





# Election Briefing 2015



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CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

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# Introduction

## Election 2015

As Christian citizens, we should think carefully about how we vote in the General Election on 7 May 2015.

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
- ▶ two key factors in voting
- ▶ the crucial issue of religious liberty
- ▶ why this particular election is perplexing for biblical Christians
- ▶ 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

## Key resources



### Voting records of all MPs

See [christian.org.uk/election](http://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 90 MPs who are standing down.<sup>1</sup> Obviously you will want to ask the views of the other candidates in your constituency.



### Candidate QuestionCards

Download at [christian.org.uk/election](http://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 – telephone 0191 281 5664.



### This Election Briefing

Further copies can be downloaded from our website [christian.org.uk/election](http://christian.org.uk/election) or ordered by calling our office – telephone 0191 281 5664.

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).<sup>2</sup> 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.

In our democracy we all have the legal right to vote. We elect Members of Parliament and so ultimately the Government. We help choose Caesar. So voting is a serious responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

This year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II. Huge numbers of our countrymen died during that war defending freedom, including the right to have an elected government. They secured for us the privilege of being able to vote, which is still effectively denied to billions of people around the world. We have the responsibility to use it well.

Multi-party democratic elections with a free press are relatively unusual both historically and globally. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2014 has found that fewer than 13 per cent of the world's population live in a full democracy (see table).<sup>4</sup>

As we saw with same-sex marriage, Christians in Britain today live in a collapsing culture where God's laws are openly flouted. To some extent all of the main parties are part of that moral decline. That doesn't make the choice of who to vote for very easy, but it's

## Democracy Index 2014

Type of regime	% of world population
Full democracies	12.5
Flawed democracies	35.5
Hybrid regimes	14.4
Authoritarian regimes	37.6

certainly a whole lot easier than living in an authoritarian regime like Zimbabwe or Burma.

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"<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

The economy is a major issue being discussed during the election campaign. All the main party leaders agree that the deficit has to be addressed. It is plainly wrong if a government accumulates massive public debt without any intention of repaying it. This is stealing from future generations. But Christians can legitimately disagree about *how* to tackle the deficit, because in order to make a judgment *many facts need to be assessed*.

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.

In their 2015 public letter 'Who is my

neighbour?' the Church of England's House of Bishops has drawn attention to a wide range of political issues, including European integration, debt, poverty, Trident and the environment. No doubt biblical teaching must be applied to all such matters, whether or not you reach their precise conclusions. It is welcome that the report gives arguments against euthanasia. But nothing is said about abortion, destructive experiments on embryos or same-sex marriage. The Roman Catholic Bishops didn't make that mistake and, unlike their Anglican counterparts, they also insisted that candidates must be questioned directly on where they stand on religious liberty.<sup>7</sup>

## Two key factors in voting: candidates and parties

For the European elections, candidates are ranked in order of preference by their parties. Electors then vote for the party. This is a particular form of proportional representation which makes it harder to vote for individual candidates.



For the Westminster elections it is very different. In the 'first past the post' system 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. 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.

The key to identifying your candidates is to be sure what parliamentary area (constituency) you live in. This website is helpful:

**[yournextmp.com](http://yournextmp.com)**

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.<sup>8</sup>

## **The crucial issue of religious liberty**

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.

A country cannot really be free unless there is freedom of religion – liberty not only to believe certain things in your head, but to live out your faith in public. The importance attached to religious liberty has a long history in Britain. The year 2015 marks the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Magna Carta, which is widely viewed as paving the way for modern democracy. How many people today realise that the first clause of Magna Carta sought to protect the legal freedom of the English Church?

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 to the State. Government by itself cannot solve all our problems or even come remotely close.

Biblical Christians tend to be alarmed at the Scottish Parliament's Named Person scheme, which appoints a state guardian for every child in Scotland regardless of whether they need one. The named person will be able to go over the heads of parents to directly advise children. A ban on parental smacking, debated many times by the Welsh Assembly in recent years, could end up criminalising loving parents.

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

Evangelicals are also concerned that Conservative plans to introduce 'Extremism Disruption Orders' could end up severely damaging free speech. They have already

seen the impact of Nicky Morgan's '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 being asked very intrusive questions. One Christian school has been closed. Meanwhile none of the infamous Trojan Horse schools have been closed.

Respected commentator Charles Moore warned in March 2015: "Socially conservative moral views are now teetering on the edge of criminality, and are over the edge of disapproval by those who run modern Britain."<sup>9</sup>

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 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.

## **Why this particular election is perplexing for biblical Christians**

Christians were deeply grieved at the passing of the same-sex marriage legislation, in a way which goes far beyond the general disillusionment with politicians in Britain today.

Marriage is intended by God to be the bedrock of our society. It is in the married family that children *and adults* learn to prefer the needs of others to their own. It is in the permanent relationship of marriage that children learn right from wrong and experience the stability of having parents who love each other just as much as they love them. It is in marriage that there is the union of the sexes and that children are raised with male and

female role models in the image of God.

The breakdown of the family has led to manifold damaging social consequences in our society. The attack on marriage began long before same-sex marriage, yet for Parliament to legislate a lie into law is a very grave step to take. Marriage predates Parliament and even the nation state. It is *the* most basic institution of society.

So with same-sex marriage how wrong can you be? It uses man-made law to usurp God's good design for mankind.

Many people, Christians and non-Christians, believe there has been a profound breach of trust over redefining marriage. They will not forget this. Vernon Bogdanor, the respected Professor of Government, recently highlighted same-sex marriage as one of the three main reasons why people feel "unrepresented" at Westminster.<sup>10</sup>

The redefinition of marriage is plainly contrary to the Bible. But it was also introduced in a deceitful way. The political leaders hid their true intentions at the last election: for example, none of the three main parties at Westminster included same-sex marriage in their manifesto in 2010. The three party leaders went on to redefine marriage as quickly as possible, hoping it would be forgotten by 7 May 2015.

A majority of Conservative backbenchers voted against same-sex marriage. But it is also true that three days before the election David Cameron specifically denied that he planned to introduce same-sex marriage in an interview with Sky News.<sup>11</sup>

So there has been a huge breach of trust. In 2010 the political parties knowingly sold Christians a false prospectus. Christians are perplexed by all of this.

Some Christians may quietly think there is now no point in voting at all, that politicians will not listen to them in future. But we must remember the Bible's teaching on government and common grace. God has ordained the

governing authorities in every country – as Romans 13 makes clear – whether rulers are Christian or not. 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 disagreed with us about redefining marriage can still strongly agree that assisted suicide or liberalising cannabis laws are wrong. 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 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. It is not only right but essential that Christians in Britain engage in the General Election by voting and by witnessing to the truth.

## 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: [yournextmp.com](http://yournextmp.com)

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 The Christian Institute's website – [christian.org.uk/election](http://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 three main political parties at Westminster – the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats. We also include some of the known policies of those parties which have significant representation at national or European level – the SNP, Plaid Cymru, UKIP and the Greens. 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 links to the 2015 General Election manifestos of the parties covered in this publication, see [christian.org.uk/election](http://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 Coalition's record in Government 2010-2015

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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 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.

Though it was supposed to be a free vote for Government MPs, there were reports of undue pressure put on Conservative MPs.<sup>12</sup> More Conservatives voted against same-sex marriage than for it at Second Reading. The Liberal Democrats allowed their MPs a free vote.<sup>13</sup> Four Lib Dem MPs voted against the Bill at Second Reading. In the House of Lords, the Government conspired with the Opposition frontbench (Labour) to manipulate the Parliamentary timetable and rush the legislation through.<sup>14</sup>

The Government allowed a free vote on amendments seeking to protect religious liberty and freedom of speech, but these were all rejected by MPs.

David Cameron has described same-sex marriage as one of his proudest achievements and Nick Clegg referred to the first same-sex weddings as a "momentous occasion".<sup>15</sup> David Cameron wants to export same-sex marriage around the world and has said that those

countries receiving British aid should respect gay rights.<sup>16</sup>

Although having originally said religious organisations would be exempt from the legislation,<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

**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 opposite-sex couples.<sup>19</sup> A Government source said that David Cameron thinks such a move would 'undermine marriage',<sup>20</sup> though it remains Liberal Democrat policy to support heterosexual civil partnerships.<sup>21</sup>

**Marriage allowance** – The Government introduced a tax break for married couples worth around £200 a year from April 2015.



