



THE CHRISTIAN
INSTITUTE

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Election Briefing 2019

AN ANALYSIS OF PARTY POLICIES ON
ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO CHRISTIANS



ELECTION
2019

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Contents

3		Introduction
8		Conservatives
14		Labour
19		Scottish National Party
22		Liberal Democrats
25		The Independent Group for Change
26		Plaid Cymru Party of Wales
28		Green Party
30		Brexit Party
31		The Christian Party
32		Christian Peoples Alliance
33		More information about legislation and public policy
42		References

Key resources



Voting records of MPs

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



Candidate QuestionCards

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



This Election Briefing

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



Introduction

ELECTION 2019

As Christian citizens we should think carefully about how we vote in the General Election on 12 December 2019.

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

- why should you vote?
- biblical priorities
- Brexit
- issues on the horizon
- two key factors in voting
- speaking to candidates
- party policies on key issues
- 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 standards, particularly the Ten Commandments, directly apply. In modern Britain they can be among the most controversial subjects, yet in our view the Bible is perfectly clear about them.

We cannot be exhaustive. There will be other areas of concern where much material is available or where there is honest disagreement among Christians holding to the Bible as their authority, such as the environment.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOTE?

The state is a means of God's 'common grace'. The Bible is very clear that the governing authorities act on God's behalf

to restrain evil and promote what is good (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). This benefits all people in this world, not just Christians.

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

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

Common grace and the privilege of voting

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

Like the prophet Daniel, God's people must encourage leadership which promotes

truth and righteousness, such as when he said to King Nebuchadnezzar: “Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed” (Daniel 4:27).

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

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

BIBLICAL PRIORITIES

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

For instance, the Bible is not clear on how to improve access to GPs 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 judgement based on experience. Many situations we encounter in ordinary life are at this level, and so are many political issues.

But at the other end of the spectrum the Bible is “clear, direct, and decisive”⁴ about a whole host of political issues. For example, a vote for abortion or euthanasia is a vote to break the sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13). These are the kinds of issues

that we mainly focus on in this briefing – straightforward matters of right or wrong.

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

BREXIT

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

As a registered charity, the Institute did not tell Christians how to vote in the 2016 EU referendum. But we did encourage Christians across the UK to prayerfully consider their view and to cast their vote. There were biblical Christians on both sides.

The referendum saw a majority vote to leave the EU and the ‘Article 50’ process began in March 2017. The issue of Brexit has dominated our political landscape since. Constitutionally extraordinary – even unprecedented – events have taken place. Other issues have not received the level of scrutiny that would be expected in normal circumstances, including the imposition of abortion and same-sex marriage on Northern Ireland. Irrespective of views on Brexit, the lack of a resolution since the referendum has resulted in damaging instability. We pray this will come to an end as soon as possible.

We encouraged Christians in 2017 to remember that, although the General

Election had been dubbed 'the Brexit election', the chosen MPs could pass laws affecting every area of life. Parliament has since considered issues including abortion, same-sex marriage, heterosexual civil partnerships, relationships and sex education, assisted suicide, no-fault divorce, pornography, gambling, cannabis and Christian persecution overseas. While Brexit is an important issue that may well dominate this election, Christians must consider other matters as well.

ISSUES ON THE HORIZON

The new Parliament elected on 12 December 2019 could vote on laws affecting religious liberty, freedom of speech, transgender rights, abortion, assisted suicide, divorce liberalisation, drugs legalisation and gambling. More information about legislation and public policy on these and other issues is given from page 33 onwards.

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

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

Christians in Britain have enjoyed remarkable freedom for centuries, which was hard won down the years. 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. 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 that 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 UK, unlike Communist countries, we do not equate society with the State. Government by itself cannot solve all our problems or even come remotely close.

TWO KEY FACTORS IN VOTING: CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

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

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

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

In casting a vote Christians are not necessarily endorsing every item of policy of the party they vote for. You may decide to back a particular political party which most approximates to where you stand. Or you may consider it 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 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 it better to vote for one of the Christian political parties that 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 colleagues vote in a certain way does not mean that you need to do the same. It is your choice.

But you cannot 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.⁵

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 while 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 these questions is a Christian witness.

CONTACTING YOUR CANDIDATES

You can contact your candidates by letter or email, or on 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.

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

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

There are many ways of being a Christian citizen, but a General Election provides an excellent opportunity for Christians to be salt and light in our society. We must pray for wisdom and speak out for the truth.

THE POLICIES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

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

Within these broad areas, this *Election Briefing* highlights some of the policies of the four main political parties at Westminster – the Conservatives, Labour, the SNP and the

Liberal Democrats. We also include some of the known policies of those parties that currently have significant representation at national or European level – The Independent Group for Change, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party and the Brexit Party. Many Christians ask us about the policies of The Christian Party and the Christian Peoples Alliance. These have also been included. Space and time constraints do not permit 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 election website will link to the 2019 General Election manifestos of the parties covered in this publication as they become available: christian.org.uk/election

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

Christians must weigh the evidence and exercise their Christian conscience, remembering that: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

i For contact information about candidates, visit: whocanivotefor.co.uk

i For MPs' voting records, party manifestos (as available) and other election information, visit: christian.org.uk/election



After the 2017 General Election the Conservative Party was the largest party and formed a minority Government, reaching a 'confidence and supply' agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party.⁶ The Conservatives were also in Government from 2015 to 2017, with a working majority of 17. From 2010 to 2015 they were in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Party had 298 MPs at the dissolution of Parliament in November 2019.

Conservative Prime Ministers since the 2010 General Election:

- 🕒 **David Cameron**, May 2010 to July 2016
- 🕒 **Theresa May**, July 2016 to July 2019
- 🕒 **Boris Johnson**, from July 2019

CONSERVATIVE PARTY RECORD IN GOVERNMENT 2015-2019

Relationships and sex education – The Government's Children and Social Work Act 2017 created the new compulsory subject of Relationships Education for all primary schools in England. When it comes into force in September 2020, it will mean teaching young children about "different types" of relationships. Parents will not have the automatic right to withdraw their children from the classes. A secondary school subject called Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) – covering "intimate relationships" – was also created, with a right of withdrawal from the sex education element only.

Same-sex marriage – In July 2019 the Government allowed time for amendments to be discussed that led to same-sex marriage being legalised in Northern Ireland. The Government's official position was that the change was right but should be left to the Northern Ireland Assembly.



