'** consideration before commencing IVF treatment.

Labour allowed its MPs a free vote on these three issues, though then Prime Minister Gordon Brown strongly supported all three and Labour MPs were whipped to support the Bill as a whole. The legislation included regulation-making powers to allow the birth of **GM children** with three or four parents. It also permits scientists to use current stocks of donated tissue for embryo experiments, even where the original donors did not give their express consent.

The embryology Bill saw votes on lowering the upper gestational limit for

abortion from 24 weeks. Labour MPs were allowed to vote according to their conscience; Jeremy Corbyn voted against any reduction.

Many people are concerned that the Labour Government's **Mental Capacity Act 2005** for England and Wales allows euthanasia by omission. The Act does not formally legalise euthanasia but creates 'advance decisions', known as 'living wills', which could open the door to euthanasia.

Labour pushed through various 'gay rights' measures, including **homosexual adoption**, the **Civil Partnership Act**, reducing the **homosexual age of consent** to 16, and reforming the law on sexual offences to remove all distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual acts.

When in Government, the Labour Party resisted calls to lower the **age of heterosexual consent** from 16.⁹¹

In 2003 Labour repealed **Section 28** for England and Wales (the law which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools).

The year 2003 also saw the introduction

of **special employment rights for homosexuals** and **employment laws covering 'religion or belief'** which have interfered with the ability of churches and Christian organisations to maintain their distinctive doctrines and ethos.

Labour passed the **Equality Act 2006**, which prohibited religious discrimination when providing goods and services. The Government refused to include conscience protections for Christians in business. It was this Act which set up the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The 2007 **Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORs)** banned any adoption agency from refusing to place children with same-sex couples. Since then all Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England have become entirely secular bodies or closed. The SORs have also been used to sue Christian B&B owners for operating a 'married couples only' policy for double rooms.

The **Equality Act 2010** consolidated all discrimination laws, including the SORs, into a single Act. The Bill as introduced would



◉ Former Prime Ministers Gordon Brown and Tony Blair

have narrowed the employment freedom of churches and religious organisations even further than the 2003 employment laws (see above). The House of Lords voted three times against any narrowing of the 2003 legislation and the Government gave way. The Act also places an equality duty on public bodies – like schools and the police – covering homosexual and transsexual rights, as well as other protected grounds.

Shortly after the 2005 General Election Labour tried again to outlaw **incitement to religious hatred**, this time in its Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. After strong opposition from Christians around the country, several Labour MPs rebelled against their Government and the House of Commons voted to substantially alter the offence, including a robust free speech protection.

In 2007 Labour introduced an offence of **'incitement to hatred on grounds of sexual orientation'**. The original legislation paralleled the religious hatred law as substantially amended by the Commons, with the crucial exception that there was no free speech protection. However, a free speech clause was successfully inserted by the House of Lords after a campaign led by the late Lord Waddington.

Cannabis was downgraded by Labour in 2004 – becoming a class C drug on a par with sleeping pills. However, in response to overwhelming evidence of cannabis damaging mental health, the Labour Government restored the drug to class B in 2009.

The **Gender Recognition Act**, passed in 2004, provides a raft of legal rights for

transsexuals – including the right for people to change their legal birth sex.

The **Gambling Act 2005** provided for a massive deregulation of the gambling industry, introducing Las Vegas-style casinos to Britain and allowing for a great multiplication of betting shops, slot machines and internet gambling. The Act formally legalised fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) in high street betting shops.

England and Wales

Labour tightened the law on **prostitution** by introducing a 'strict liability' offence of paying for sex with someone who has been exploited for gain (Policing and Crime Act 2009). In 2008 the Labour Government made it an offence for a person to be in possession of an **extreme pornographic image**.

The Licensing Act 2003 allowed for **24-hour drinking**, which came into force in 2005.

The Labour Government repealed the **blasphemy laws** in 2008 after a campaign by atheists.

England only

Labour kept the existing requirement for state schools to have daily **collective worship** which is mainly Christian, but in 2006 it allowed sixth-formers not to attend collective worship. It did not amend the 1988 law which says that the main content of **RE** in non-denominational schools should be Christian. However, guidance published in 2010 considerably strengthened multi-faith emphasis and advises that schools include teaching of humanism in RE lessons.⁹²

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has been in Government in Scotland since 2007. It currently has 63 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP leader is Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Scotland's First Minister. The party had 54 MPs in Westminster at the dissolution of Parliament.

SNP POLICIES

Named Person – In 2014 the SNP Government decided that every child in Scotland should have a 'named person' – a state employee – to oversee their 'wellbeing'. The Supreme Court ruled in 2016 that the scheme breached the right to a private and family life, as it allowed the named person to share personal data and advise children without their parents' consent. Deputy First Minister John Swinney has stated that the Scottish Government is "absolutely committed" to introducing a revised scheme,⁹³ but because of the ruling it will be much more limited.

LGBT education – The SNP Government announced in April 2017 that LGBTI equality in schools is to be reviewed.⁹⁴ It has established a new LGBTI-inclusive education working group to expand the teaching of homosexuality and transsexualism in schools.

Transsexualism – The party's 2017 manifesto says the SNP "is committed to reviewing and reforming gender recognition laws". The party also supports a third gender option for passports and amending the Equality Act to explicitly protect "the whole spectrum of trans identities".⁹⁵

'Gay rights' envoy – The SNP's 2017 manifesto says "SNP MPs will support the establishment of a special envoy to promote the rights of LGBTI people throughout the world, as an integral part of UK foreign policy".⁹⁶ In April 2017 SNP MPs challenged the Government to commit to establishing such an envoy.⁹⁷

Same-sex marriage – A Government Bill to introduce same-sex marriage was passed in the Scottish Parliament in 2014. SNP MSPs were given a free vote on the Bill. Government ministers denied that there was any need for amendments to protect religious liberty and freedom of speech.⁹⁸

Civil partnerships – The SNP spokesman welcomed the principle of the Civil Partnership Bill in 2004.⁹⁹ All of the then five SNP MPs voted for the Bill at Westminster.

Marriage allowance – The SNP does not favour marriage tax breaks.¹⁰⁰

Gay adoption and fostering – The SNP supported adoption by homosexual couples. The SNP introduced fostering rights for homosexual couples; the regulations came into force in September 2009.¹⁰¹



📍 SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon

Equality Oath – First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said that supporting integration “is not, in my view, done through swearing of oaths” and warned that the proposed oath “potentially risks exclusion of people who do not define their values as being uniquely British”.¹⁰²

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 – SNP MPs had a free vote on the Bill, including on abortion.¹⁰³

Abortion – First Minister Nicola Sturgeon favours the current 24-week abortion limit. Following the announcement that abortion law would be devolved, she stressed that the SNP had no plans to change the existing law.¹⁰⁴ Nicola Sturgeon is “very sympathetic” to the idea of NHS Scotland covering the cost of abortions for Northern Irish women who travel to Scotland.¹⁰⁵ At Westminster two SNP MPs voted for Fiona Bruce’s amendment

to explicitly ban **sex-selective abortion**; two others voted against.

GM babies – When the House of Commons voted on plans to allow genetically modified babies with three or four parents, four SNP MPs voted in favour; two voted against. Westminster SNP Leader Angus Robertson supported the move.