**Prime Minister David Cameron (Conservative) and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrat) outside 10 Downing Street after forming a coalition Government in May 2010.**

Despite describing the marriage tax break measure as “patronising drivel” before entering into coalition, the Lib Dems agreed not to block its introduction. However, the Lib Dems say the tax break will penalise unmarried couples and are committed to abolishing it.<sup>22</sup> The Prime Minister has said he wants to see the marriage tax break “expanded” should he remain in power.<sup>23</sup>

**Legal rights for cohabiters** – The Government declined to introduce Law Commission proposals for new legal rights for couples who cohabit.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

**Parenting law** – In March 2014, Government sources briefed the national press on a proposal to criminalise deliberate harm to a child’s “physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development”.<sup>26</sup> However, many warned that the plan was wide open to misuse and in response the Government’s Serious Crime Act simply modernised the existing child cruelty offence without broadening its scope.<sup>27</sup>

**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.<sup>28</sup>

In February 2015, Government MPs were allowed a free vote on Fiona Bruce's amendment to explicitly outlaw sex-selective abortion.<sup>29</sup> The amendment was defeated by 292 votes to 201.

**GM babies** – The Coalition passed regulations legalising genetically modified babies with three or four parents, making Britain the only country in the world to permit the practice.<sup>30</sup>

**Reform of Section 5** – Following a long campaign spearheaded by The Christian Institute, the Government accepted a reform of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 so that it no longer catches “insulting” words or behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

**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.<sup>32</sup>

**Lobbying Act** – In January 2014 the Coalition passed a law restricting the legitimate campaigning activities of charities and other organisations during elections. 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.<sup>33</sup>

**Freedom of speech at universities** – To accompany the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act the Government issued draft guidance in December 2014 which required onerous checks on outside speakers at all university societies, which would include Christian Unions.<sup>34</sup> The final guidance dropped the section about external speakers at universities. This followed press reports of serious divisions among Government ministers on this issue, with David

Cameron supporting the original plans but Nick Clegg opposing them on free speech grounds.<sup>35</sup>

**Sex education** – The coalition Government has backed liberal sex education guidance produced by outside groups,<sup>36</sup> but the two Conservative Education Secretaries have refused to compel all primary schools in England to teach sex education.

**British values** – In 2014 the Government introduced regulations compelling all schools in England to “actively promote” British values. The Government issued guidance which makes clear that schools are not expected to promote same-sex marriage or alternative lifestyles, nor must church schools promote other faiths.<sup>37</sup> However, Ofsted has been using the rules to ask intrusive questions of pupils and has failed to respect the ethos of Christian and Jewish schools.<sup>38</sup> The Government has not reined in Ofsted.

**Education** – Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced in 2014 that schools would be given £2 million to tackle homophobic bullying.<sup>39</sup> A Government report suggested that children as young as four or five should be taught ‘LGBT issues’.<sup>40</sup> Nicky Morgan also passed regulations banning state funding for nurseries that support creationism, suggesting that such people have “extremist” views.<sup>41</sup> The Government has not closed down any school connected to the notorious Trojan Horse scandal involving some Muslims in Birmingham, but the Education Secretary has closed a Christian school in Durham for failing a ‘British values’ inspection.

**Drugs** – The Home Office commissioned an international research project on drugs, which was published in October 2014.<sup>42</sup> In response, Downing Street resisted changing the law and said a radical change in drugs policy

would “send an incredibly dangerous message to young people”. The Liberal Democrats welcomed the report, seeing it as evidence in favour of decriminalisation.<sup>43</sup>

**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.<sup>44</sup> Stakes and prizes for fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) were left untouched, despite calls for them to be reduced.<sup>45</sup>

**Alcohol** – In 2014 the Government introduced a ban on ‘below cost’ selling of alcohol in England and Wales. It says that the ban prevents businesses from selling alcohol at “heavily discounted prices and aims to reduce excessive alcohol consumption”.<sup>46</sup> The Coalition backtracked on an earlier plan to introduce a stricter minimum unit pricing policy in the face of opposition from the drinks industry.<sup>47</sup>

**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.<sup>48</sup>

**Constitution** – The Succession to the Crown Act 2013 changed the law relating to royal succession, allowing a future monarch to marry a Roman Catholic.<sup>49</sup>

**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.<sup>50</sup>

**House of Lords** – While in Government the Liberal Democrats sought to reform the House of Lords, making it an elected chamber with the total number of Peers halved to 450, but these plans were blocked by the Prime Minister following a rebellion by backbench Conservatives.<sup>51</sup>

**‘Alternative vote’ (AV)** – A UK-wide referendum was held in May 2011 on replacing the ‘first past the post’ voting system with the ‘alternative vote’ system. This was sought by the Lib Dems as part of the Coalition Agreement. However, 68 per cent of the population rejected the proposal; 32 per cent supported it.<sup>52</sup>



## Conservative Party Policies

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**Same-sex marriage** – The Conservatives' 2015 manifesto says: "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".<sup>52a</sup>

### Abortion

- The Conservatives allowed a free vote on Fiona Bruce's amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion, but David Cameron spoke out against her proposal.<sup>53</sup>
- Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said in 2012 that he favoured a 12-week abortion limit. David Cameron and Theresa May also said they would support lowering the limit from the current level of 24 weeks, but the Prime Minister emphasised that the Government has "no plans" to introduce a change.<sup>54</sup>

### Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008

*Abortion* – Conservative MPs had a free vote on abortion. David Cameron voted to lower the abortion time limit to 20 weeks.<sup>55</sup>

*Hybrid embryos* – Conservatives were allowed a free vote on animal-human hybrid embryos. David Cameron voted in favour.<sup>56</sup>

*Saviour siblings* – Conservatives were allowed a free vote on 'saviour siblings'.<sup>57</sup> David Cameron did not vote.

*Fatherhood* – Conservatives had a free vote, though spokesmen stated that children conceived through IVF needed a male role model.<sup>58</sup> David Cameron voted for keeping the 'need for a father' requirement.

**Assisted suicide** – David Cameron has repeatedly stated he is against legalising assisted suicide, saying he's worried that vulnerable people would be "unfairly pressurised", although he also stressed that the Conservatives would have a free vote.<sup>59</sup>

**Extremism** – The Conservative manifesto includes plans for new Extremism Disruption Orders (EDOs).<sup>59a</sup> It is expected these orders would be triggered by individuals who are not breaking current laws but 'spread, incite, promote or justify hatred', including on the grounds of religion, sexual orientation and/or transgender identity. An order would be issued by a court on the 'balance of probabilities', the civil standard of proof.<sup>60</sup> The party's 2015 manifesto also proposes banning orders for "extremist organisations" which "foment hate" and says "we will take further measures to ensure colleges and universities do not give a platform to extremist speakers."<sup>61</sup>

**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.<sup>62</sup>

**'Incitement to homophobic hatred'** – The Tories allowed a free vote on the issue, but



**Prime Minister David Cameron**

David Cameron and his 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** – The Conservatives' 2015 manifesto says: "We will review the legislation governing hate crimes, including the case for extending the scope of the law to cover crimes committed against people on the basis of disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity."<sup>62a</sup>

**Equality Bill 2006** – In the 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)**  
– David Cameron and a third of Conservative

MPs at the time voted for the SORs, saying that Roman Catholic adoption agencies would have to comply with the law.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup>

**Free schools** – David Cameron has pledged to open at least 500 new free schools if the Tories win the election.<sup>65</sup> However, following recent controversial inspections of Christian free schools, it is not clear to what extent Ofsted will permit such schools to operate with a Christian ethos.

**Smacking** – The Justice Secretary Chris Grayling has said he believes physical punishment is sometimes necessary,<sup>66</sup> and David Cameron is said to support the status quo, which allows parental smacking.<sup>67</sup> The Conservative members of the Welsh Assembly have been given a free vote on the issue.

**Persecution of Christians** – David Cameron has said that the British Government should stand up for Christians, who "are now the most persecuted religion around the world".<sup>68</sup>

**Drugs** – In October 2014 the Prime Minister said: "I don't believe in decriminalising drugs that are illegal today."<sup>69</sup> He commented that it would send the wrong message to children. Home Secretary Theresa May also opposes the liberalisation of drugs policy.<sup>70</sup>

**Prostitution** – In the Commons, the Conservatives wanted to remove the 'strict liability' offence proposed in the Policing and Crime Bill 2009 which was designed to



strengthen the law against prostitution.<sup>71</sup> This would have greatly weakened the offence. However, the party did not in the end vote against the new law in the House of Lords. In 2010 Cameron said that decriminalisation of prostitution-related offences should be explored but no subsequent action has been taken by the Government on the issue.<sup>72</sup>

**Gambling** – The Conservatives did not in the end oppose the Gambling Act 2005. David Cameron initially supported Labour Government plans for one super casino but the party then distanced itself from proposals to site the casino in Manchester, giving its Peers a free vote on that issue.<sup>73</sup>

**Pornography** – The party’s manifesto says it will introduce age-verification checks on pornographic websites.<sup>74</sup>

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.