Conservative MPs were given a free vote. Boris Johnson did not vote.

Schools guidance – In March 2018 the Government consulted on draft guidance that would have effectively banned disagreement with same-sex marriage in independent schools across England. However, the final draft published in April 2019 allows schools



Theresa May, Prime Minister 2016-2019

to “facilitate debate” and offers a specific protection for faith schools to teach that “marriage is only between a man and a woman”.⁷

Divorce – In June 2019 the Conservative Government introduced the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill, which would have brought in ‘no-fault’ divorce in England and Wales. The Bill fell when the Parliamentary session ended in October 2019 but was subsequently included in the Government’s agenda for the new session.

Heterosexual civil partnerships – The Government supported legislation, passed in March 2019, requiring the law to be changed by 31 December 2019 to allow opposite-sex couples to form civil partnerships.⁸

Transgenderism – The Government consulted in 2018 on amending the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to ‘streamline’ and ‘de-medicalise’ the process of changing legal sex.⁹ No conclusion has been published.

Free speech – In 2018 a Government minister called on higher education groups to “stamp out the ‘institutional hostility’ to unfashionable views” and urged them to challenge ‘safe-spaces’ and ‘no-platforming’.¹⁰

Hate crime – In 2016 the Government published a four-year hate crime action plan for England and Wales. This included requiring the police to record all reported incidents, and, for the first time, record ‘transgender’ as an aggravating factor.¹¹ In 2018 the Government asked the Law Commission to review hate crime legislation, including whether it should cover more protected characteristics.

Extremism – Conservative policy seeks to tackle ‘non-violent extremism’. It defines extremism as vocal or active opposition to “fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.¹² The Conservatives established the Commission for Countering Extremism, which “advises the government on new policies to deal with extremism, including the need for any new powers”.¹³

Ofsted inspections of churches – In April 2018 the Government formally dropped the proposal, first consulted on in late 2015, that any group teaching a child for six or more hours in any week should have to register and be subject to Ofsted ‘British values’ inspections.¹⁴ This could have included church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, some summer camps and even Sunday schools.

Prevent – The Government has commissioned a review of the controversial anti-radicalisation programme, *Prevent*.¹⁵

Home education – In April 2019 the Government consulted on introducing a register of home-educating families. The then Education Secretary said that a register is needed because some children are “potentially at risk”.¹⁶ No outcome of the consultation has yet been published.

Abortion – In response to a campaign to allow abortion up to birth, the Government said it had “no plans” to change the law.¹⁷ In July 2019 the Government allowed time for amendments to be discussed that led to abortion being legalised in Northern Ireland. The Government’s official position was that the change was right but should be left to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Conservative MPs were given a free vote. Boris Johnson did not vote. The Government’s draft legal framework, published for consultation in November 2019, would make abortion more easily available in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK.

‘Buffer zones’ – In 2018 the then Home Secretary Sajid Javid ruled out introducing ‘buffer zones’ around abortion clinics nationwide as this would not be “proportionate”.¹⁸

Organ donation – The Conservative Government backed a Private Member’s Bill moving England to a presumed consent system for organ donation. The law passed in March 2019 and will be introduced from spring 2020.

Gambling – The Government lowered the maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2 in April 2019.

Drugs – The Government changed the law in 2018 to allow unlicensed cannabis-derived medicinal products to be prescribed by specialist doctors. It said it has “no plans to legalise cannabis for recreational use”.¹⁹ It has also said it has “no plans to decriminalise drug possession”.²⁰ In 2016 the Government introduced a ban on ‘legal highs’, which mimic the effects of banned substances such as cannabis and heroin.²¹

Prostitution – In 2018 the Government commissioned research into prostitution, including on the best legislative approach for “tackling harm and exploitation”.²² The report from the University of Bristol was published in late October 2019. The Government’s response will not be published before the General Election.

Pornography – The Government’s Digital Economy Act 2017 would have imposed age-verification checks on pornographic websites. After several delays it was announced in October 2019 that the Bill will not be brought into force. The Government said the objectives would be delivered through other means.²³

Blood donation – In 2017 the Government reduced the deferral period on giving blood that applies to men who have had sex with men from twelve to three months.²⁴

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

Sharia law – An independent review of Sharia councils was published in February 2018. The Government rejected a recommendation for a Sharia council regulatory body because it “could add legitimacy to the perception of the existence of a parallel legal system even though the outcomes of Sharia Councils have no standing in civil law”.²⁵

CONSERVATIVE PARTY POLICIES

Abortion – The Conservatives allowed a free vote on Fiona Bruce’s amendment in 2015 to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion. It was defeated by 292 votes to 201. In October 2018 Conservative MPs voted 108 to 15 against Diana Johnson’s Ten Minute Rule Bill supporting the removal of all criminal laws relating to abortion. Boris Johnson did not vote.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 – Conservatives were allowed a free vote on animal-human hybrid embryos, ‘saviour siblings’, keeping the ‘need for a father’ requirement in IVF and lowering the abortion time limit. Boris Johnson voted against a ban on creating animal-human hybrids.²⁶ He did not vote on the other issues.

Assisted suicide – The Conservatives had a free vote on Rob Marris’s Bill to legalise assisted suicide in 2015.²⁷ Boris Johnson voted against assisted suicide.

LGBT rights – In June 2019 the party said: “From legalising gay marriage at home to promoting LGBT rights around the world, we are committed to stripping away barriers that hold people back.”²⁸

Under Michael Howard there was a free vote for Conservative MPs on the **Civil Partnership** and **Gender Recognition Acts** in 2004, though the frontbench spokesmen supported both. Boris Johnson voted in favour of both pieces of legislation.

Drugs – The Conservatives pledge to tackle drug addiction, drug-related crime, and “take a new approach to treatment”^{28a}

Incitement to religious hatred – The party backed House of Lords amendments

in 2006 to narrow the scope of the offence and include a robust free speech protection.²⁹

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

Islamophobia – The Conservatives have so far not adopted the definition of Islamophobia proposed by the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims.³⁰

Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORs) 2007 – A third of Conservative MPs at the time voted for the SORs, meaning that Roman Catholic adoption agencies had to secularise or close.³¹ Conservative MPs and Peers were given a free vote. Boris Johnson did not vote.