Assisted suicide – Nicola Sturgeon has voted against assisted suicide Bills at Holyrood. In February 2015 she questioned how such legislation could contain sufficient safeguards.¹⁰⁶

SORs – At the time the SORs were being considered, the party said Roman Catholic adoption agencies should be free to refuse to place children with same-sex couples.¹⁰⁷

Hate crimes – The SNP supported the Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act 2009 which introduced tougher penalties for crimes committed against homosexuals and transsexuals.

Free speech – The SNP’s Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill in 2009 and anti-sectarianism Bill in 2011 gave rise to serious free speech concerns, but were amended during their passage to include protections.

Incitement to religious hatred – The SNP was in favour of the House of Lords amendments which included a robust free speech shield in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.¹⁰⁸

Lobbying – The party’s 2017 manifesto says it supports strict rules on lobbying but opposes “the restrictions on the activities of campaigning charities”.¹⁰⁹ In Holyrood a Government Bill to introduce a lobbying

register was passed in 2016.¹¹⁰

Smacking – The SNP Government is opposed to the physical punishment of children, but the Minister for Childcare and Early Years has said it “does not, however, wish to see parents unnecessarily or unreasonably criminalised”.¹¹¹

Home education – Guidance published in 2007 upheld the right of parents to home educate and denied that child protection problems are any more likely to arise with home-educated children than those educated at school.¹¹²

Faith schools – In March 2017 a party spokesman said the SNP is a “strong supporter” of faith schools.¹¹³

Sex education – Sex education guidance published by the Scottish Government in 2014 emphasises children’s rights over those of parents.¹¹⁴

Gambling – The party’s 2017 manifesto calls for more devolved powers to tackle fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs).¹¹⁵ The Scotland Act 2016 devolved power over the number of FOBTs that are allowed per betting premises licence – but only for future licences. The SNP said that this did not go far enough.¹¹⁶

Drugs – The SNP administration in Holyrood continues to stand by its general anti-drugs strategy, introduced in 2008, though there has been criticism of the continued widespread use of methadone for drug addicts in Scotland.¹¹⁷ In 2014 the Scottish Government rejected calls from advisors to prescribe heroin to addicts.¹¹⁸ SNP MPs backed the law banning psychoactive substances.¹¹⁹ The Scottish Government has

announced that drug-driving limits will be introduced in Scotland.¹²⁰

Cannabis – In 2003 the party supported the UK Government’s reclassification of cannabis from class B to class C.¹²¹ However, in 2008 an SNP minister in the Scottish Government welcomed the decision to return cannabis to class B.¹²² In 2016 the SNP Conference overwhelmingly passed a resolution stating: “Where appropriate, cannabis should be decriminalised for medical use and available on prescription. Conference calls on the UK Government to devolve the power to decriminalise cannabis for medical use to the Scottish Parliament.”¹²³

Alcohol – The SNP Government passed the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) Scotland Act 2012. The Act introduces a minimum price per unit on alcohol, but has yet to come into effect due to an ongoing legal challenge.¹²⁴

Sunday trading – In 2016 SNP MPs voted against the Government’s plans to relax Sunday trading.¹²⁵ The party supports Sunday trading in principle, but did not want Scottish workers to be adversely affected by the legislation for England and Wales.¹²⁶

Constitution – Former First Minister Alex Salmond repeatedly called for and supported the repeal of the Act of Settlement, which excludes Roman Catholics from the line of succession to the throne.¹²⁷ The party’s 2015 manifesto pledged to “oppose scrapping the Human Rights Act”.¹²⁸

House of Lords – The SNP’s 2017 manifesto says: “SNP MPs will vote for the abolition of the House of Lords.”¹²⁹



The Liberal Democrats had nine MPs before dissolution for the General Election. The leader of the Lib Dems is Tim Farron.

LIB DEM PARTY POLICIES

Transsexualism – The Liberal Democrats state that they have “trailblazed the way on transgender rights” in the UK.¹³⁰ In 2016 Tim Farron backed the recommendations in the ‘Transgender Equality’ report from the Women and Equalities Committee, which included allowing ‘self-declaration’ and lowering the age for changing legal sex from 18 to 16.¹³¹ The party’s 2017 manifesto calls for the introduction of an ‘X’ option on passports and other official documents.^{131a}

Drugs

The Liberal Democrats have consistently called for a radical liberalisation of the UK’s drugs laws.¹³² The 2017 manifesto says the party would: “End imprisonment for possession of illegal drugs for personal use”.¹³³

Cannabis – The Lib Dems support a regulated cannabis market in the UK.¹³⁴ Cannabis “would be sold over the counter by trained and licensed vendors, in plain packaging with clear health and risk reduction information”.¹³⁵

The party says the supply of illegal drugs would continue to attract severe penalties and would be recognised as a serious offence.¹³⁶

Abortion – In May 2017 the Lib Dems’ election spokesman confirmed the party’s pro-abortion stance.¹³⁷

In 2008 and 2015 the Liberal Democrats allowed their MPs a free vote on abortion amendments. Tim Farron did not vote.

Assisted suicide – The party supports the legalisation of assisted suicide. Tim Farron has said he does not.¹³⁸

In September 2015 the Lib Dems gave their MPs a free vote on Rob Marris’s Bill to legalise assisted suicide. Tim Farron did not vote.

Extremism – The Liberal Democrats opposed then Home Secretary Theresa May’s proposal to introduce ‘banning orders’.¹³⁹

Government plans for an *Equality Oath* have been described as “superficial and divisive” by Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesman Lord Paddick.¹⁴⁰

The Lib Dems’ 2017 manifesto commits to scrapping the counter-extremism scheme *Prevent*.¹⁴¹ The party has also proposed replacing the term “British values” with “universal democratic values”.¹⁴²

Incitement to religious hatred – It was party policy to oppose the Labour Government’s Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. The Lib Dems supported amendments made in the Lords,

including a robust free speech protection, as the Bill would have “censored legitimate speech”.¹⁴³

The Lib Dems want to include **hate crimes** against homosexual and transsexual people in a category of aggravated offences so that stronger sentences can be given.¹⁴⁴

Equality Bill 2006 – The Lib Dems in the Lords voted against plans to introduce religious harassment laws in the provision of goods and services following concerns about free speech and religious liberty.¹⁴⁵

SORs – The Lib Dems supported the Labour Government in voting for the SORs in 2007,¹⁴⁶ which closed down the Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England.

Equality Act 2010 – The Liberal Democrats firmly supported the Equality Act. They voted for narrowing employment protections for churches and religious organisations.¹⁴⁷

The Lib Dem 2017 manifesto promises a comprehensive international LGBT rights strategy.¹⁴⁸

Same-sex marriage – The Liberal Democrats view the same-sex marriage legislation as a great achievement and as such would like the Government to do more to promote same-sex marriage abroad.¹⁴⁹ Tim Farron has stated that the coalition Government “did not go as far as they should have in terms of recognising transgender rights”.¹⁵⁰

The Liberal Democrats strongly supported **adoption by homosexual couples**, the **Civil Partnership Act** and the **Gender Recognition Act**.