**Divorce** – The Scottish Conservatives opposed the quicker divorce measures contained in the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006.<sup>75</sup>

**Adoption in Scotland** – The then Scottish Conservative leader Annabel Goldie supported the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, which extended joint adoption to homosexual couples.<sup>76</sup> The Conservative frontbench spokesman opposed amendments to stop homosexual adoption, although it was a free vote for the party’s MSPs. He supported giving religious adoption agencies an exemption from laws requiring them to consider homosexuals as adopters.<sup>77</sup>

**Named Person** – The Scottish Conservatives’ spokesman for young people has spoken out against the Named Person scheme, saying that it amounts to a “completely unacceptable intrusion into family life.”<sup>78</sup>

**Organ donation** – The Prime Minister recently reaffirmed his opposition to a presumed consent system for organ donation.<sup>79</sup>

**Blasphemy laws** – The Conservatives regarded repeal of the blasphemy law in England and Wales as a matter of conscience and allowed a free vote.<sup>80</sup>

**Sunday trading** – In 2012 the coalition Government extended Sunday trading hours during the Olympics and Paralympics.<sup>81</sup> At the time, it was reported that a number of senior Conservatives were open to the possibility of permanently relaxing Sunday trading laws, though this has not taken place.<sup>82</sup>

**Sharia** – Home Secretary Theresa May has promised that a future Conservative government would commission an independent review of the operation of Sharia courts in England and Wales.<sup>83</sup>

**Constitution** – The Conservatives have promised to repeal the Human Rights Act and introduce a new British Bill of Rights.<sup>84</sup>

**House of Lords** – The 2015 manifesto says: “We will ensure that the House of Lords fulfils its valuable role as a chamber of legislative scrutiny and revision. While we still see a strong case for introducing an elected element into our second chamber, this is not a priority in the next Parliament.”<sup>84a</sup>





## Liberal Democrat Party Policies

### Drugs

The Liberal Democrats have consistently called for a radical reform of the UK's drugs laws and they have announced the most far-reaching liberalising measures put forward by a major political party.<sup>85</sup> The party wants to end the use of imprisonment as a punishment for personal possession of illegal drugs of any class.<sup>86</sup> Instead, those arrested with drugs for personal use would be diverted to treatment and education. The party says the supply of illegal drugs would continue to attract severe penalties and would be recognised as a serious offence.<sup>87</sup>

*Cannabis* – If elected, the Lib Dems would like to “consider potential frameworks for a strictly controlled and regulated cannabis market with tight controls on quality and strength.”<sup>88</sup>

*Heroin* – The party has previously proposed giving heroin to addicts as a way to cut crime<sup>89</sup> and supports the decriminalisation of heroin use.<sup>90</sup>

### Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

– Liberal Democrats were allowed to vote according to their conscience on lowering the time limit for **abortion** from 24 weeks. Leader Nick Clegg voted against any reduction.

MPs were allowed a free vote on the creation of animal-human embryos, ‘saviour siblings’ and scrapping the ‘need for a father’ requirement

for IVF children. Nick Clegg voted in favour of animal-human embryos and ‘saviour siblings’, and also supported the repeal of the ‘need for a father’ requirement.

**Assisted suicide** – The party supports the legalisation of assisted suicide. In 2004 the Liberal Democrats passed a conference motion that ‘medically assisted dying’ should be legalised and this position was reaffirmed by a motion at the 2012 conference which said the party should press for legislation on assisted suicide.<sup>91</sup> Nick Clegg has said he personally opposes a change in the law.<sup>92</sup> The coalition Government gave its Peers a free vote on Lord Falconer’s Bill in July 2014.

**Free speech** – The party’s 2015 manifesto promises to introduce a Freedoms Act to: “Protect free speech by ensuring insulting words, jokes, and non-intentional acts, are not treated as criminal.”<sup>92a</sup> The Spring Conference in 2015 reaffirmed the Liberal Democrats’ belief that people have the right to offend others: “There is no place for restrictions on acts of blasphemy in law or by intimidation leading to self-censorship.”<sup>93</sup>

**Extremism orders** – The Liberal Democrats opposed the Home Secretary’s “push to introduce ‘banning orders’ which would give her the power to put ASBO-style constraints on people who say unpleasant but lawful things.”<sup>94</sup>

**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”<sup>95</sup>

**‘Incitement to homophobic hatred’** – When Lord Waddington’s free speech clause was debated as part of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill 2008, the Liberal Democrats forced a vote in the House of Commons because they were so strongly opposed to the amendment.<sup>96</sup> However, by November 2009 they had decided to give Peers a free vote on the issue.<sup>97</sup> Most Lib Dem Peers voted against the free speech clause.

The Lib Dems want to include **hate crimes** against homosexual, bisexual and transsexual people in a category of aggravated offences so that stronger sentences can be given.<sup>98</sup>

**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.<sup>99</sup>

**SORs** – The Lib Dems supported the Labour Government in voting for the SORs in 2007,<sup>100</sup> 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 and also argued that religion should not be included as a protected characteristic in the public sector equality duty.<sup>101</sup>

The Lib Dems plan to develop a statutory code of practice for the **Public Sector Equality Duty**. They would also like private companies

receiving public funds to be required to publish equality data and want to establish a public sector-wide procurement policy to promote equality in the workplace.<sup>102</sup>

The Liberal Democrats’ 2014 equalities document pledges that the party will form an international strategy in order to promote and improve ‘LGBT+’ rights worldwide.<sup>103</sup>

**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.<sup>104</sup>

**Marriage** – The party supports the introduction of non-religious marriage in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – particularly favouring legal recognition for humanist ceremonies, as has been done in Scotland.<sup>105</sup>

**Divorce** – The Scottish Lib Dems pushed through measures to allow quicker divorce in the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 as coalition partners with Labour.

In 2002 the Lib Dems backed **adoption by homosexual couples** in England and Wales, and passed equivalent Scottish legislation in 2007 when coalition partners in the Scottish Executive.

The Liberal Democrats also strongly supported 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,<sup>106</sup> which has been interpreted to mean banning parental smacking. However, Nick Clegg has said he does not support banning smacking and when the issue arose in 2008 the Lib Dems gave their MPs



**Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats**

a free vote.<sup>107</sup> The Liberal Democrats have been seeking to ban smacking in Wales.<sup>108</sup>

**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”.<sup>109</sup>

**Schools** – The Lib Dem’s 2015 manifesto says the party will: “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.”<sup>109a</sup>

**Sex education** – It has long been the policy of the Liberal Democrats to have statutory sex education in primary schools. The party would like to guarantee compulsory sex education in all state schools, including academies and free schools, from the age of seven.<sup>110</sup>

**Collective worship** – At their 2014 Autumn Conference, the party adopted a new policy calling for the repeal of the legal requirement for collective worship at all state-funded schools.<sup>111</sup>

**State-funded Christian schools** – The party’s 2015 manifesto says that every church school should lose its freedom to choose Christian staff, apart from in the case of RE, and to select

pupils on the basis that they agree with the school's ethos.<sup>112</sup>

Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg has in the past called for all church schools to teach that homosexuality is "normal and harmless".<sup>113</sup> Schools minister David Laws has said it is unacceptable for them to teach that homosexuality is morally wrong.<sup>114</sup>

**Prostitution** – The 2014 Autumn Conference reiterated that the decriminalisation of prostitution has been Liberal Democrat policy since the 1994 publication of their policy paper *Confronting Prostitution*.<sup>115</sup>

**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".<sup>116</sup> They have backed calls for a £2 maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs). The Lib Dems' culture spokesman has said there is "no place for high stakes, high risk casino gambling on the high street".<sup>117</sup>

**Pornography** – At the 2013 conference, a motion for an automatic block on internet pornography was rejected, with one speaker arguing it was "counter to all liberal instincts".<sup>118</sup>

**Alcohol** – The party's 2015 manifesto pledges to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol.<sup>118a</sup>

**Blood donation** – The change to the National Blood Service public safety policy of banning men who have ever had sex with men from giving blood was welcomed by the Liberal Democrats. Now the party intends to ask the Advisory Committee on Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs to review the rules around blood donation for homosexual men to see if they can be relaxed further.<sup>119</sup>

**Organ donation** – All five of the Lib Dem Welsh Assembly members voted in favour of an opt-out system for Wales,<sup>120</sup> meaning that people's organs can automatically be used for transplants after their death unless the person has specifically indicated that they do not wish to be a donor.