Equality Act 2010 – Conservative MPs and Peers were whipped to support an amendment by Baroness O’Cathain maintaining existing employment exemptions for churches, but the party gave its support to the Bill as a whole.³²

Persecution of Christians – Responding to a report on the persecution of Christians abroad, Boris Johnson said he “will always prioritise protecting religious freedoms and stand up for those facing persecution”.³³

The 2019 Conservative manifesto commits to implementing the Bishop of Truro’s recommendations on combating persecution of Christians overseas.^{33a}

Gambling – The 2019 manifesto promises to review the Gambling Act.^{33b}

Faith schools – In May 2018 then Education Secretary Damian Hinds announced that the Government will support the development of new voluntary-aided faith schools within the state sector.³⁴

Religious Education – In December 2018 the Government rejected calls to introduce statutory “RE and worldviews” into the curriculum in England.³⁵

Named Person – The Scottish Conservatives repeatedly spoke out against the recently scrapped statutory Named Person scheme, saying that it was “completely unworkable and unwanted”.³⁶

Smacking – The Conservatives have consistently upheld the right of parents to reasonably chastise their own children, including opposing the moves to ban smacking in Scotland and Wales.³⁷

Abuse of trust law – In 2017, the Government said it would change the law to make it illegal for sports coaches to take advantage of 16 and 17-year-olds in their care. It has not yet done so, but has committed to reviewing the Sexual Offences Act containing the provision.³⁸

Human Rights Act 1998 – The party’s 2017 manifesto said: “We will not repeal or replace the Human Rights Act while the process of Brexit is underway but we will consider our human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes.”³⁹

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

THE RECORD OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT 2010-2015

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

Same-sex marriage – The Coalition passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 for England and Wales. It was supposed to be a free vote for Government MPs, but there were reports of undue pressure put on Conservative MPs.⁴¹ More Conservatives voted against same-sex marriage than for it at Second Reading. The Liberal Democrats allowed their MPs a free vote.⁴² Four Lib Dem MPs voted against the Bill at Second Reading.

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

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.

Marriage allowance – The Government introduced a tax break for married couples worth over £200 a year from April 2015. Despite describing the measure as “patronising drivel” before entering into coalition, the Lib Dems agreed not to block its introduction.⁴³



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

Legal rights for cohabitants – The Government declined to introduce Law Commission proposals for new legal rights for couples who cohabit.⁴⁴

Abortion – The Department of Health confirmed the biggest liberalisation of abortion practice in England and Wales since 1967, in updated guidance published in May 2014. The document for abortion providers said there is “no legal requirement” for doctors to see women seeking an abortion before approving it.⁴⁵

GM babies – The Coalition passed regulations legalising genetically modified babies with three or four parents, making Britain the first country in the world to officially permit the practice.⁴⁶

Free speech – In 2013 the Government accepted reform of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 so that it no longer catches “insulting” words or behaviour.⁴⁷ Later 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 effectively dropped its plans.⁴⁸

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

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

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

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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰



Labour had 243 MPs at dissolution for the General Election.
The Labour leader is **Jeremy Corbyn**.

LABOUR PARTY POLICIES

Relationships and sex education – Labour supported the Government’s new statutory Relationships Education subject for primary schools.⁵¹ In its 2017 manifesto, Labour pledged to make sex and relationships education “a compulsory part of the curriculum” and to “ensure that the new guidance for relationships and sex education is LGBT inclusive”.⁵²

Education – The party has said it would abolish Ofsted in favour of a “two-phase” system, with regular “health checks” by local authorities and more in-depth inspections by specialists where concerns arose.⁵³

Same-sex marriage – Labour strongly supported the introduction of same-sex marriage. It did not formally impose a whip, though there were reports of MPs coming under pressure from the leadership at the time to support the Bill.⁵⁴ Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour of the Bill.

Same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland – Labour MPs had a free vote on the amendment to legalise same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland. The Labour frontbench spoke in favour.⁵⁵ No Labour MP voted against it and 222 supported it, including Jeremy Corbyn.⁵⁶ **The party’s 2019 manifesto**

says a Labour Government would “fully implement” same-sex marriage in the Province.^{56a}

Divorce – Labour’s 2019 manifesto says the party will “introduce a no-fault divorce procedure”.⁵⁷

Heterosexual civil partnerships – The party supported the Bill extending civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples.⁵⁸

Marriage allowance – Labour published a funding report with plans to scrap the marriage allowance alongside its 2019 manifesto.⁵⁹

Transgenderism – Labour’s 2019 manifesto says the party will reform the Gender Recognition Act to “introduce self-declaration for transgender people”.⁶⁰ In 2018, Jeremy Corbyn said that men who ‘self-identify’ as women should be treated as women.⁶¹

LGBT rights envoy – The Labour Party promised in its 2017 manifesto to appoint “dedicated global ambassadors” for LGBT rights “to fight discrimination and promote equality globally”.⁶²

Extremism

Ofsted inspections of churches – In 2016 a Labour spokesman said the Government's plans for registration and inspection of out-of-school groups were unnecessary and would only impose an additional bureaucratic burden on Sunday schools.⁶³

Prevent – Jeremy Corbyn has described *Prevent* as “counter-productive” and too focused on Muslims, saying it should be focused on “all communities”.⁶⁴ Labour's Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott said *Prevent* has been “an abject failure”.⁶⁵

Hate crime – Diane Abbott promised in October 2018 that Labour would hire “10,000 extra police officers to work in the community to help tackle all forms of hate crime”.⁶⁶

In its 2017 manifesto Labour promised to “bring the law on LGBT hate crimes into line with hate crimes based on race and faith, by making them aggravated offences”.⁶⁷

Islamophobia – The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of 'Islamophobia' has been endorsed by the Labour Party.⁶⁸



👤 Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

Home education – Labour's education spokesman in the House of Lords said in 2017 that home educators should have to register with their local authority.⁶⁹

Smacking – Welsh Labour has brought forward a Bill to criminalise parents in Wales who smack their children.⁷⁰ Labour MSPs supported a Bill to criminalise smacking in Scotland.⁷¹

Abortion – In its 2019 manifesto, Labour pledges to decriminalise abortion. It also says women in Northern Ireland should have access to abortions there.⁷² In July 2019 the Labour frontbench spoke in favour of an amendment from backbench Labour MPs to legalise abortion in Northern Ireland, though MPs had a free vote.⁷³ Jeremy Corbyn voted for it.