Smacking – It is Lib Dem policy to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK legislation,¹⁵¹ which anti-

smacking groups say means banning parental smacking. However, when the issue arose in 2008 the Lib Dems gave their MPs a free vote.¹⁵² The Liberal Democrats have been seeking to criminalise parents in Wales who smack their children.¹⁵³

Home education – In 2010 the Lib Dems opposed the Labour Government’s plans to regulate home education, with then education spokesman David Laws labelling them “excessive”.¹⁵⁴

Schools – The Lib Dems’ 2015 manifesto said the party would: “Support schools to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination, and to establish a tolerant and inclusive environment for all their pupils. We will remove schools’ exemption from the bar on harassment in these areas while protecting the right to teach about religious doctrine.”¹⁵⁵

Sex education – It has long been the policy of the Liberal Democrats to have statutory



Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats

sex education in primary schools. The party has welcomed 'Relationships Education', the Government's new statutory subject planned for primary schools.¹⁵⁶ The 2017 manifesto calls for teaching on LGBT+ relationships in sex and relationships education.^{156a}

State-funded Christian schools – A party conference motion passed in 2017 said that every church school should lose its freedom i) to choose Christian staff, apart from in the case of religious instruction, and ii) to select pupils on the basis that they agree with the school's ethos.¹⁵⁷

Prostitution – The Lib Dems' 2017 manifesto says the party would: "Decriminalise the sale and purchase of sex".^{157a} This has been Liberal Democrat policy since the 1994 publication of their policy paper *Confronting Prostitution*.¹⁵⁸

Gambling – The Liberal Democrats supported the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown's decision in 2008 to scrap the super casino, saying it was "the right decision".¹⁵⁹ They

have backed calls for a £2 maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs).¹⁶⁰

Pornography – In 2016 the Liberal Democrats opposed legislation which sought to block websites that show a range of sexual acts.¹⁶¹

Alcohol – The party's 2015 manifesto pledged to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol.¹⁶²

Blood donation – The Lib Dems welcomed the change made in 2011 to the National Blood Service public safety policy of banning men who have ever had sex with men from giving blood. Tim Farron has since called the twelve-month deferral period for men who have had sex with men "discriminatory".¹⁶³

Sunday trading – When the Government proposed in 2016 to liberalise Sunday trading, Lib Dem MPs were given a free vote.¹⁶⁴ Tim Farron voted against.

RECORD IN COALITION GOVERNMENT 2010-2015

For the Liberal Democrats' record in coalition Government with the Conservatives from 2010 to 2015, see pages 11-13. On some of the issues we have included, the Lib Dems disagreed with the coalition Government's approach. Some of these are mentioned below:

Civil partnerships – It remains Liberal Democrat policy to support heterosexual civil partnerships.¹⁶⁵

Marriage allowance – The Lib Dems said

the tax break would penalise unmarried couples and the 2017 manifesto commits to abolishing it.¹⁶⁶ Tim Farron has called the policy a "pathetic failure".¹⁶⁷

Legal rights for cohabittees – Since 2013 it has been Liberal Democrat policy to support greater financial and property rights for unmarried couples when their relationship ends or a partner dies intestate.¹⁶⁸

Lobbying Act – The Liberal Democrats have said that they will examine the effects of the Act on charities and may amend it in future if in Government.¹⁶⁹



Plaid Cymru had three MPs in Westminster before dissolution for the General Election and it has eleven Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales. The leader of Plaid Cymru is Leanne Wood AM.

PLAID CYMRU POLICIES

Same-sex marriage – All three Plaid Cymru MPs at the time voted in favour of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.¹⁷⁰ Leanne Wood objected to the exemption for the Church in Wales which bars it from conducting same-sex weddings.¹⁷¹ Wood was also critical of MPs who voted against same-sex marriage because constituents had asked them to do so.¹⁷²

Transsexualism – Plaid Cymru has pledged to support the development of the first Gender Identity Clinic in Wales.¹⁷³

Abortion – One Plaid Cymru MP voted for Fiona Bruce's amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion; one voted against.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 – Two of the three Plaid Cymru MPs in 2008 voted in favour of animal-human embryos, saviour siblings and keeping the abortion limit at 24 weeks. The third MP did not vote. One Plaid MP voted to keep the 'need for a father' requirement in IVF treatment.

GM babies – Two Plaid Cymru MPs voted in favour; the third was absent or abstained.

Assisted suicide – None of the three Plaid MPs voted on Rob Marris's assisted suicide Bill in September 2015. In December 2014, seven Plaid AMs voted in favour of the principle of legalising assisted suicide in Wales; one voted against; two abstained.

'Gay rights' – Plaid Cymru states on its website: "We want to see a fairer and better Wales and Europe where everybody has the freedom to express their sexuality and identity."¹⁷⁴ The party voted in favour of the equalisation of the age of consent, civil partnerships, adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples, the repeal of Section 28, the Sexual Orientation Regulations and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. In its 2015 manifesto Plaid said it wants to see LGBT rights "implemented on a global scale".¹⁷⁵

Incitement to religious hatred – Plaid Cymru opposed the introduction of an incitement to religious hatred law.¹⁷⁶

'Incitement to homophobic hatred' – Plaid Cymru MPs consistently voted against Lord Waddington's free speech amendment.

Equality Act 2010 – The party welcomed the Equality Act,¹⁷⁷ and all three of its MPs voted in favour of restricting the freedoms



Leanne Wood, leader of Plaid Cymru

of churches and other religious organisations to employ people in accordance with their beliefs.

Home education – In November 2016 the party moved an unsuccessful amendment in the Welsh Assembly calling for a ‘strengthening’ of the registration requirement for home-educating families.¹⁷⁸

Smacking – Plaid Cymru’s 2016 manifesto committed to “introduce legislation to remove the defence of reasonable chastisement”.¹⁷⁹

Cannabis – Leanne Wood spoke out in favour of the legalisation of cannabis for medicinal purposes in March 2017.¹⁸⁰ Plaid’s 2015 manifesto also called for the decriminalisation of cannabis and the party says police resources should be diverted into education programmes.¹⁸¹

Gambling – In 2004-05 all of the then four Plaid Cymru MPs voted against the Gambling Bill. In 2014, all three of the party’s MPs supported an early day motion calling on the Government to reduce the maximum stakes on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2 in line with all other high street gaming machines.¹⁸²

Alcohol – Plaid Cymru supports the introduction of a minimum pricing policy for alcohol.¹⁸³

Blood donation – The party’s 2015 manifesto pledged: “We will end the twelve month ban on blood donation by gay and bisexual men.”¹⁸⁴

Sunday trading – Two of the three Plaid MPs voted against liberalising Sunday trading; the other did not vote.

Blasphemy – All three Plaid Cymru MPs voted to repeal the blasphemy laws in May 2008.

Constitution – Plaid Cymru is in favour of establishing proportional representation in the UK Parliament, a fully-elected House of Lords and independence for Wales.¹⁸⁵



The leader of UKIP is Paul Nuttall MEP. UKIP is now the joint second-largest UK party in the European Parliament with 20 MEPs.