**Sunday trading** – When the coalition Government extended Sunday trading hours for the Olympics, the Lib Dems said they would block any permanent change.<sup>121</sup>

**Constitution** – Disestablishment of the Church of England is official Liberal Democrat policy.<sup>122</sup> They have consistently defended the Human Rights Act in coalition and say they will continue to promote it.<sup>123</sup>



## Labour Party Policies

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Labour had 258 MPs elected in the 2010 General Election.

**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 to support the Bill.<sup>124</sup> The Labour Party argued that religious bodies should be allowed to conduct same-sex marriages before the Government changed its position to permit this, and Ed Miliband said that the exclusion of the C of E from the Act was “disappointing”.<sup>125</sup> In the House of Lords, the Labour frontbench conspired with the Government to manipulate the Parliamentary timetable and rush the legislation through.<sup>126</sup> Labour whipped its MPs and Peers to oppose various amendments seeking to protect religious liberty and freedom of speech. The amendments were all defeated.

**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.<sup>127</sup>

**Marriage allowance** – Labour has promised to scrap the recently introduced tax break for married couples, branding it “unfair”.<sup>128</sup>

**Legal rights for cohabitants** – In July 2007 the Law Commission for England and Wales

published proposals to give cohabitants similar legal rights to married couples when they split up.<sup>129</sup> The Law Commission had been asked to do so by the Labour Government: Ministers called it “an issue that needed to be addressed”.<sup>130</sup> However, Labour did not implement the plans when in power.

**Smacking** – The Labour Party has resisted calls for an outright ban on smacking. However, the Children Act 2004 contained a Labour-backed law restricting (but not ending) the parental right to smack in England and Wales. Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls has said “it is wrong to smack children” but does not believe the law should be changed.<sup>131</sup> The Labour Government in Wales has said that “there are many good arguments for ending the defence of reasonable punishment” and implied it could be in its manifesto for the 2016 Assembly election.<sup>132</sup>

**Assisted suicide** – In the House of Lords, Labour allowed its Peers a free vote on Lord Falconer’s Bill to legalise assisted suicide.<sup>133</sup>

**Abortion** – The Labour leadership strongly opposed Fiona Bruce’s amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion. 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”.<sup>134</sup> Labour MPs voted 178 to 27 against the amendment.



### Ed Miliband, Leader of The Labour Party

**GM babies** – Labour gave its MPs a free vote on the plans to allow genetically modified babies with three or four parents.<sup>135</sup>

**‘Incitement to homophobic hatred’** – In their 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.<sup>136</sup> Ed Miliband has said that “this amendment has made it harder to convict someone for killing someone because of their sexuality than for their skin colour”.<sup>137</sup> This is untrue, as the clause has no relevance to the law on murder or any violence against a person.

**Freedom of speech at universities** – Labour has said that the original suggestion in draft guidance that speeches and presentations

of external speakers at universities should be submitted and vetted two weeks in advance “was both absurd and unworkable”.<sup>138</sup>

**Hate crime** – Labour has promised to expand the law on homophobic and transphobic hate crime.<sup>139</sup>

**Lobbying Act** – The Labour manifesto pledges to repeal the Lobbying Act 2014, citing the ‘gagging’ of charities.<sup>139a</sup>

### Education

*British values* – Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has been critical of “top-down demand for the promotion of British values” and said he is “concerned about both the depth and quality of British values teaching”.<sup>140</sup>

*Church schools* – Tristram Hunt has said that Ofsted should be given the power to inspect religious education in faith schools because he thinks religious schools may be “exacerbating religious and ethnic segregation in English cities”.<sup>141</sup> He has also stated that “if you really want to dig deep into the Koran or the Bible, that should be done after school”.<sup>142</sup>

*Free schools* – Labour’s 2015 manifesto says it will “end” the Free Schools programme.<sup>142a</sup>

**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.

**Sex education** – In January 2014 Labour supported an amendment which sought to introduce compulsory sex education in all schools, from the age of five. The amendment would have made teaching about “same-sex relationships, sexual violence, domestic violence and sexual consent” a compulsory part of the curriculum. It also sought to change the law on the parental right of withdrawal so that it could only be applied to children aged 14 and under.<sup>143</sup> But the 2015 manifesto says: “We will introduce compulsory age-appropriate sex and relationships education.”<sup>143a</sup>

**LGBT education** – Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has promised to create a national best practice ‘toolkit’ to “equip schools with the resources to tackle Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic bullying”.<sup>144</sup>

**‘Gay rights’ envoy** – The Labour Party has promised to appoint the first international envoy for LGBT rights. Their job would be to champion gay and transgender rights internationally.<sup>145</sup>

**Persecution of Christians** – Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander has called for more government action to tackle the persecution of Christians abroad. The 2015 manifesto commits Labour to appointing a ‘global envoy for religious freedom’.<sup>146</sup>

**Drugs** – Labour is not in favour of legalising cannabis, particularly given the popularity of stronger and more dangerous forms of the drug.<sup>147</sup> The party favours making “prevention a central part of the drugs strategy”.<sup>148</sup> When Labour was in Government it increased spending on the programme which uses methadone to address heroin addiction.<sup>149</sup>

**Modern Slavery Act** – Labour supported the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which gives greater protection to victims of human trafficking.<sup>150</sup>

**Gambling** – The Labour manifesto says: “Communities will be able to review betting shop licences in their area and reduce the number of fixed-odds betting terminals [FOBTs] in existing betting shops – or ban them entirely – in response to local concerns.”<sup>151</sup> Labour has called for FOBTs’ maximum stake to be reduced from £100 to £2.<sup>152</sup> It was liberalisation of the law by Labour’s 2005 Gambling Act that formally legalised FOBTs in casinos and betting shops.

**Blood donation** – Ed Miliband has called for a review of the twelve-month ban on men who have sex with men giving blood.<sup>153</sup>

**Sunday trading** – In 2012 the Shadow Business Secretary wrote to the coalition Government arguing that the relaxation of Sunday trading hours for the Olympics should not be extended permanently.<sup>154</sup> In 2006 the Labour Government consulted on whether to extend Sunday opening hours, after pressure from large retailers. However, they decided not to



go ahead with the plans, saying they saw “no substantial demand” for change.<sup>155</sup>

**Constitution** – The Labour Party supported the Succession to the Crown Act 2013, which lifted the legal bar on heirs to the throne marrying Roman Catholics.<sup>156</sup>

**House of Lords** – The Labour Party has repeated its previous pledge to replace the House of Lords with a “wholly elected” Senate of the Nations and Regions. It has also indicated the party would allow a referendum on the issue if elected.<sup>157</sup>

#### *Wales only*

In 2013 the Labour Government passed a law which created an opt-out system for organ donation. Labour imposed a whip on its members to ensure the law was passed.<sup>158</sup>

## Labour’s record in Government: 1997-2010

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

- legalised the creation of **animal-human hybrid embryos** for research;
- allowed the creation of **‘saviour siblings’**;
- 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; Gordon Brown voted against any reduction. In the final Commons debate the Government used a procedural measure to ensure that amendments to further liberalise the abortion law went to the bottom of the list for consideration. Lack of time then meant that they never reached a vote. The press speculated that the Prime Minister wanted to avoid causing unhelpful controversy.<sup>159</sup>

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

Labour pushed through various ‘gay rights’ measures. In 2000 Labour **lifted the ban on homosexuals serving in the Armed Forces**. It passed the **Civil Partnership Act**, reduced the **homosexual age of consent** to 16, and reformed the law on sexual offences to remove all distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual acts.<sup>160</sup> But attempts to quietly scrap the law against **homosexual activity in public lavatories** had to be abandoned after major opposition in the House of Lords.

When in Government, the Labour Party resisted calls to lower the **age of heterosexual consent** from 16.<sup>161</sup>

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





**Tony Blair, Prime Minister 1997-2007**

maintain their distinctive doctrines and ethos. Under these laws the Bishop of Hereford was successfully sued for refusing to employ a homosexual youth worker and atheists won an employment case against Prospects, a Christian charity for people with learning disabilities.