In 2015 the Labour leadership strongly opposed Fiona Bruce's amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion. Then Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper wrote to the party's MPs urging them to vote against it, and, though the party claimed there was a free vote, Fiona Bruce said her amendment was defeated “by Labour Party whipping”.⁷⁴ Jeremy Corbyn was one of 178 Labour MPs to vote against the amendment, while 27 voted for.

In October 2018 Labour MPs voted 179 to 7 in favour of Diana Johnson's Ten Minute Rule Bill supporting the removal of all criminal laws relating to abortion. Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour.

'Buffer zones' – In 2017 Jeremy Corbyn backed calls for abortion clinics to have 'buffer zones'.⁷⁵ Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott criticised Sajid Javid's rejection of buffer zones for all abortion sites in 2018.⁷⁶

Assisted suicide – Labour allowed its MPs a free vote on Rob Marris’s Bill to legalise assisted suicide in 2015.⁷⁷ Jeremy Corbyn did not vote.

Organ donation – Welsh Labour introduced a system of presumed consent for organ donation in 2015, a first for the UK.⁷⁸ Labour also supported legislation creating a presumed consent system in England.⁷⁹

GM babies – Labour gave its MPs a free vote on the plans to allow genetically modified babies with three or four parents.⁸⁰ Jeremy Corbyn voted in favour of GM babies.

Lobbying Act – The 2017 Labour manifesto pledged to repeal the 2014 Lobbying Act, citing the ‘gagging’ of charities.⁸¹

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

Prostitution – Jeremy Corbyn said in 2018 that he backs criminalising those who purchase sex but not prostitutes.⁸³

Pornography – Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott has criticised the access young children have to online pornography and suggested that “exposure to extreme imagery could be partly to blame for violent crime”.⁸⁴

Drugs – Labour promises to “progress clinically appropriate prescription of medical cannabis”.⁸⁵ The party has announced that it would launch a royal commission to review the legalisation of drugs including cannabis, cocaine and heroin. Labour would specifically consider creating state-run facilities where addicts can inject themselves with drugs.⁸⁶

Modern Slavery Act – Labour supported the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which gives greater protection to victims of human trafficking.⁸⁷

Gambling – Labour supported the reduction in the maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2.⁸⁸ The 2019 manifesto says Labour will curb gambling advertising in sports and introduce a new gambling Bill, including a levy to help tackle problem gambling.⁸⁹ It has also said it will ban credit card betting.⁹⁰

Blood donation – In 2017 Jeremy Corbyn spoke against the twelve-month deferral period on giving blood that applied to men who have had sex with men.⁹¹

Sunday trading – In 2016 Labour voted against the Government’s plans to liberalise Sunday trading and promised in its 2019 manifesto to “keep restrictions”.⁹²

Human Rights Act 1998 – In its 2017 manifesto, Labour said: “The Conservatives threaten our Human Rights Act and may withdraw us from the European Convention of Human Rights. Labour will retain the Human Rights Act.”⁹³

House of Lords – Labour says in its 2019 manifesto that it would replace the House of Lords with an “elected Senate of the Nations and Regions”.⁹⁴

LABOUR'S RECORD IN GOVERNMENT: 1997-2010

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 they were whipped to support the Bill as a whole.

The embryology Bill also saw votes on lowering the upper gestational limit for **abortion** from 24 weeks. Labour MPs were allowed to vote according to their conscience; Jeremy Corbyn voted against any reduction.

Labour pushed through various 'gay rights' measures, including **homosexual adoption**, the **Civil Partnership Act** and

reducing the **homosexual age of consent** to 16. In 2003 Labour repealed Section 28 for England and Wales (the law which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools).

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.

When in Government, the Labour Party resisted calls to lower the **age of heterosexual consent** from 16.⁹⁶

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



➤ Former Prime Ministers Gordon Brown and Tony Blair

a single Act. The Bill as introduced would have narrowed the employment freedom of churches and religious organisations. The House of Lords voted three times against any narrowing of those freedoms and the Government gave way. The Act also places an equality duty on public bodies – like schools and the police – covering homosexual and transgender rights, as well as other protected grounds.

In 2005 Labour tried to outlaw **incitement to religious hatred** through 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 agreed 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.

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

The **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, gambling adverts and internet gambling. The Act formally legalised fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) in high street betting shops. In 2008 Gordon Brown scrapped plans to create a super casino.

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

Scottish National Party

snp.org

The logo for the Scottish National Party (SNP) features the letters 'SNP' in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by a stylized 'X' symbol. The logo is set against a bright yellow rectangular background.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has been in Government in Scotland since 2007. It currently has 62 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP leader is **Nicola Sturgeon MSP**, Scotland's First Minister. The party had 35 MPs in Westminster at dissolution for the General Election.

SNP POLICIES

Named Person – In 2014 the SNP Government passed legislation to give every child in Scotland a 'named person' – a state employee – to oversee their 'wellbeing' or happiness. The Supreme Court ruled in 2016 that the scheme breached the right to a private and family life. In September 2019 Deputy First Minister John Swinney announced that the statutory scheme would be repealed, after being unable to make it lawful and workable.⁹⁷

Education – In November 2018 the SNP Government announced that Scotland would be the first country in the world to embed LGBT education across the curriculum.⁹⁸ Guidance on Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education is set to be revised to cover various themes relating to LGBT lifestyles.⁹⁹ The Scottish Government has defended an RSHP online resource that parents have said promotes masturbation and pornography.¹⁰⁰

Transgenderism – The party consulted on its plan to allow self-declaration of gender in 2017. It has announced its intention to hold a further consultation "on the detail of draft legislation to bring Scotland's process of Gender Recognition in line with international best practice".¹⁰¹ The SNP also supports a third gender option for passports and amending the Equality Act to explicitly protect "all trans and non-binary people".¹⁰²



LGBT rights envoy – The SNP has pledged that MPs will advocate for a special envoy to promote LGBT rights as an integral part of foreign policy.¹⁰³ In 2018 its shadow spokesman pressured the UK Government on the subject.¹⁰⁴

Same-sex marriage – A Government Bill to introduce same-sex marriage was passed in the Scottish Parliament in 2014. SNP MSPs were given a free vote on the Bill. SNP ministers denied that there was any need for amendments to improve protections for religious liberty and freedom of speech.¹⁰⁵