UKIP POLICIES

Abortion – Paul Nuttall favours limiting abortion to the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, but has said it would not be party policy.¹⁸⁶

Same-sex marriage – UKIP opposed the introduction of same-sex marriage on the basis that it should not have been given political priority and because of concerns about religious liberty.¹⁸⁷ The UKIP 'Christian manifesto' in 2015 stated: "We will not repeal the legislation, as it would be grossly unfair and unethical to 'un-marry' loving couples or restrict further marriages, but we will not require churches to marry same-sex couples."¹⁸⁸ In November 2016 Deputy Leader Peter Whittle said: "When it comes to gay marriage I think the party totally accepts that, it's not even an issue for us any more."¹⁸⁹

Sharia law – The party's 2017 manifesto says: "UKIP will ban wearing of the niqab and the burqa in public places. Face coverings such as these are barriers to integration. We will not accept these de-humanising symbols of segregation and oppression, nor the security risks they pose."¹⁹⁰

UKIP's 2017 manifesto also promises to "establish a legal commission to draw up proposals to disband sharia councils", saying:

"It is simple: there should be one law for all".¹⁹¹

Marriage allowance – The party's 2015 manifesto pledged to increase the transferable tax allowance for married couples.¹⁹²

Ofsted – UKIP's 2017 manifesto proposes snap Ofsted inspections where "Anti-Western, anti-Semitic, or anti-equality views are being expressed by staff or governors".¹⁹³ Paul Nuttall was "appalled about Ofsted inspectors quizzing pupils as young as four about their knowledge of sexuality".¹⁹⁴

The party's 2015 manifesto supported the freedom of parents to choose **home education** for their children.¹⁹⁵

Faith schools – UKIP said in 2015 that it "backs faith schools provided they are open to the whole community, uphold British values, do not discriminate against any section of society and meet required educational standards".¹⁹⁶

Religious education – Paul Nuttall has stated that, as a Christian country, it is natural for teaching about Christianity to be a "core part of religious education" in Britain, and that RE should be taught in a neutral manner.¹⁹⁷



Paul Nuttall, leader of UKIP

Sex and relationships education – UKIP's 2017 manifesto promises the party will “End sex education in primary schools”.¹⁹⁸ UKIP criticised the Government's proposed new Relationships Education subject for primary schools and said that parents need a full right of withdrawal.¹⁹⁹

British values – The UKIP 2017 manifesto says: “UKIP will stand up for the equal rights of all people in Britain, and say we are proud of our country and its achievements, our values of free speech, democracy, independence, and patriotism. We will promote British values in our legal system, in our schools, and in our society.”²⁰⁰

Smacking – Paul Nuttall criticised plans to ban smacking in 2013, after a children's charity called for an immediate ban on smacking children.²⁰¹

Transsexualism – Former boxing promoter Frank Maloney gave a speech on transsexualism at a 2015 UKIP conference dressed as a woman. In April 2017, Deputy Leader Peter Whittle tweeted that calls to teach transsexual issues to toddlers were “cultural Marxism”.²⁰²

Drugs – The party's 2017 manifesto says: “UKIP will not legalise classified drugs” and “We will rigorously enforce current legislation”.²⁰³

Alcohol – UKIP's 2017 manifesto promises to repeal the 2003 Licensing Act, which allowed 24-hour drinking.^{203a}

Gambling – UKIP's 2017 manifesto supports reducing the maximum stake for fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2.²⁰⁴

Local government – UKIP supports the introduction of referenda in local government: “Major decisions should be subject to binding local referenda and a local vote.”²⁰⁵

Constitution – In April 2017 Paul Nuttall said: “The time has come to do away with the antiquated House of Lords and replace it with some form of elected chamber.”²⁰⁶ UKIP's 2017 manifesto pledges to repeal the Human Rights Act and introduce a new UK Bill of Rights.²⁰⁷



The Green Party had one MP, Caroline Lucas, before dissolution for the General Election, and has three MEPs. Its co-leaders are Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley.

GREEN PARTY POLICIES

Transsexualism – In its 2017 LGBTIQ+ manifesto the Green Party supported allowing children to ‘self-identify’ in their chosen gender without parental permission.²⁰⁸ The party’s 2015 equality manifesto supported ‘the right for trans people to access services, hospitals, toilets, changing rooms and other gendered spaces that match their affirmed gender’.²⁰⁹

Free speech – Caroline Lucas supports the Defend Free Speech campaign against Extremism Disruption Orders and has said that anti-extremism orders would restrict civil liberties.²¹⁰ She also supported the ‘Reform Section 5’ campaign.

Same-sex marriage – The Green Party welcomed the introduction of same-sex marriage, describing it as “a historic moment”.²¹¹ The party would also allow heterosexual civil partnerships.²¹²

Extremism – In its 2017 manifesto the party says it wants to scrap the Prevent strategy and “pursue community-led collaborative approaches to tackling all forms of extremism instead”.^{212a}

Abortion – The party wants the remaining criminal laws relating to abortion to be removed²¹³ and Caroline Lucas voted for Diana Johnson’s Ten Minute Rule Bill to do this. Caroline Lucas voted against explicitly banning sex-selective abortion in 2015 but says she opposes it.²¹⁴

GM babies – When the House of Commons voted on plans to allow GM babies with three or four parents, Caroline Lucas voted in favour. The party remains opposed to GM crops.²¹⁵

Assisted suicide – The Green Party supports assisted suicide for terminally ill people.²¹⁶ Caroline Lucas voted to legalise assisted suicide in 2015.

Education – The party’s 2015 manifesto included plans to “make equality and diversity lessons mandatory in all schools” and “phase out public funding of schools run by religious organisations”.²¹⁷ The party wants to abolish the requirement for collective worship.²¹⁸ Caroline Lucas described the Government’s planned introduction of mandatory Relationships Education for primary schools as “wonderful news”.²¹⁹ The Greens support the right of parents to educate their children at home.²²⁰



📍 Green Party co-leader Caroline Lucas

Drugs – The party believes that drugs should be legalised. It envisages making cannabis available through regulated outlets, as in the Netherlands.²²¹ Caroline Lucas has been vocal in Parliament calling for a reform of the UK's drug laws, including the decriminalisation of small-scale possession of drugs for personal use.²²²

Prostitution – The Green Party wants to decriminalise prostitution.²²³

Gambling – Caroline Lucas has opposed fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) and asked the Government to review the Gambling Act 2005.²²⁴

Sunday trading – In 2016 Caroline Lucas voted against liberalising Sunday trading.

Constitution – The Green Party wants to replace the House of Lords with an elected second chamber.^{224a}



CHRISTIAN PARTY POLICIES

In advance of the 2015 General Election, the Christian Party launched a 'Declaration of British Values', asking all election candidates to sign up to statements on freedom of conscience, the constitution, traditional marriage and the sanctity of life.²²⁵

Same-sex marriage – The Christian Party opposed the coalition Government's introduction of same-sex marriage.²²⁶

Sanctity of life – The party wants to end abortion and is opposed to euthanasia.²²⁷ The Christian Party does not think that public funding should be spent on abortion on demand.²²⁸ It would seek to ban any practice which results in the destruction of human embryos.²²⁹

Transsexualism – The Christian Party does not believe 'sex-changes' should be publicly funded.²³⁰

Free speech – The Christian Party supported the free speech clause inserted in the homophobic hatred law by Lord Waddington and it has also promised more generally to: "Uphold free speech and abolish the concept of 'Thought Crime'."²³¹

Equality – The party has pledged to "review and repeal the inequality in Equalities legislation in order to return race equality

laws, sexual orientation equality laws, gender equality laws and religious equality laws to a correct basis that all men are equal under the law".²³²

Named Person scheme – The Christian Party opposes the Scottish Government's Named Person scheme, describing it as an "unwarranted Big Brother intrusion into family life".²³³

Smacking – The party supports parents' freedom to smack their children and says it will "shift the balance of power in the home from children back to parents".²³⁴

Contraception – The Christian Party would: "Make contraception for minors, without parental approval, illegal."²³⁵

Drugs – The Party promises to: "Promote zero tolerance towards illegal drug possession for personal use through the use of a full range of alternative punishments, rather than prison sentences."²³⁶

Prostitution – The Christian Party opposes prostitution.²³⁷

Sunday – The Christian Party would seek to: "Promote the restoration of Sunday as a day of rest".²³⁸

CHRISTIAN PEOPLES ALLIANCE POLICIES

Marriage – The Christian Peoples Alliance (CPA) opposes “all attempts to redefine the meaning of marriage and will repeal all those laws which have already attempted to do this”.