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.

In 2002 Labour legalised **homosexual adoption** in England and Wales; in 2007, together with its Lib Dem coalition partners at the time, Labour introduced homosexual adoption in Scotland. 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 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 a duty on public bodies – like schools and the police – to promote homosexual and transsexual rights. The Labour Government accepted amendments by Labour Peer Lord Alli to permit the registration of **civil partnerships in churches**, but stated that individual churches would not be compelled to allow them on their premises.<sup>162</sup>

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 Lord Waddington.<sup>163</sup>

**Cannabis** was downgraded by Labour in 2004 – cannabis became 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. However, a softer approach has been adopted than for other class B drugs – cannabis users are only arrested on the third offence.<sup>164</sup>

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. These machines have been described as the ‘crack cocaine’ of gambling. Licences were granted for 16 huge new casinos – with the smallest of them considerably bigger than most which existed before the Act. Gordon Brown only rejected plans for the one super casino allowed by the legislation.<sup>165</sup>

#### *England and Wales*

The Charity Commission claimed that Labour’s **Charities Act 2006** removed the presumption that churches and religious organisations are for the ‘public benefit’, though senior lawyers dispute this and the Commission has lost key court cases on its interpretation of the Act.<sup>166</sup> The Commission now asks religious charities to state how they provide ‘public benefit’ to obtain or maintain their charitable status.

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**.<sup>167</sup>

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.<sup>168</sup> 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 the multi-faith emphasis and advises that schools include teaching of atheism in RE lessons.<sup>169</sup>

#### *Scotland only*

Until 2007 Labour ran the Scottish Executive with its Lib Dem coalition partners. As well as introducing **homosexual adoption** and scrapping **Section 28**, they forced through reforms to **divorce law**, slashing the waiting time for ‘no-fault’ divorce.

The law on **prostitution** was strengthened by the Executive’s Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007.

## SNP Policies

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The Scottish National Party (SNP) has been in Government in Scotland since 2007, holding a majority since 2011 with 64 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. The party had six MPs in Westminster before dissolution for the General Election.

**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 scheme, which is to be rolled out by August 2016 under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, allows the named person to share personal data and advise children without their parents’ consent.<sup>170</sup>

**Same-sex marriage** – The SNP pledged to consult on same-sex marriage in its manifesto for the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary elections.<sup>171</sup> It did consult, but went ahead even though 64 per cent of respondents opposed redefining marriage.<sup>172</sup> The party went on to pass same-sex marriage 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.<sup>173</sup>

**Civil partnerships** – The SNP spokesman welcomed the introduction of the Civil Partnership Bill in 2004.<sup>174</sup> All of the then five SNP MPs voted for the Bill at Westminster; they also voted against an amendment to extend

the benefits of the Bill to siblings who share a house. A Scottish Government consultation in 2015 is expected to consider the issue of introducing civil partnerships for heterosexual couples.<sup>175</sup>

**Marriage allowance** – The SNP does not favour marriage tax breaks.<sup>176</sup>

**Divorce** – In 2005 the SNP gave its MSPs a free vote on the Family Law (Scotland) Bill which made divorce quicker and easier, though its spokesman welcomed the Bill.<sup>177</sup>

**Gay adoption and fostering** – The SNP supported the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill which extended joint adoption to homosexual couples. The party opposed amendments by one of its own MSPs (Roseanna Cunningham) to stop homosexual couples adopting.<sup>178</sup> The SNP introduced fostering rights for homosexual couples; the regulations came into force in September 2009.<sup>179</sup>

**Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008** – SNP MPs had a free vote on the Bill, including on abortion.<sup>180</sup>

**Abortion** – First Minister Nicola Sturgeon favours the current 24-week abortion limit. Prior to the vote on Scottish independence, she stressed that the SNP had no plans to change the current law.<sup>181</sup> At Westminster two SNP MPs voted for Fiona Bruce’s amendment to explicitly ban **sex-selective abortion**; two others voted against.



**Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland and Leader of the SNP**

**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.

**Assisted suicide** – Nicola Sturgeon has voiced opposition to an assisted suicide Bill being brought forward in Holyrood. She stated that she is not convinced by the legislation and instead expressed her support for palliative care. She also questioned how such legislation could contain sufficient safeguards.<sup>182</sup>

**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.<sup>183</sup>

**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 Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill was introduced by the SNP minority Government in March 2009. At Stage 2 the Government tabled Amendment 378. This amendment would have created an offence of threatening, alarming or distressing behaviour. The breadth of the proposal gave rise to serious free speech concerns. After criticism, the Scottish Government passed an alternative proposal that was much narrower.<sup>184</sup>

In 2011, the Scottish Government introduced an anti-sectarianism Bill. Under the proposed legislation a person who was offended by Christian beliefs could easily have claimed that a particular Christian was “inciting hatred” against them. A free speech clause was included in the final version of the Bill following a Christian Institute campaign, including the threat of judicial review.<sup>185</sup>

**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.<sup>186</sup>

**Lobbying Act** – The party’s 2015 manifesto says: “We support strict rules on lobbying but believe that campaigning charities should be allowed straightforward access and restrictions on their activities as ‘non-party campaigners’ should be removed.”<sup>186a</sup>

**Smacking** – The party is against a total ban on parental smacking. It supports the current law in Scotland.<sup>187</sup>

**Home education** – Statutory guidance was published by the SNP minority Government in December 2007. The guidance 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.<sup>188</sup>

**Religious education** – As part of the Scottish Government’s Curriculum for Excellence, paganism was introduced into religious education classes for the first time in 2012.<sup>189</sup>

**Sex education** – Revised sex education guidance was published by the SNP Government in 2014. The guidance emphasises children’s rights at the expense of parental involvement and says ‘named persons’ should be given confidential information that would be kept from parents.<sup>190</sup>

**Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009** – The Bill originally proposed by the SNP minority Government would have legalised oral sex between teenagers, but the Government moved an amendment to close the loophole after a parliamentary committee scrutinising the Bill raised concerns.

**‘Gay rights’ envoy** – Nicola Sturgeon is supportive of a ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex’ (LGBTI) rights envoy “to promote the rights of LGBTI people throughout the world, as an integral part of UK foreign policy”.<sup>191</sup>

**Gambling** – The SNP spoke out against the Gambling Act 2005.<sup>192</sup> The Scottish Government consulted on giving councils more powers to restrict betting shops but dropped these plans after opposition from some respondents.<sup>193</sup> The party’s 2015 manifesto calls for more powers to tackle fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs).<sup>193a</sup>

## **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.<sup>194</sup> In 2014 the Scottish Government rejected calls from advisors to prescribe heroin to addicts.<sup>195</sup>

**Cannabis** – In 2003 the party supported the UK Government’s reclassification of cannabis from class B to class C.<sup>196</sup> However, in 2008 an SNP minister in the Scottish Government welcomed the decision to return cannabis to class B.<sup>197</sup> In March 2015, Nicola Sturgeon stated that she is against the legalisation of cannabis.<sup>198</sup>

**Prostitution** – The SNP opposed the introduction of ‘tolerance zones’ in February 2003<sup>199</sup> and supported the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007 which strengthened the prostitution laws in Scotland. In June 2013, the SNP reportedly blocked a law to criminalise the purchase of sex.<sup>200</sup> The Scottish Government’s Bill to tackle human trafficking, introduced in December 2014, did not include measures to criminalise the purchase of sex, though the Scottish Government said it would “consider carefully” any amendments on the issue.<sup>201</sup>

**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.<sup>202</sup>

**Constitution** – The SNP campaigns for an independent Scotland. 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.<sup>203</sup> The party’s 2015 manifesto pledges to “oppose scrapping the Human Rights Act”.<sup>203a</sup>

**House of Lords** – The SNP’s 2015 manifesto says: “The SNP believes the House of Lords should be scrapped and replaced with a fully elected second chamber.”<sup>204</sup>

# Plaid Cymru | Party of Wales

plaid.cymru | partyof.wales



## Plaid Cymru Policies

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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.

**Same-sex marriage** – All three Plaid Cymru MPs voted in favour of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.<sup>205</sup> Leanne Wood objected to the exemption for the Church in Wales.<sup>206</sup> Wood was also critical of MPs who voted against same-sex marriage because constituents had asked them to do so.<sup>207</sup>

**Abortion** – In 2012, Plaid Cymru's Deputy Leader Elin Jones said she was "strongly opposed" to cutting the abortion limit to twelve weeks. She said: "I firmly believe in the right to choice on abortion" and commented that restricting abortion in such a way would "be a hugely regressive and retrograde shift" from the Abortion Act 1967.<sup>208</sup>

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 (Elfyn Llwyd and Hywel Williams) voted in favour of animal-human embryos, saviour siblings and keeping the abortion limit at 24 weeks. The third MP (Adam Price) did not vote.