Civil partnerships – The party welcomed the principle of the Civil Partnership Bill in 2004.¹⁰⁶ All SNP MPs voted for the Bill at Westminster. The SNP Government has brought forward a Bill to make civil partnerships available to heterosexual couples.¹⁰⁷

Gay adoption and fostering – The SNP supports adoption by same-sex couples. It introduced fostering rights for homosexual couples; the regulations came into force in September 2009.¹⁰⁸

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 – SNP MPs had a free vote on the Bill, including on abortion.¹⁰⁹

Abortion – First Minister Nicola Sturgeon favours the current 24-week abortion limit.¹¹⁰ In 2017 she offered to cover the cost of abortions for Northern Irish women on the Scottish NHS.¹¹¹ In July 2019 she gave her support to SNP MPs voting to legalise abortion in Northern Ireland.¹¹² In a free vote, 20 SNP MPs voted to do so and two opposed the move.¹¹³ SNP MPs do not usually vote on measures only affecting other parts of the UK.

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 voted against assisted suicide Bills at Holyrood. In February 2015 she questioned how such legislation could contain sufficient safeguards.¹¹⁴

Sexual Orientation Regulations (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.¹¹⁵

Hate crimes – In its 2019 programme for Government, the SNP said it will extend the characteristics to which hate crime statutory aggravations apply and will also introduce 'stirring up hatred' offences for all relevant characteristics.¹¹⁶ A Scottish Government hate crime campaign that included a poster addressed "Dear Bigots" was criticised as singling out religious believers.¹¹⁷ The SNP supported the Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act 2009, which introduced tougher penalties for crimes committed against homosexuals and transgender people.

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

Incitement to religious hatred – The SNP was in favour of the House of Lords amendments that included a robust free speech shield in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.¹¹⁸

Islamophobia – The SNP has adopted the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims’ definition of ‘Islamophobia’.^{118a}

Lobbying – The party’s 2015 manifesto said: “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.”¹¹⁹ In Holyrood a Government Bill to introduce a lobbying register was passed in 2016.¹²⁰

Smacking – The SNP strongly supported a Bill passed in October 2019 that will criminalise parents for reasonable chastisement.¹²¹

Home education – Guidance published by the Scottish Government in 2007 upheld the right of parents to home educate and denied that child protection problems are any more likely to arise with home-educated children than those educated at school.¹²² The Scottish Government is conducting a review of the guidance.¹²³

Prostitution – The SNP describes prostitution as “a form of violence against women” and is in favour of criminalising the purchase but not the sale of sex.¹²⁴

Gambling – The SNP pushed for the reduction of the maximum stake on FOBTs.¹²⁵ In its 2019 manifesto the party says it will “press for greater devolution of gambling regulation” and “press the UK Government to stop underage gambling on video games”. It also promises to “support a full public health inquiry into gambling related harm”.¹²⁶

Drugs – In October 2019 the SNP conference backed a resolution to decriminalise the possession and consumption of drugs.¹²⁷ The SNP wants to be able to introduce facilities where drug addicts can inject themselves.¹²⁸ The party commits in its 2019 manifesto to call on Westminster to devolve drugs policy.¹²⁹ The SNP Government announced new limits to tackle drug-driving in October 2019.¹³⁰

Alcohol – The SNP Government passed the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) Scotland Act 2012, introducing a minimum price per unit on alcohol. It was implemented in 2018.¹³¹

Sunday trading – In 2016 SNP MPs voted against the Government’s plans to relax Sunday trading.¹³² The party supports Sunday trading in principle, but did not want Scottish workers to be adversely affected by the legislation for England and Wales.¹³³

Constitution – The party is fully opposed to the abolition of the Human Rights Act 1998.¹³⁴ The party supports a proportional representation electoral system for Westminster elections.¹³⁵

House of Lords – The SNP commits in its 2019 manifesto to abolishing the “undemocratic” House of Lords.¹³⁶



The Liberal Democrats had 20 MPs at dissolution for the General Election. The party leader is **Jo Swinson**.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS PARTY POLICIES

Relationships and sex education – It has long been the policy of the Lib Dems to have mandatory sex education in primary schools. The party welcomed Relationships Education, the Government's new statutory subject for primary schools.¹³⁷ Its 2019 manifesto says teaching on LGBT+ relationships, sexual consent and "issues surrounding explicit images and content" will all be included in sex and relationships education.¹³⁸

Transgenderism – The party's 2019 manifesto pledges to 'completely reform the Gender Recognition Act', including removing the need for medical diagnosis. It would also recognise "non-binary gender identities" and introduce an 'X' option to designate sex on passports.¹³⁹

Drugs – The Liberal Democrats have consistently called for a radical liberalisation of the UK's drugs laws.¹⁴¹ The party would end prison sentences for the possession of drugs for personal use but says it would impose "severe penalties on those who manufacture, import and/or deal in illegal drugs".¹⁴² It supports a legal, regulated cannabis market in the UK, including making it available through licensed outlets.¹⁴³ The party previously proposed the



Jo Swinson, leader of the Liberal Democrats

decriminalisation of heroin use and giving heroin to addicts as a way to cut crime.¹⁴⁴

Abortion – The party's 2019 manifesto pledges to decriminalise abortion across the UK.¹⁴⁵ The Lib Dems would also introduce 'buffer zones' around abortion centres.¹⁴⁶ Jo Swinson voted in favour of legalising abortion in Northern Ireland, which was a free vote for Lib Dem MPs.

Assisted suicide – The party supports the legalisation of assisted suicide.¹⁴⁷ In September 2015 the Lib Dems gave their MPs a free vote on Rob Marris's Bill to legalise assisted suicide.

Extremism – The Liberal Democrats opposed the Conservative Government's plan to introduce 'banning orders'.¹⁴⁸ The party would scrap *Prevent*.¹⁴⁹ It has also proposed replacing the term "British values" with

“universal democratic values”.¹⁵⁰

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 House of Lords, including a robust free speech protection, as the Bill would have “censored legitimate speech”.¹⁵¹

Hate crime – The party wants to extend hate crime laws to cover “all forms of hate activity”, including an ‘incitement to hatred’ offence covering transgenderism.¹⁵² The 2019 manifesto promises to make all ‘hate crimes’ “aggravated offences”.^{151a}

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.¹⁵³

Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORs) – The party supported the Labour Government in voting for the SORs in 2007,¹⁵⁴ which closed down the Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England.