The party says there should be “state recognition for other mutually supportive relationships where two people have lived together for a long time”.²³⁹

Abortion – The CPA is committed to repealing the 1967 Abortion Act and outlawing cloning of human beings and embryo experimentation.²⁴⁰

Euthanasia – The party has pledged to “strongly oppose the growing euthanasia culture”.²⁴¹

Sex education – The party says sex education should teach both “Christian values of marriage between a man and a woman for life” and “the secularist view of having sex when you want it but using condoms to prevent disease”.²⁴²

Church schools – The CPA states that: “Christian schools should be encouraged and if appropriate state funded but every effort should be made to ensure a broad curriculum in these schools and that other points of view

are taught.”

The party also believes that “all children should know what Christian worship is and the role it plays in our society”.²⁴³

Prostitution – The CPA promises to “oppose any attempts to relax moral laws such as legalising brothels or legalising prostitution”.²⁴⁴

Gambling – The party proposes that: “The Gambling Act 2005 will be repealed and new controls put on casinos with mandatory warnings having to be placed in all betting shops that gambling can cause serious poverty”.²⁴⁵

Drugs – The CPA has pledged to “take a stricter approach to drug use because of the clear link between drug use and crime”.²⁴⁶

Sunday – The CPA would: “Restore Sunday as a day of rest and family time.” This would involve limiting the number of people that retailers are permitted to employ on a Sunday and ensuring that Government employees are given the day off if they want it.²⁴⁷

More information about legislation and public policy

MEDICAL ETHICS

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008

Liberalising UK law covering the use of embryos and applying to technologies ranging from IVF to animal-human cloning, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Act became law when it received Royal Assent in November 2008. The most controversial elements of the Act included allowing scientists to create animal-human hybrid embryos, permitting the selection of embryos to be born as 'saviour siblings' for a child with a serious medical condition, and abolishing 'the need of a child for a father' requirement in IVF.²⁴⁸ The work on animal-human hybrids was abandoned as a failure a year after the Act was passed.²⁴⁹

GM babies

The HFE Act permitted future regulations allowing scientists to create genetically modified children for women who have mitochondrial disease. The coalition Government introduced these regulations in February 2015, making the UK the only country in the world to legislate for the techniques to create 'disease-free' GM children with three or four parents.²⁵⁰ The procedures are germline modification which will affect future generations in unknown ways. The first licence to create three and four-parent babies was granted by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in March 2017.²⁵¹

Abortion

The present law allows abortion up to 24 weeks of gestation, but the law permits abortion up to birth where the child may have 'a serious handicap'. What constitutes a serious handicap has not been defined. The diagnosis of a comparatively trivial deformity, such as a cleft palate, has even been used as a ground for an abortion.²⁵² Overall in 2015 in Great Britain, 98.1 per cent of the 203,096 legal abortions were carried out for social reasons.²⁵³

Parliamentary consideration of the HFE Bill in 2008 presented the first opportunity in nearly 20 years to significantly amend the law on abortion. Pro-life MPs sought a reduction in the upper gestational time limit for abortion from the current limit of 24 weeks. Sadly, several votes to reduce the limit were all lost. The closest vote, on a reduction to 22 weeks, was lost by 304 to 233. Pro-abortion MPs tabled amendments which would have liberalised the law. These included removing the requirement for two doctors' signatures on abortion forms (creating abortion on demand), allowing nurses to carry out abortions, and permitting women to have drug-induced abortions at home. Lack of time meant that these amendments never reached a vote.²⁵⁴

The coalition Government stated on numerous occasions that sex-selective abortion is illegal in Britain. However, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) – Britain's largest abortion provider – has claimed that the "law is silent on the matter of gender selection."²⁵⁵ *The Daily Telegraph* carried out an investigation in 2012 which

caught two doctors offering abortions to women who said their babies were the 'wrong sex'.²⁵⁶ Despite sufficient evidence for a prosecution, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided not to charge the two doctors, saying that it was not in the public interest.²⁵⁷ Sadly, in February 2015, MPs failed to back an amendment proposed by Conservative MP Fiona Bruce to explicitly clarify that abortion on the grounds of sex alone is illegal in the UK.

In March 2012 the then Health Secretary Andrew Lansley told Parliament that he would consult on new guidelines for abortion providers outside the NHS.²⁵⁸ However, 17 months before the promised consultation eventually began, his new interim guidelines were sent to clinics. These new rules effectively bypassed Parliament. Although the guidance was intended to address the problems of doctors pre-signing forms and sex-selective abortions, it did neither, but instead simply relaxed abortion procedures. The final guidance, released in May 2014, says there is "no legal requirement" for doctors to see women seeking an abortion before approving it. It suggests that nurses could see the patient instead. The guidance also suggests that doctors can reach an opinion by talking to the patient over the phone or via a webcam.²⁵⁹ It amounts to the biggest liberalisation of abortion practice since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed.

Abortion law was devolved to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2016.

Assisted suicide/euthanasia

Euthanasia by acts of commission (e.g. by administering a lethal injection) is illegal in the UK, as is assisting someone to commit suicide. However, pro-euthanasia campaigners have made repeated attempts to change the law in these areas.

In 2015, Rob Marris MP introduced a Private Member's Bill to legalise assisted suicide. The Bill applied to England and Wales. In September 2015 it was defeated in the Commons, by 330 votes to 118.

The Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill was introduced at Holyrood in November 2013. It was rejected by 82 votes to 36 in May 2015.

In June 2014 the UK Supreme Court dismissed an appeal to allow doctors to assist in suicides. Judges ruled 7-2 to uphold an earlier decision by the High Court, saying that it is a matter for the UK Parliament to decide.²⁶⁰

Blood donation

In 2011 the coalition Government removed a longstanding safeguard which prevented blood being donated by men who have ever had sex with other men.²⁶¹ The safeguard had been in place since the 1980s to prevent the risk of HIV contamination. But since 7 November 2011 men whose last sexual contact with another man was more than twelve months ago have been able to donate blood in England, Scotland and Wales. A twelve-month safeguard remains in place because men who have sex with men (MSM) have, as a group, a higher risk of sexually acquired blood-borne viruses.²⁶²

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Same-sex marriage

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, which introduced same-sex 'marriage' in England and Wales, came into force in March 2014.