Elfyn Llwyd voted to keep the 'need for a father' requirement in IVF treatment.

**GM babies** – Dafydd Wigley, Plaid Cymru's former leader and Campaign Co-ordinator for the 2015 Westminster election, expressed his support for GM babies on the party's website, after the House of Commons voted to allow controversial procedures to be carried out to create three and four-parent babies.<sup>209</sup> Two Plaid Cymru MPs voted in favour; the third was absent or abstained.

**Assisted suicide** – 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: "Plaid Cymru is a party that has always stood up for the equality and equal rights of LGBT people." 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.<sup>210</sup> The party's 2015 manifesto wants to see LGBT rights "implemented on a global scale".<sup>211</sup>

**Legal rights for cohabittees** – The 2005 Plaid Cymru manifesto promised to introduce a law "to provide a right for unmarried partners to register their partnership and have property, pension and inheritance rights".<sup>212</sup>



**Incitement to religious hatred** – Plaid Cymru opposed the introduction of an incitement to religious hatred law.<sup>213</sup>

**‘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,<sup>214</sup> and all three of its MPs voted in favour of restricting the freedoms of churches and other religious organisations to employ people in accordance with their beliefs.

**Home education** – Plaid Cymru education spokesman Simon Thomas has said that “it is up to parents how they educate their children”.<sup>215</sup>

**Smacking** – Plaid Cymru wants to end the defence of reasonable chastisement.<sup>216</sup> In 2014 Plaid Cymru tabled an amendment to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill in a failed attempt to ban smacking in Wales.<sup>217</sup>

**Cannabis** – Plaid Cymru supports the decriminalisation of cannabis and the party says police resources should be diverted into education programmes.<sup>218</sup>

**Gambling** – In 2004/5 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.<sup>219</sup>

**Alcohol** – Plaid Cymru supports the introduction of a minimum pricing policy for alcohol.<sup>220</sup>



**Leanne Wood, Plaid Cymru Leader**

**Blood donation** – The party’s 2015 manifesto pledges: “We will end the twelve month ban on blood donation by gay and bisexual men.”<sup>221</sup>

**Organ donation** – The party’s Deputy Leader Elin Jones welcomed the passage of the Human Transplantation (Wales) Bill in 2013.<sup>222</sup> Plaid Cymru AMs were given a free vote on the Bill.<sup>223</sup>

**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 within the European Union.<sup>224</sup>

# UK Independence Party

ukip.org



## UKIP Policies

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UKIP had two MPs in Westminster before dissolution for the General Election. UKIP is now the largest UK party in the European Parliament with 24 MEPs. The leader of UKIP is Nigel Farage MEP.

**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.<sup>225</sup>

Nigel Farage has said that the party does not support same-sex marriage “all the while we are signed up to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and where we have the risk that our established church and possibly other faith communities could ultimately under discrimination laws be forced to conduct services that they find anathema. If we get rid of the ECHR, and it doesn’t have the dominant place over our society, we’ll look at it again.”<sup>226</sup>

**Marriage allowance** – The party’s 2015 manifesto pledges to increase the transferable tax allowance for married couples.<sup>226a</sup>

**Family** – Nigel Farage has said the Government has shown ‘contempt’ for families where one parent stays at home.<sup>227</sup> UKIP is “100 per cent” supportive of stay-at-home mothers.<sup>228</sup>

**Abortion** – Deputy Leader Paul Nuttall MEP favours limiting abortion to the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.<sup>229</sup>

Both UKIP MPs, Mark Reckless and Douglas Carswell, voted in favour of an explicit ban on sex-selective abortion.

**GM babies** – Douglas Carswell voted for regulations allowing scientists to create genetically modified babies with three or four parents; Mark Reckless voted against the plans.

**Ofsted** – UKIP’s 2015 manifesto advocates streamlining Ofsted inspections and promises: “We will continue to monitor British values, but with a view towards combatting extremism and radicalisation, rather than criticising widely-held Judeo-Christian beliefs.” It also says: “An independent body will hear complaints about an Ofsted inspection. We will remove Ofsted’s right to investigate itself.”<sup>229a</sup> Deputy Leader Paul Nuttall MEP was “appalled” at Ofsted inspectors quizzing pupils as young as four about their knowledge of sexuality.<sup>230</sup>

**Faith schools** – UKIP has accused the EU of “interfering” with faith schools in the UK following the disclosure that Christian schools are under investigation by the European Commission to determine if they breach equality laws when expressing a preference for religious staff.<sup>231</sup>

**Religious education** – Paul Nuttall MEP has stated that, as a Christian country, it is natural for teaching about Christianity to be a “core part of religious education” in Britain.<sup>232</sup>



The party's 2015 manifesto supports the freedom of parents to choose **home education** for their children.<sup>232a</sup> UKIP also believes in the right of parents to educate their children in their religion of choice.<sup>233</sup>

**Sex education** – UKIP's 2015 manifesto says: "We support age-appropriate sex and relationship education at secondary level, but not for primary school children." The manifesto adds that "all parents must be made fully aware of the sex education teaching materials being used, before their children see it, and we will continue to respect their right to withdraw children from sex-education classes if they wish."<sup>234</sup>

**Contraception** – Louise Bours, UKIP's health spokesman, has voiced concerns over girls as young as ten being given a contraceptive implant by the NHS, and the casual attitude towards underage sex.<sup>235</sup>

**Free speech** – The UKIP 2015 manifesto promises to: "Uphold freedom of speech within the law as a fundamental British value." It goes on: "We believe all ideas and beliefs should be open to discussion and scrutiny and we will challenge the 'culture of offence' as it risks shutting down free speech".<sup>236</sup>

**Reasonable chastisement** – Nigel Farage is reported to have told a BBC Question Time audience that parents should be able to smack their children.<sup>237</sup>

**Drugs** – The party's 2015 manifesto says, "We will not decriminalise illegal drugs,"<sup>238</sup> although Nigel Farage has previously called for a Royal Commission to look at options for legalising certain drugs, and describes the current approach to drugs as "neither practical nor effective".<sup>239</sup>



**Nigel Farage, Leader of UKIP**

**Gambling** – UKIP backs calls for council powers to veto new betting shops and its 2015 manifesto supports reducing the maximum stake for fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2.<sup>240</sup>

**Prostitution** – Nigel Farage believes prostitution should be decriminalised and regulated.<sup>241</sup>

**Transsexualism** – Former boxing promoter Frank Maloney gave a speech on transsexualism at a UKIP conference. His appearance dressed as a woman at the conference in Margate was hailed by Nigel Farage as proof that the party is "open to everyone".<sup>242</sup>

**Organ donation** – The decision taken by the Welsh Assembly Government for a presumed consent system for organ donation was criticised by UKIP as 'ethically questionable'.<sup>243</sup>

**Christian heritage** – Nigel Farage has described Britain as a Judeo-Christian country and said that we need to “start standing up for our values”.<sup>244</sup>

**Sharia law** – UKIP Deputy Leader Paul Nuttall MEP has spoken out in support of a Bill aimed at tackling controversial Sharia courts in Britain. He supported Baroness Cox’s Bill to curb the ‘courts’ that back polygamy and discrimination against women.<sup>245</sup> UKIP would not allow the Islamic system of Sharia law to operate in parallel to British law and would ensure “all communities are aware and adhere to the supremacy of British law”.<sup>246</sup>

**Constitution** – UKIP is well known for its policy of ending the UK’s membership of the European Union. UKIP backs the call for an English Parliament based in the House of Commons and would also like to see the House of Lords reformed into a Parliament for the United Kingdom.<sup>247</sup>

UKIP has pledged to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a new British Bill of Rights.<sup>248</sup>



## Green Party Policies

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The Green Party had one MP, Caroline Lucas, and has three MEPs and two MSPs. The party leader is Natalie Bennett.

**Same-sex marriage** – The Green Party officially supported same-sex marriage before the last election. The party would also allow heterosexual couples to enter a civil partnership instead of marriage.<sup>249</sup>

**Abortion** – The Green Party states it will not support any restrictions to current abortion law.<sup>250</sup> Caroline Lucas voted against explicitly banning sex-selective abortion in 2015.