Equality Act 2010 – The Liberal Democrats welcomed the Equality Act. They voted for narrowing employment protections for churches and religious organisations.¹⁵⁵

LGBT rights – The party’s 2017 manifesto promised a comprehensive international strategy.¹⁵⁶

Divorce – The 2019 manifesto pledges to introduce “a right to no-fault divorce”.¹⁵⁷

Same-sex marriage – The Liberal Democrats viewed the same-sex marriage legislation as a great achievement.¹⁵⁸ In its 2019 manifesto

the party commits to removing provisions that prevent same-sex weddings within the Church of England and Church in Wales.¹⁵⁹ Jo Swinson voted in favour of legalising same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

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

Smacking – It is party policy to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK law.¹⁶⁰ Anti-smacking groups say this means banning parental smacking. Frontbench MSPs Liam McArthur and Alex Cole-Hamilton co-sponsored the Bill to criminalise parents in Scotland who smack.

Home education – The Liberal Democrats believe there should be “greater supervision” of home-educated children, including visits twice a year by a local authority representative “to ensure that appropriate education” is being given.¹⁶¹

Schools – The party’s 2015 manifesto said it would: “Support schools to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination, and to establish a tolerant and inclusive environment for all their pupils. We will remove schools’ exemption from the bar on harassment in these areas while protecting the right to teach about religious doctrine.”¹⁶² The party would require all school uniform policies to be gender-neutral.¹⁶³

State-funded Christian schools – A party conference motion passed in 2017 said every church school should lose its freedoms to i) choose Christian staff, except for religious instruction, and ii) select pupils on the basis that they agree with the school’s ethos.¹⁶⁴

Prostitution – The party’s 2017 manifesto said it would: “Decriminalise the sale and purchase of sex”.¹⁶⁵

Gambling – The Liberal Democrats backed the reduction to a £2 maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs)¹⁶⁷ and commit in the 2019 manifesto to restricting gambling advertising, banning the use of credit cards for gambling, and introducing a compulsory levy on gambling firms to tackle gambling problems.¹⁶⁸

Pornography – The Liberal Democrats opposed legislation that would have imposed age-verification checks on pornographic websites.¹⁶⁹

Alcohol – The party’s 2017 manifesto promised to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol.¹⁷⁰

Blood donation – The Lib Dems supported the changes made in 2011 and 2017 to the National Blood Service public safety policy that banned men who had ever had sex with men from giving blood.¹⁷¹

Sunday trading – When the Government proposed in 2016 to liberalise Sunday trading, Lib Dem MPs were given a free vote.¹⁷²

Organ donation – The party supported the introduction of a presumed consent organ donation system.¹⁷³

Islamophobia – The Liberal Democrats have adopted the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims’ definition of Islamophobia.¹⁷⁴

Persecution of Christians – The 2019 manifesto promises to: “Protect, defend, and promote human rights for all, including LGBT+ individuals who are persecuted across the world as well as those persecuted for their religion or belief.”¹⁷⁵

Human Rights Act – The party’s 2019 manifesto says it will: “Defend the Human Rights Act, resist any attempt to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and oppose any laws that unnecessarily erode civil liberties.”^{175a}

Constitution – The party in its 2019 manifesto supports a proportional representation electoral system for Westminster elections and an elected House of Lords.¹⁷⁶

RECORD IN COALITION GOVERNMENT 2010-2015

For the Liberal Democrats’ record in coalition Government with the Conservatives from 2010 to 2015, see pages 12-13. On some of the issues we have included, the Lib Dems disagreed with the coalition Government’s approach. Some of these are mentioned here:

Marriage allowance – The party would also scrap the tax allowance for married couples.¹⁷⁷

Legal rights for cohabitants – 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.¹⁷⁸

Lobbying Act – The Liberal Democrats have said that they will examine the effects of the Act on charities and may amend it in future if in Government.¹⁷⁹

The Independent Group for Change

votechange.uk



The Independent Group for Change (IGC) was formed in March 2019 by three Conservative and eight Labour MPs. Six subsequently left the IGC; it had five MPs at the time of dissolution for the General Election. Its leader is **Anna Soubry**.

THE INDEPENDENT GROUP FOR CHANGE PARTY POLICIES

At the time of going to print, the IGC has never published a formal manifesto. It identifies its aim as pursuing “policies that are evidence-based, not led by ideology”.¹⁸⁰

Same-sex marriage – Four of the party’s MPs voted in favour of same-sex marriage in 2013.

Abortion – While in their previous parties, four of the IGC MPs voted for abortion on demand up to 24 weeks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Four MPs in the party voted to legalise **abortion and same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland**. Anna Soubry did not vote.

Constitution – The party’s 2019 manifesto says it would reform the House of Lords, with “fairer representation of the elected bodies from each of the nations, regions and local government.”^{180a}





Plaid Cymru had four MPs in Westminster at dissolution for the General Election and it has ten Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales. The leader of Plaid Cymru is **Adam Price AM**.

PLAID CYMRU PARTY POLICIES

Same-sex marriage – All three Plaid Cymru MPs at the time voted in favour of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.¹⁸¹ Then leader Leanne Wood objected to the exemption for the Church in Wales which bars them from conducting same-sex weddings.¹⁸² All Plaid MPs voted to legalise same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

Transgenderism – Plaid Cymru has pledged to support the development of the first Gender Identity Clinic in Wales.¹⁸³ In its 2019 manifesto Plaid pledges to make changing legal sex a “streamlined, de-medicalised process”.¹⁸⁴

Abortion – One Plaid Cymru MP voted for Fiona Bruce’s amendment to explicitly ban sex-selective abortion; one voted against. Plaid Cymru supported the legalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland and all four MPs voted for it.¹⁸⁵



Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 – Two of the then three Plaid Cymru MPs in 2008 voted in favour of animal-human embryos,aviour siblings and keeping the abortion limit at 24 weeks. One Plaid MP voted to keep the ‘need for a father’ requirement in IVF treatment.