Religious groups can opt in to conducting same-sex weddings if they wish, but the 2013 Act specifically excludes same-sex weddings within the Church of England.²⁶³ It also states that no church or church minister

can be compelled “by any means” to carry out a same-sex wedding.²⁶⁴

The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced same-sex ‘marriage’ in Scotland, with similar protections for church ministers who disagree with same-sex marriage.

Despite promises made by the Governments at Westminster and Holyrood, the legislation includes inadequate protection for individuals with a conscientious objection to the redefinition of marriage.

Civil partnerships

In 2005 the UK’s Civil Partnership Act came into force, allowing same-sex couples to legally register their relationship. The rights and privileges of marriage and civil partnership are identical. It was seen by many as paving the way for same-sex marriage.

During the passage of the same-sex marriage legislation in 2013 the Government agreed to hold a formal consultation on extending civil partnerships to heterosexual couples. In June 2014 the Government rejected the idea after respondents to the consultation were overwhelmingly opposed.²⁶⁵ A heterosexual couple brought a legal action seeking to force the Government to change the law, but the Court of Appeal ruled against them in February 2017.²⁶⁶

Marriage tax breaks

The Conservatives’ 2010 manifesto gave a commitment to “end the couple penalty for all couples in the tax credit system”. It also stated that marriage would be recognised in the tax system in the next Parliament – but this recognition, in the form of a tax break, was also to apply to civil partnerships.²⁶⁷

In April 2014 MPs voted 279 to 214 in favour of the tax break. Labour’s attempt to force the Government to review the allowance failed in a further House of

Commons vote. The transferable tax allowance, which became available on 6 April 2015, is worth up to £230 in 2017-18 for married couples where both are basic rate taxpayers and one spouse earns less than the personal tax allowance.²⁶⁸

Parental smacking

The Children Act 2004, which applies to England and Wales, restricted the defence of ‘reasonable chastisement’ for parental smacking of children. Under this law, any smack that causes reddening of the skin that is ‘more than transitory’ would be a criminal offence. Attempts by some backbench MPs during the passage of the Bill to ban all smacking failed. In Scotland, smacking is allowed but use of implements, shaking or blows to the head are outlawed.

Adoption

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples in England and Wales. Before the 2002 Act was passed, some 95 per cent of all adoptions were by married couples; the remaining 5 per cent were by single persons.²⁶⁹ The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting and homosexual couples in Scotland.

Legal rights for cohabitees

Currently the law affords married couples benefits and protections which are not available to cohabiting heterosexual couples. In July 2007, the Law Commission published a report advocating new legal rights for cohabitees.²⁷⁰ A subsequent Law Commission report in 2011 sought rights specifically for cohabitants when one dies, recommending that partners who have lived together for five years (or two years where they have a child together) obtain equal rights to those

of a wife or husband.²⁷¹ Neither the Labour Government nor the coalition Government implemented these recommendations.²⁷²

The Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 granted cohabiting couples financial rights that mimic marriage. It allowed cohabiting couples, when they split up, to have equal rights to money and property acquired during the relationship. (The Act does not require a minimum length of cohabitation.) It also gave these rights to homosexual couples who live together.

Transsexualism

The UK's Gender Recognition Act, passed in 2004, provides a raft of legal rights for transsexuals. An adult who has been diagnosed with "gender dysphoria"²⁷³ and has lived for two years as a person of the opposite sex can apply to change their legal sex, including on their birth certificate. The then Government did permit sporting bodies and pension companies to have exemptions from the legislation, but it resisted amendments in Parliament to protect churches and religious organisations from the effects of the Act. In the end church leaders were given partial protections in Regulations from the criminal disclosure offence contained in the Act.

There have been increasing calls to liberalise the Gender Recognition Act. In January 2016 the Women and Equalities Committee released a report calling for people to be allowed to change their legal sex without any need for a medical diagnosis. The Committee also called for the minimum age for changing sex to be reduced from 18 to 16, and for legal recognition for those who self-identify as neither male nor female (known as "non-binary").²⁷⁴

EDUCATION

Home education (England)

In November 2009 the Labour Government published its Children, Schools and Families Bill, which included, among other things, provisions covering home education and sex education (see below). These aspects of the Bill were stripped out to get the Bill through before the 2010 General Election. The home education plans sought to introduce a bureaucratic and invasive monitoring scheme for parents who home-school their children, including allowing officials to question children without their parents being present.

Dame Louise Casey's integration review, published in December 2016, called for greater regulation of home education.

Sex education (England)

Until new proposals are implemented (see below), the law requires state-maintained secondary schools in England to offer sex education, but free schools, academies and primary schools are not required to do so. However, there have been a number of efforts in recent years to press the agenda of statutory sex education for children as young as five. There have also been calls to limit or scrap the right of parents to remove their children from sex education lessons.²⁷⁵

Labour's Children, Schools and Families Bill in 2009-10 would have led to compulsory sex education in primary and secondary schools, as part of a statutory national curriculum for Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, taking control of how sex education is taught out of the hands of local school governors. It would also have removed the right of parents to withdraw their child from sex education when the child reached the age of 15. Draft sex education guidance published alongside

the Bill suggested detailed sex education lessons for children as young as five.²⁷⁶ These plans failed to become law before the 2010 General Election.

In January 2014 Labour supported an amendment to introduce statutory sex education for all children from the age of five and a restriction on the parental right of withdrawal to children aged 14 and under.²⁷⁷ This was defeated by the coalition Government.

The coalition Government backed liberal sex education guidance produced by external groups, including the PSHE Association,²⁷⁸ but successive Conservative Education Secretaries (Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan) resisted calls to compel all primary schools to teach sex education.

In March 2017 the Conservative Government announced plans for a new statutory subject of 'Relationships Education', to apply to all primary schools in England. This has been welcomed across the parties and the enabling legislation already enacted. It will mean teaching young children about "different types of relationships" and could include much of the content of sex education, which has so far not been compulsory in primary schools. The Government says that parents will not have the right to withdraw their children from the classes. A secondary school subject called Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) – covering "intimate relationships" – is also planned, for which some right of withdrawal is expected. Prior to the General Election being called, the Government said it would hold a consultation on the issue in autumn 2017.²⁷⁹

Religious education and school assemblies

The law in England and Wales, which is 'more honoured in the breach than the observance', requires that the main content of religious education in non-denominational

schools must be devoted to the study of Christianity.²⁸⁰ There must also be a daily act of collective worship in schools (this usually takes place as an assembly) and it must be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".²⁸¹ (The law provides an opt-out from participating in the act of worship for teachers and pupils.)

Promoting homosexuality in schools

In 2003 Labour repealed 'Section 28' – the law which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools – for England and Wales. Section 28 was repealed in Scotland in 2000.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN THE UK

Reform of Section 5

The misuse of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 by overzealous police officers and prosecutors led to several instances of Christians being arrested, detained and – in some cases – prosecuted simply for expressing their religious beliefs.

In December 2012 the House of Lords overwhelmingly supported former police Chief Constable Lord Dear's amendment to remove the word "insulting" from the scope of Section 5, voting 150 to 54. In January 2013, the Government agreed to give way.²⁸² The reform officially came into force on 1 February 2014.