**GM babies** – When the House of Commons voted on plans to allow GM babies with three or four parents, Caroline Lucas voted in favour, saying she was voting with her conscience.<sup>251</sup> The party remains opposed to GM crops.<sup>252</sup>

**Assisted suicide** – The Green Party supports assisted suicide for terminally ill people.<sup>253</sup> Green MSP Patrick Harvie is taking forward the assisted suicide Bill in the Scottish Parliament.

**Equality** – The Green Party launched an LGBT manifesto in 2010 wanting to amend the Equality Act 2010 to bring in **homosexual and transsexual harassment laws**. The Greens oppose all **religious liberty exemptions** from equality and anti-discrimination laws.<sup>254</sup> The party supports the proposed EU directive to ban goods and services discrimination

and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation.<sup>255</sup>

**Education** – The party's manifesto includes plans to "make equality and diversity lessons mandatory in all schools" and "phase out public funding of schools run by religious organisations".<sup>256</sup> The party opposes the current exceptions in equality law for church schools and wants to abolish the requirement for collective worship.<sup>257</sup> Caroline Lucas introduced a Private Member's Bill to make PSHE, including sex education, statutory in all state-funded schools, including primary schools. The Greens support the right of parents to educate their children at home.<sup>258</sup>

**Drugs** – The party believes that drugs should be legalised. It envisages making cannabis available through regulated outlets, as in the Netherlands.<sup>259</sup> 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.<sup>260</sup>

**Prostitution** – The Green Party wants to decriminalise prostitution.<sup>261</sup>

**Gambling** – Caroline Lucas has opposed fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) and asked the Government to review the Gambling Act 2005.<sup>262</sup>

**Blood donation** – The Greens' manifesto promises to review the twelve month ban on men who have sex with men giving blood.<sup>262a</sup>



## Christian Party Policies

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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.<sup>263</sup>

**Same-sex marriage** – The Christian Party opposed the coalition Government's introduction of same-sex marriage.<sup>264</sup>

**Sanctity of life** – The party wants to end abortion and is opposed to voluntary euthanasia.<sup>265</sup> The Christian Party does not think that public funding should be spent on abortion on demand.<sup>266</sup> They would seek to ban any practice which results in the destruction of human embryos.<sup>267</sup>

**Transsexualism** – The Christian Party does not believe "sex-changes" should be publicly funded.<sup>268</sup>

**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'."<sup>269</sup>

**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".<sup>270</sup>

**Education** – The party would reinstate the provision of Christian religious education in schools, with no obligation to promote other faiths, and ensure schools provide collective Christian worship.<sup>271</sup>

**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".<sup>272</sup>

**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".<sup>273</sup>

**Contraception** – The Christian Party would: "Make contraception for minors, without parental approval, illegal."<sup>274</sup>

**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."<sup>275</sup>

**Prostitution** – The Christian Party opposes prostitution.<sup>276</sup>

**Sunday** – The Christian Party would seek to: "Promote the restoration of Sunday as a day of rest".<sup>277</sup>

# Christian Peoples Alliance

cpaparty.net

CHRISTIAN  
peoples  
ALLIANCE

## Christian Peoples Alliance Policies

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**Marriage** – The Christian Peoples Alliance (CPA) opposes “all attempts to redefine the objective meaning of marriage, and will be working to repeal all laws which have already attempted to do this”. It has also promised to “broaden Civil Partnership to cover certain situations where two people are tied to each other”.<sup>278</sup>

**Abortion** – The CPA is committed to repeal of the 1967 Abortion Act and outlawing cloning of human beings and embryo experimentation. It would provide exceptions to a ban on abortions in “cases of urgent necessity and anencephalic life”.<sup>279</sup>

**Euthanasia** – The party has pledged to “strongly oppose the growing euthanasia culture”.<sup>280</sup>

**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”.<sup>281</sup>

**Church schools** – The CPA states that: “Christian schools and Muslim schools and schools of any other faith should be allowed 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.” It also believes that “all children should know what Christian worship is and the role it plays in our society”.<sup>282</sup>

**Prostitution** – The CPA promises to “oppose any attempts to relax moral laws such as legalising brothels or legalising prostitution”.<sup>283</sup>

**Gambling** – The party proposes to “repeal the Gambling Act 2005” and impose greater restrictions on betting shops and casinos.<sup>284</sup>

**Drugs** – The CPA has pledged to “take a tougher approach to drug use because of the clear link between drug use and crime”.<sup>285</sup>

**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.<sup>286</sup>

# More information about legislation and public policy

## Medical ethics

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### 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.<sup>287</sup> The work on animal-human hybrids was abandoned as a failure a year after the Act was passed.<sup>288</sup>

### GM babies

The HFE Act permitted future regulations to allow 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 which will create ‘disease-free’ GM children with three or four parents.<sup>289</sup> The procedures are germline modification which will affect future generations in unknown ways. The Department of Health claimed widespread public support for the measure. However, its own consultation on the draft regulations showed a majority of respondents (62 per cent) opposed the plans.<sup>290</sup>

### 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.<sup>291</sup> Overall in 2013 in Great Britain, 98.4 per cent of the 202,577 legal abortions were carried out for social reasons.<sup>292</sup>

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.<sup>293</sup>

The coalition Government has 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”.<sup>294</sup> *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'.<sup>295</sup> 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.<sup>296</sup> 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.<sup>297</sup> 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. The guidance also suggests that doctors can reach an opinion by talking to the patient over the phone or via a webcam.<sup>298</sup> It amounts to the biggest liberalisation of abortion practice since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed.

### **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.

Former Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer has continued to lead attempts at Westminster to legalise assisted suicide, reintroducing his Assisted Dying Bill in June 2014. The Bill applies to England and Wales. Previous attempts (in 2006 and 2009) to liberalise the law on assisted

suicide failed to become law.

The Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill was introduced at Holyrood in November 2013. The Scottish Parliament rejected a similar Bill in 2010 by 85 votes to 16.

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.<sup>299</sup>

### **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.<sup>300</sup> 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.<sup>301</sup>

### **Organ donation – consent**

The Welsh Assembly has introduced an 'opt-out' system for organ donation in Wales, which presumes that residents consent to organ donation unless they have specifically opted out.<sup>302</sup> The same system is often discussed for the other parts of the UK, but has not yet been brought forward elsewhere.

### **Organ donation – before death**

There are many medical definitions of death including "brain death".<sup>303</sup> A number of doctors are concerned that the process of organ donation encourages doctors to harvest organs from patients who are not quite dead yet. Doctors are keen to take organs from a body with a beating heart, because the removal of the heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and kidneys

must be done before they begin to deteriorate due to cessation of blood circulation. Some 'brain-dead' organ donors are given a general anaesthetic before their organs are removed to suppress their body's reaction to the physical distress of being cut into.

Secular ethicist Professor Peter Singer of Princeton University has said of these patients: "Defining such people as dead was a convenient way around the problems of making their organs available for transplantation, and withdrawing treatment from them."<sup>304</sup> Medical ethicist, Michael Potts, has said that "since the patient is not truly dead until his or her organs are removed, it is the process of organ donation itself that causes the donor's death."<sup>305</sup>

## Marriage and the family

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### 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.

The coalition Government had no mandate to force through such controversial legislation. Same-sex marriage was not in the manifesto of any of the major political parties at the 2010 General Election,<sup>306</sup> and just three days before the election, David Cameron declared on Sky News that he was "not planning" to introduce it.<sup>307</sup>

The Government launched a consultation exercise in March 2012, asking *how*, not *whether*, to introduce same-sex marriage.<sup>308</sup> It was claimed that this was the 'biggest listening exercise' ever carried out, but 500,000 signatories of the Coalition for Marriage's national petition were ignored.<sup>309</sup>

The consultation was conducted on the basis that same-sex weddings would not be held in churches and other religious premises,<sup>310</sup> but in December 2012 David Cameron announced

a policy change to allow this where a religious group opts in.<sup>311</sup> The 2013 Act specifically excludes same-sex weddings within the Church of England.<sup>312</sup> It also states that no church or church minister can be compelled "by any means" to carry out a same-sex wedding.<sup>313</sup>

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. The Labour Government incorporated amendments in the Equality Act 2010 permitting the registration of civil partnerships in churches where the building's trustees opt in to the scheme. The coalition Government passed the necessary regulations in 2011.