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

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

LGBT rights – Plaid Cymru states on its website: “We want to see a fairer and better Wales and Europe where everybody has the freedom to express their sexuality and identity.”¹⁸⁶ The party voted in favour of the equalisation of the age of consent, civil partnerships, adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples, the repeal of Section 28, the Sexual Orientation Regulations and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. In its 2015 manifesto Plaid said it wants to see LGBT rights “implemented on a global scale”.¹⁸⁷

Incitement to religious hatred – Plaid Cymru opposed the introduction of an incitement to religious hatred law.¹⁸⁸

‘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,¹⁸⁹ and all three of its MPs at the time voted in favour of restricting the freedoms of churches and other religious organisations to employ people in accordance with their beliefs. Plaid says in its 2019 manifesto it wants to include “gender identity” as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act.^{189a}

Home education – Plaid wants parents to be required to register home-educated children with their local authority and for children to be “seen and spoken to annually”.¹⁹⁰

Smacking – Plaid Cymru supports the legislation to ban smacking in Wales.¹⁹¹

Gambling – In 2004-05 all of the four Plaid Cymru MPs at the time voted against the Gambling Bill. The party supported the reduction in the maximum stakes on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) from £100 to £2.¹⁹²

Drugs – Plaid’s 2019 manifesto says it is in favour of decriminalising cannabis, and wants a National Commission on reforming drug law.¹⁹³

Alcohol – Plaid Cymru supports the introduction of a minimum pricing policy for alcohol.¹⁹⁴

Sunday trading – Two of the then three Plaid MPs voted against liberalising Sunday trading in 2016; the other did not vote.

Constitution – In its 2019 manifesto Plaid Cymru supports establishing proportional representation in the UK Parliament, and a fully-elected House of Lords.¹⁹⁵



The Green Party had one MP, Caroline Lucas, at dissolution for the General Election, and has seven MEPs. Its co-leaders are **Siân Berry** and **Jonathan Bartley**.

GREEN PARTY POLICIES

Education – Caroline Lucas described the Government’s introduction of mandatory Relationships Education for primary schools as “wonderful news”.¹⁹⁶ The party says in its 2019 manifesto it wants to “end the opt-out of LGBTIQ+ inclusive” lessons and fund lessons covering “all aspects of sex and relationships”.^{196a} It would also abolish the requirement for collective worship.¹⁹⁷

The Greens support the right of parents to educate their children at home.¹⁹⁸

Transgenderism – The Green Party supports allowing under-18s to gain legal recognition in their ‘self-declared’ sex, without parental permission.^{198a} It also promises to increase funding for gender identity clinics, and to introduce an ‘X’ option to designate sex on passports.¹⁹⁹

Same-sex marriage – The Green Party welcomed the introduction of same-sex marriage and Caroline Lucas voted for its legalisation in Northern Ireland in July 2019.²⁰⁰ The party believes same-sex marriages should be allowed in Anglican churches.²⁰¹

Heterosexual civil partnerships – The party supported the introduction of heterosexual civil partnerships.²⁰²

Equality law – The party’s position is that “opt-outs from equality and discrimination laws by religious organisations will not be allowed”.²⁰³

Free speech – Caroline Lucas supported the Defend Free Speech campaign against Extremism Disruption Orders and said that anti-extremism measures would restrict civil liberties.²⁰⁴ She also supported reform of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 so that it no longer catches “insulting’ words or behaviour.

Extremism – In its 2017 manifesto the party said it wanted to scrap the **Prevent** strategy and “pursue community-led collaborative approaches to tackling all forms of extremism instead”.²⁰⁵



🕸 Green Party co-leaders Jonathan Bartley and Siân Berry.

Abortion – The party wants the remaining criminal laws relating to abortion to be removed and Caroline Lucas voted for Diana Johnson’s Ten Minute Rule Bill to do this.²⁰⁶ Caroline Lucas voted against explicitly banning sex-selective abortion in 2015 but says she opposes it.²⁰⁷ She also voted to introduce abortion in Northern Ireland. The party would prevent pro-life advice being advertised in any state-funded school or institution.²⁰⁸

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

Assisted suicide – The Green Party supports assisted suicide, which Caroline Lucas voted to legalise in 2015.²⁰⁹

Drugs – The party says in its 2019 manifesto that all drugs should be legalised and regulated.²¹⁰ It proposes making cannabis available for recreational use through licensed outlets, as well as making heroin

available on prescription.²¹¹ The 2019 manifesto also promises ‘drug consumption rooms’ where users can inject themselves.²¹² It says the Green Party would prohibit advertising of all drugs including alcohol, and introduce minimum unit pricing on alcohol.^{212a}

Prostitution – The Green Party wants to decriminalise all aspects of prostitution.²¹³

Gambling – Caroline Lucas opposed fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) and asked the Government to review the Gambling Act 2005.²¹⁴

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

Constitution – The Green Party wants to disestablish the Church of England and abolish the “legislative, executive and judicial roles of the monarch”.²¹⁵ It supports a proportional representation electoral system for Westminster elections and would replace the House of Lords with an elected second chamber.²¹⁶



The Brexit Party was formed in January 2019. It currently has 28 MEPs, including its leader **Nigel Farage**.

BREXIT PARTY POLICIES

At the time of going to print, the Brexit Party has never published a formal manifesto.

Free speech – The Brexit Party includes freedom of speech in one of its seven core position statements.²¹⁷ The party's 2019 'Contract with the People' seeks to: "Require Universities to incorporate an obligation to protect legal free speech."^{217a} When Brexit Party MEP Ann Widdecombe was criticised for comments she made about homosexuality, Nigel Farage said:

"Ann... will have views on abortion and on homosexuality that will be very different to the views that will be held by many others. I think these things are a matter of conscience, I don't think they are matters for party leaders to support or condemn individuals because they have strong views."²¹⁸

Nigel Farage supported reform of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986.