IPNAs

Under Clause 1 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill 2013, Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were set to be replaced by Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance (IPNAs). The proposed injunctions would have outlawed "causing nuisance or annoyance to any person" in a public place and were widely criticised as

being too vague, leading to fears that anyone from street preachers to buskers could be caught.²⁸³

In January 2014 the House of Lords voted 306 to 178 to replacing the proposed “nuisance or annoyance” threshold with the safer, longstanding threshold of causing “harassment, alarm or distress”. The amendment – proposed by Lord Dear – was supported by 14 other senior figures from the police and the judiciary. The Government subsequently backed down and agreed to accept the basis of the amendment.²⁸⁴

Counter-extremism strategy

The Government’s counter-extremism strategy goes beyond tackling terrorism and violence in order to address ‘non-violent extremism’, which is described as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.

Concerns are being raised (including by Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights) that this definition is too vague and subjective, potentially catching any person with strong beliefs, no matter how peace-loving or innocuous. There are media reports that a failure to agree a legal definition of ‘extremism’ has caused the continued delay in publishing the Government’s Counter-extremism Bill.²⁸⁵ In the meantime, the Department for Education continues to promote the ‘British values’ agenda, which Ofsted seems to interpret as being mainly about LGBT rights.

‘British values’ in schools – Since 2014 Ofsted inspectors have been carrying out ‘British values’ checks on schools across the education system in England. There have been reports of Ofsted inspectors failing to

understand or respect the ethos of Jewish and Christian schools, where intrusive questions have been asked of children and teachers about sensitive issues including same-sex marriage and transsexualism.

Ofsted inspections of churches – The 2015 Counter-extremism Strategy proposed that out-of-school institutions teaching children would in future have to register with the state. The Government consulted on giving Ofsted legal power to investigate any setting in England that provides instruction to children for more than six to eight hours in any week. The proposals stated that any “extremist” or “undesirable” teaching which is incompatible with ‘British values’ would be prohibited.²⁸⁶

The plans could encompass various forms of church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, church weekends away, some summer camps and even Sunday Schools – if the lessons contribute to a child receiving more than six hours of teaching from the church in a single week. Sanctions could include banning leaders from working with children and an education minister has explained that failure to register would be a criminal offence. Although the consultation closed in January 2016, the Government has not yet published its response.

Extremism Disruption Orders – Plans for Extremism Disruption Orders (EDOs)²⁸⁷ appear to be delayed by the failure to agree a definition of ‘extremism’ for the Counter-extremism Bill (*see above*). EDOs were to be aimed at “harmful activities of extremist individuals who spread hate but do not break laws”.²⁸⁸ While Home Secretary, Theresa May said the measures would cover “extremism of all sorts”.²⁸⁹ ‘Banning orders’ were also proposed to close down groups promoting ‘extremism’.²⁹⁰

Equality Oath – In a report into integration issued in December 2016, civil servant Dame Louise Casey recommended that there should be a ‘British values’ oath for public office holders, including civil servants, school governors, councillors etc. Communities Secretary Sajid Javid supported the idea, suggesting requiring a commitment to ‘equality’.²⁹¹ Such an oath could exclude Christians from public office.

Prevent – The Prevent strategy was first introduced under Labour after the July 2005 London bombings. After the coalition Government reviewed the strategy in 2011, it began to focus more on non-violent extremists. As an anti-radicalisation programme intended to stop people being drawn into terrorism, the Prevent strategy has been controversial. It has been linked to well-publicised incidents of over-reaction. In 2017, Conservative MP Lucy Allan said children who attend protests against badger culling risk being referred to Prevent.²⁹² However, there are also reports of the scheme operating successfully, and the Government says it is working.

Incitement to religious hatred law

After several earlier attempts, the Labour Government finally succeeded in passing an incitement to religious hatred offence in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. Many prominent lawyers, politicians and academics rightly feared that the offence, as originally worded, threatened free speech. However, after an extensive campaign, vital safeguards were introduced to protect, among other things, religious debate and evangelism. As amended, the law (which has a maximum seven-year prison sentence) only covers threatening words or behaviour intended to stir up hatred, and there is an explicit protection for free speech and

evangelism. The Government opposed these safeguards, which were introduced by the House of Lords, and said it would remove them in the Commons. However, in only the second Commons defeat for Labour since it had come to power in 1997, MPs voted in January 2006 to keep the safeguards.

‘Incitement to homophobic hatred’ law

An ‘incitement to homophobic hatred’ offence was passed in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008. The offence outlaws any words or behaviour which are threatening and intended to stir up hatred on grounds of sexual orientation, and it carries a maximum seven-year prison sentence. The then Labour Government drew up the offence along the same lines as the law against inciting religious hatred as amended by the Commons, but did not include an explicit free speech protection like that in the religious hatred law.

In response the late Lord Waddington, a former Home Secretary, tabled a cross-party amendment in the House of Lords to protect free speech. After the Labour Government was defeated in four separate votes in the Lords, ministers finally conceded and brought the new incitement law into force with the free speech shield in March 2010.

Aggravated offences and ‘hate crime’

Currently, certain racially and religiously aggravated crimes automatically carry a tougher penalty in English law. Although crimes motivated by hostility to sexual orientation and transsexualism can also receive a more serious sentence, there are moves to elevate such offences to the same category as religion and race.

Employment laws

In 2003 the Labour Government introduced special employment rights for homosexuals,

having agreed to an EU Directive which provided for legislation in this area. After a long campaign by church schools, churches and Christian organisations, the then Government gave an exemption in the UK laws so that such bodies are not forced to employ practising homosexuals. The 2004 *Amicus* case in the High Court found that the UK Government had properly implemented the EU Directive.²⁹³

Nevertheless, the legislation makes it more difficult for church schools, churches and Christian organisations to refuse to employ staff whose conduct does not match their Christian profession. In 2007 the Diocese of Hereford lost at an employment tribunal as a result of turning down a candidate for a youth worker role because of his homosexual lifestyle. The case was lost because of procedural issues and confusion over C of E teaching in a policy document.

Also in 2003, the Government introduced similar regulations covering 'religion or belief', removing the absolute discretion of churches to employ believers in whatever posts they see fit. In theory the regulations give employment protection for religious believers in secular workplaces, but the greatest concern has been the potential to restrict the freedom of Christian organisations to employ believers.

The Labour Government's Equality Bill debated by Parliament in 2009-10 sought to narrow the religious protections in these employment laws (see Equality Act 2010 below).

Equality Act 2006

The Equality Act made it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities and services. It contains some exceptions for churches and religious organisations, but does not adequately

protect the rights of conscience of individuals in business. Initially the Bill included religious harassment provisions but in November 2005 the House of Lords removed these because of concerns about their implications for free speech and religious liberty. The Equality Act also established the Equality and Human Rights Commission and allowed ministers to introduce the Sexual Orientation Regulations.

Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007 (SORs)

The Labour Government introduced its controversial Sexual Orientation Regulations in April 2007. The SORs outlaw discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services. Although religious exemptions were included to protect the core activities of churches, for example, it is now unlawful in some circumstances for Christians to act according to their religious belief that homosexual practice is morally wrong. The SORs have been used to fine Christian owners of a bed and breakfast for operating a 'married couples only' policy for double rooms. The 2006 Northern Ireland SORs have led to the court case against Ashers Baking Company for declining to produce a cake with the slogan 'Support Gay Marriage'. The SORs have also forced all the Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England to either close or secularise.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Bill debated by Parliament in 2009-10 sought to consolidate all discrimination laws, including the SORs, into a single Act. Yet the Bill as introduced would have narrowed the employment freedom of churches and religious organisations even further than the 2003 employment laws (see above). The House of Lords voted three times against any narrowing of the 2003 laws and the Labour Government gave way.