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.<sup>314</sup> However, in December 2014 a heterosexual couple began legal action seeking to obtain a civil partnership.<sup>315</sup>

### 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.<sup>316</sup>

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 £212 in 2015/16 for married couples where both are basic rate taxpayers and one spouse earns less than the personal tax allowance.<sup>317</sup>

### **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.<sup>318</sup> The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting and homosexual couples in Scotland.

### **Divorce**

At present there are five 'grounds' for divorce in England and Wales. These are adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, two years' separation where both parties consent and

five years' separation where one party does not want the divorce.<sup>319</sup> In January 2006 the Scottish Parliament passed the Family Law (Scotland) Act, which abolished the ground of desertion and reduced the amount of time required for a divorce on the grounds of separation – from two years to one where both parties agree and from five years to two where one party does not want the divorce.

The divorce laws in Great Britain are already far too lax. In England and Wales a court has permitted divorce on the ground of 'unreasonable behaviour' because of a prolonged DIY renovation.<sup>320</sup>

### **Legal rights for cohabitants**

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 cohabitants.<sup>321</sup> 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.<sup>322</sup> Neither the Labour Government nor the subsequent coalition Government implemented these recommendations.<sup>323</sup>

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 – including the right for people to change their legal birth sex. So a man can

become a woman in law and then marry another man. 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. The Scottish Government's 2012 anti-sectarianism legislation protects people with any one of five different kinds of "gender identity" from offensive behaviour at, or in connection with, football matches (see Section 4 of the Offensive Behaviour in Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012).

## Education

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### 'British values'

In September 2014 the coalition Government issued controversial 'British values' regulations which require schools in England to actively promote "fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs". The regulations also require schools to ensure that "principles are actively promoted which...encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010".<sup>324</sup>

The Department for Education (DfE) subsequently came under huge pressure from Christians writing letters, highly controversial inspections in Christian and Jewish schools, challenges from MPs, and the prospect of a judicial review.

In a partial climbdown, the DfE issued updated guidance in November 2014, which makes clear that the regulations create no additional equality duties and, crucially, require

schools to promote respect for *people* as opposed to respect for their *beliefs*. Schools are not expected to promote same-sex marriage or alternative lifestyles.<sup>325</sup> However, it remains the case that Ofsted – the body responsible for enforcing the new standards in schools – is failing to adhere to the new guidance itself in many high-profile cases.<sup>326</sup>

### 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.

### Sex education (England)

The law requires state-maintained secondary schools in England to offer sex and relationships 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.<sup>327</sup>

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.<sup>328</sup> 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.<sup>329</sup> This was defeated by the coalition Government.

The Coalition has backed liberal sex education guidance produced by external groups, including the PSHE Association,<sup>330</sup> but successive Conservative Education Secretaries (Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan) have resisted calls to compel all primary schools to teach sex education.

### **Religious education and school assemblies**

The law in England and Wales requires that the main content of religious education in non-denominational schools must be devoted to the study of Christianity.<sup>331</sup> There must also be a daily act of collective worship in schools (this usually takes place in an assembly) and it must be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.”<sup>332</sup> (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**

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### **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 May 2011 Sir Edward Leigh MP tabled an amendment to ensure that police would no longer be able to use Section 5 to arrest people just because others might find their words or behaviour “insulting.”<sup>333</sup> A large number of MPs added their names to his amendment, reflecting broad cross-party support. The amendment did not become law but the show of strength by MPs did force the Government to hold a public consultation on the matter.<sup>334</sup> 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.<sup>335</sup> The reform officially came into force on 1 February 2014.



Lord Dear

### **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 outlaw “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.<sup>336</sup>

Legal advice from former chief prosecutor Lord Macdonald of River Glaven QC explained

the proposal's safeguards were "shockingly low" and could result in "serious and unforeseeable interferences in individual rights".<sup>337</sup>

In January 2014 the House of Lords voted 306 to 178 to amend the Bill by 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 Lord Dear's amendment.<sup>338</sup>

### **Counter-terrorism strategy**

The Government introduced the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill in November 2014 as part of its wider anti-extremism strategy. The Bill, which compels public bodies to try and stop people being "drawn into terrorism", was enacted on 12 February 2015.

During parliamentary consideration of the Bill, a consultation paper was released which included guidance for universities to "exclude those promoting extremist views that support or are conducive to terrorism".<sup>339</sup> This would have involved societies, including Christian Unions, being forced to hand over presentations for vetting and submitting names of speakers two weeks in advance.<sup>340</sup> Those universities deemed to have failed to comply with the guidance could be subject to a court order.<sup>341</sup>

The Government came under such pressure that in February 2015 it introduced an important free speech safeguard into the Bill and promised to rework the key section of the final guidance.<sup>342</sup> With reports of a split in the coalition Government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats over the issue,<sup>343</sup> the Government dropped the key section of the guidance which threatened the free speech of university Christian Unions and issued the rest of the guidance in March

2015. The coalition Government envisages the next Government issuing separate guidance on external speakers at universities after the General Election.<sup>344</sup>

### **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, amongst 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 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, 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 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.

The Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 allow the House of Commons to overrule the House of Lords and pass legislation without the consent of Peers. They are a draconian device intended to be used on matters of major national and constitutional significance. Former PM Gordon Brown said in 2010 that he was prepared to use them to repeal Lord Waddington's free speech clause.<sup>345</sup> Labour used this very rare parliamentary procedure to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts from 18 to 16 (it has only ever been used seven times).<sup>346</sup>

### **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.<sup>347</sup>

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 forced all the Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England to either close or secularise. The SORs have also 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'.

### **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. The Equality Act 2010 also placed a duty on public bodies – like schools and the police – to promote rights on various grounds including sexual orientation, religion or belief, and transsexualism (the Public Sector Equality Duty).

### **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.

### **Charities Act 2006**

The Charity Commission claimed that Labour's Charities Act 2006 removed the presumption that churches and religious organisations are for the 'public benefit', though senior lawyers dispute this and the Commission has lost key court cases on its interpretation of the Act.<sup>348</sup> The Commission now asks religious charities to state how they provide 'public benefit' to obtain or maintain their charitable status.

## **Public morality**

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### **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.<sup>349</sup>)

### **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. Those in favour of the legalisation of drugs are continually campaigning for drugs to be reclassified downward.

### **Gambling**

In 2005 the Government passed the 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.<sup>350</sup>

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.<sup>351</sup> FOBTs allow gamblers to stake up to £18,000 an hour on virtual versions of casino games like blackjack and roulette.

### **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'.<sup>352</sup> It went on to announce plans to allow 'mini-brothels', so that two or three prostitutes could work together on the same premises.<sup>353</sup> 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 1994, when the Sunday Trading Act allowed six hours of unregulated trading every Sunday. Since then there have been continued assaults on the remaining restrictions on Sunday trading – for example, the coalition Government temporarily lifted the restrictions during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.

Future deregulation would further undermine Sunday as a day of rest. It would also put further pressure on workers 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**

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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.<sup>354</sup> 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.<sup>355</sup> 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. The extraordinary ruling came about because the National Secular Society (NSS) and an atheist ex-councillor sued Bideford Town Council in Devon. But in the ruling, the High Court rejected the principal claims of the NSS that the saying of prayers during formal council meetings discriminates against, or breaches the human rights of, atheist councillors.

In response the Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles MP, fast-tracked the commencement of new laws which overtook the Court's ruling. The Localism Act restores 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 Members' 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.

### **'Alternative vote' (AV) referendum**

Following a Lib Dem requirement in the Coalition Agreement, the Government held a referendum in May 2011 on whether to change the voting system for Westminster Parliamentary elections from 'first past the post' to the 'alternative vote', an elaborate system where voters rank candidates in order of preference. This system would have made it much more difficult to elect particular candidates because of their views on moral issues. Ahead of the referendum, Ed Miliband said AV would benefit 'progressive' parties.<sup>356</sup> 'Progressives' are defined by the BBC as socially liberal,<sup>357</sup> and according to the Oxford English Dictionary they are "liberal" and favour "social reform".

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# Election Briefing 2015

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The General Election takes place on 7 May 2015.

As a Christian citizen, you have the opportunity to vote. The outcome is widely expected to be the closest and most uncertain for a generation. Voting is a serious responsibility. But what should you do?

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
- two key factors in voting
- the crucial issue of religious liberty
- why this particular election is perplexing for biblical Christians
- speaking to candidates
- party policies
- key background information on legislation and public policy.



## Key resources to inform your vote, including:

- Voting records of all MPs
- Candidate QuestionCards
- Downloadable copies of this Election Briefing

[christian.org.uk/election](http://christian.org.uk/election)