Lobbying Act 2014

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 includes major changes to electoral law. These changes in Part 2 of the Act do not target professional lobbyists but instead hinder the work of voluntary groups and grassroots organisations.

The Act introduces a spending limit of £9,750 per constituency for third-party campaigning in the months leading up to a General Election. It also includes staff costs within spending caps, whereas staff costs are excluded for political parties.

During the passage of the Bill, some 130 groups – including The Christian Institute – supported the Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement. The pressure generated by the campaign led to various Government concessions in the Bill, though not as far-reaching as changes sought by the Commission.

PUBLIC MORALITY

Blasphemy laws

The laws of blasphemy and blasphemous libel were repealed by the Government as part of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. (In theory, a blasphemy law still exists in Scotland.²⁹⁴)

Drugs

The law categorises illegal drugs as either class A, B or C according to their harmfulness. The classification determines the criminal penalties for possession and supply. The most harmful drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, are class A. Class B includes cannabis and speed (amphetamines) and class C includes sleeping pills.

In November 2003 Parliament approved the reclassification of cannabis from a class B

drug to a class C drug by passing the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2003. This applied to the whole of the UK, and came into force in 2004. However, in response to overwhelming evidence of cannabis damaging mental health, the drug was restored to class B in 2009.

There is a concerted campaign underway which seeks to dismantle the whole of the UK's drugs legislation. Recent attention has focused on campaigns to legalise cannabis for 'medicinal use' by prescription. This is very different from making available medicines derived from cannabis which are first subject to rigorous tests and trials like any other medical treatment.

The Psychoactive Substances Act came into force in May 2016. It prohibits so-called 'legal highs', which mimic the effects of banned substances such as cannabis and heroin. Also known as psychoactive substances, they were linked to 204 deaths in 2015.²⁹⁵

Gambling

In 2005 the Government passed the new Gambling Act. The Act swept away layers of sensible restrictions which, for years, had controlled the worst excesses of casinos, betting shops and slot machines. It formally legalised 'virtual casino' machines in betting shops and elsewhere. These machines, known as fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs), have been called the 'crack cocaine' of gambling. The Act also greatly reduced restrictions on new casinos opening, repealed the 24-hour membership requirement and lifted the general ban on all gambling advertising. In addition, slot machines with unlimited stakes and prizes were allowed for the first time.

Licences were granted for 16 huge new casinos – with the smallest of them considerably bigger than most which existed

before the Act. When PM, Gordon Brown only rejected plans for the one super casino allowed by the legislation.²⁹⁶

In December 2013, MPs voted 322 to 231 in favour of the Categories of Gaming Machine (Amendment) Regulations 2014 to increase stakes and prizes for slot machines. These Regulations, passed by the coalition Government, kept the maximum stake for FOBTs at £100. Labour and others have been campaigning for this to be significantly reduced.²⁹⁷ FOBTs allow gamblers to stake up to £18,000 an hour on virtual versions of casino games like blackjack and roulette.

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved power over the number of FOBTs that are allowed per betting premises licence – but only for future licences. The Wales Act 2017 gives equivalent power to the Welsh Assembly.²⁹⁸

Prostitution

In 2004 the Labour Government published a consultation paper for England and Wales on prostitution which proposed liberalising the law, including introducing ‘tolerance zones’.²⁹⁹ It went on to announce plans to allow ‘mini-brothels’, so that two or three prostitutes could work together on the same premises.³⁰⁰ However, these plans were never taken forward.

Five years later the Policing and Crime Act 2009 moved in the opposite direction – tightening the law on prostitution by introducing a ‘strict liability’ offence of paying for sex with someone who has been exploited for gain. Strict liability means that it does not matter whether the purchaser knew or had tried to find out whether the prostitute was exploited or not – the fact that exploitation had taken place is sufficient to make using the prostitute an offence.

Sunday trading

Sunday trading was legalised in England and

Wales in 1994, when the Sunday Trading Act allowed six hours of unregulated trading every Sunday for large stores.

In 2015-16, the Government sought to further liberalise the law by giving local authorities or mayors the power to extend Sunday trading hours in their area. In March 2016 the proposed legislation was defeated by 317 votes to 286 in the Commons following cross-party opposition.

Future deregulation would further undermine Sunday as a day of rest. It would also put further pressure on employees to work on Sundays. Employee protections in the legislation have proved to be weak. The day of rest was instituted by God at creation (Genesis 2:2) and affirmed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). It is of value to all men.

THE CONSTITUTION

The constitutional settlement in Britain provides that Britain is not a secular state. The [Protestant Reformed] Christian nature of the constitution is evident not only in the monarch’s coronation oath, but also in the establishment of the Church of England.

Succession to the Crown Act

The coalition Government passed the Succession to the Crown Act in 2013, with the support of the Opposition. Section 2 of the Act removes the bar to the heir to the throne marrying a Roman Catholic.³⁰¹ Some MPs and Peers raised concerns that such a change could spark a constitutional crisis in years to come, which may result in the disestablishment of the Church of England.³⁰² Amendments to make clear that the monarch must be in communion with the established church were rejected by the Government. The Act came into force on 26 March 2015.

Council prayers

In February 2012 a High Court judge ruled that local councils had no lawful power to hold prayers during official business.

In response, then Communities Secretary Sir Eric Pickles MP fast-tracked the commencement of new laws which overtook the Court's ruling. The Localism Act restored the right of councils to hold prayers as part of their formal meetings. The later Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 was supported by the coalition Government and the Opposition and provided the legal right for smaller councils not covered by the Localism Act to hold prayers at the start of their meetings. It was taken through Parliament as a Private Member's Bill.

House of Lords

Clearly there is no uniquely biblical model for how a second chamber should be organised.

Yet in recent years it has been the House of Lords, not the Commons, which has been a more effective protector of religious liberties. Many Christians will be concerned at any curtailment of the role of the House of Lords.

Christians should be particularly concerned about any 'party list' system which prevents the public from voting for a particular candidate and concentrates power in the hands of the political parties. Many Christians may want to vote for a person whose views on moral issues are not the same as party policy, but such a system would compel them to vote for the party as a whole. Also Christians often tell the Institute they are disappointed that their MP feels obliged to follow the party whip; but in a 'party list' system of proportional representation, a political representative is entirely dependent on the party for his or her position and such pressure can only grow.

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Election Briefing 2017

AN ANALYSIS OF PARTY POLICIES ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO CHRISTIANS

The General Election takes place on 8 June 2017.

As a Christian citizen, you have the opportunity to vote. Voting is a serious responsibility. This briefing aims to inform Christians before they vote. It contains an in-depth analysis of party policies on key issues of concern to Christians.

The Christian Institute is a registered charity and we cannot tell you how to vote. What we can do in this briefing is address:

- why should you vote?
- biblical priorities
- Brexit
- issues on the horizon
- two key factors in voting
- speaking to candidates
- party policies
- key background information on legislation and public policy.



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