Smacking – The Brexit Party's Welsh Assembly members oppose the Welsh Government's legislation to criminalise parents who smack.²¹⁹



Constitution – The Brexit Party would abolish the "unelected House of Lords", and supports a proportional representation electoral system for Westminster elections.²²⁰

THE CHRISTIAN PARTY POLICIES

Relationships and sex education – The party called for sex education classes to be restricted to secondary schools, on a “parental opt-in basis”. It has opposed the promotion of “the LGBT agenda” through schools. The party promised to promote the Christian view of sex and marriage as part of the curriculum.²²¹

Transgenderism – The Christian Party opposes public funding of ‘sex changes’.²²²

Marriage – The party supports traditional marriage and opposed the coalition Government’s introduction of same-sex marriage.²²³ It called for a marriage tax allowance for “all married couples, regardless of income” and criticised the easy availability of divorce.²²⁴

Sanctity of life – The Christian Party opposes abortion, euthanasia and the destruction of human embryos.²²⁵

Free speech – The party supported the free speech clause inserted in the homophobic hatred law by Lord Waddington and it also promises more generally to: “Uphold free speech and abolish the concept of ‘Thought Crime.’”²²⁶

Equality law – It pledges 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”.²²⁷

Smacking – The party supports parents’ freedom to smack their children and said it would “shift the balance of power in the home from children back to parents”.²²⁸

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.”²²⁹

Prostitution – The Christian Party opposes prostitution.²³⁰

Religious Education – The Christian Party has said that “provision of Christian religious education in schools should be reinstated, with no obligation to promote other faiths”.²³¹

Sunday trading – The Christian Party said it would seek to: “Promote the restoration of Sunday as a day of rest”.²³²

i *The Christian Party may run joint candidates with the Christian Peoples Alliance in some constituencies.*

CHRISTIAN PEOPLES ALLIANCE (CPA) PARTY POLICIES

Relationships and sex education – The party says in its 2019 manifesto that it is opposed to compulsory sex education.²³³ It also criticises the imposition of “secular liberal LGBT based” ideology in schools.²³⁴

Transgenderism – The CPA would make “any kind of gender reassignment treatment or surgery on children” “strictly illegal”.^{234a} Medical transition for adults would not be NHS-funded. Those “suffering from ‘gender dysphoria’” would be offered therapy.^{234b}

Marriage – The manifesto says the party will provide a grant of £12,000 when men and women first get married and £6,000 on the birth of their first child.²³⁵

Same-sex marriage – The CPA has pledged to repeal same-sex marriage legislation.^{235a}

Adoption – The CPA would restrict adoption to heterosexual married couples.^{235b}

Sanctity of life – The party would ban abortion, human cloning, embryo experimentation and all forms of euthanasia.²³⁶

Drugs – The CPA has pledged to “take a stricter approach to drug use because of the clear link between drug use and crime”.²³⁸ It also promises to make counselling available for drug addiction free of charge.²³⁹

Prostitution – The 2019 manifesto promises to “oppose any attempts to relax moral laws such as legalising brothels or legalising prostitution”.²⁴⁰

Gambling – The CPA would repeal the Gambling Act 2005 and put new controls on casinos as well as mandatory warnings of the risks of gambling in all betting shops.²⁴¹ Gambling adverts would also be banned.^{241a}

Faith schools – The party states that: “Christian schools, and provision for children from other faiths, should be encouraged and if appropriate state funded, but every effort should be made to ensure a broad enough basic curriculum in these and all schools.”²⁴²

Religious Education – The CPA says that RE should explain the beliefs of religions clearly, including by inviting adherents into schools to explain their views.²⁴³

Persecution of Christians – The party would seek international agreements to protect Christians from persecution.^{243a}

Sunday trading – According to its manifesto, the party would: “Restore Sunday as a day of rest and family time”.²⁴⁴

House of Lords – The manifesto advocates reforming the House of Lords, “with all members of the Second Chamber being elected by Proportional Representation”.²⁴⁵

i *The Christian Peoples Alliance may run joint candidates with the Christian Party in some constituencies.*

More information about legislation and public policy

EDUCATION

i *Education policy is devolved to both Scotland and Wales.*

Sex education (England)

Until new legislation is implemented in September 2020, the law requires state-maintained secondary schools in England to offer sex education. This does not apply to free schools, academies and primary schools. However, there have been many efforts in recent years to press for 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.²⁴⁶

In March 2017 the Conservative Government announced a new statutory subject of 'Relationships Education', to apply to *all* primary schools in England. Welcomed across the parties, the enabling legislation was passed later that year. The implementing regulations and accompanying statutory guidance were consulted on in 2018. The new subject will be fully implemented from September 2020, though many schools have already started. It will mean teaching young children about "different types" of relationships, which could include homosexuality, transgenderism and same-sex marriage. Parents will not have the right to withdraw their children from the classes. A secondary school subject called Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) – covering "sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity" – will include a partial right

of parental withdrawal. Department for Education (DfE) guidance says schools "are free to determine" how they address LGBT content but it should be "fully integrated into their programmes of study" when taught.²⁴⁷ The DfE states that secondary schools should cover LGBT content and that primary schools are "strongly encouraged" to do so.²⁴⁸

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.²⁴⁹ There must also be a daily act of collective worship in schools that is "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".²⁵⁰ Teachers and pupils can opt out of the act of worship.

Promoting homosexuality in schools

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

Home education (England)

Parents are responsible for ensuring their children receive a suitable education, at school or otherwise. Education is compulsory, but school is not.

There have been growing calls for the regulation of home education. Senior Ofsted and local authority figures have made a link between home education and unregistered schools. Dame Louise Casey's integration review, commissioned by the Government in July 2015 and published in December 2016, called for greater regulation of home education.

In April 2019 the DfE consulted on the creation of four new duties, including requiring home-educating parents to register their children with their local authority. The Government has not yet published the outcome of the consultation. DfE guidance for local authorities and home educators, published in April 2019, includes “conflict with ‘Fundamental British Values’” as an example of unsuitable teaching.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Same-sex marriage

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

Religious groups can opt in to conduct same-sex weddings if they wish, but the 2013 Act specifically excludes same-sex weddings within the Church of England and the Church in Wales.²⁵¹ It also states that no church or church minister can be compelled “by any means” to carry out a same-sex wedding.²⁵² 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.

In July 2019 MPs at Westminster voted to impose same-sex marriage on Northern Ireland by regulations if the Stormont institutions were not restored by 21 October 2019. The Northern Ireland Secretary is under an obligation to introduce same-sex marriage to Northern Ireland by 13 January 2020.²⁵³

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 virtually identical. It was seen by many as paving the way for same-sex marriage.

In June 2014 the Government rejected the idea of extending civil partnerships to heterosexual couples after respondents to a consultation were overwhelmingly opposed.²⁵⁴ The Supreme Court ruled in June 2018 that it was unlawful that heterosexual couples could only marry while same-sex couples had the choice of marriage or civil partnership. Following this, the UK Government agreed to support a Private Member’s Bill requiring civil partnerships to be extended to heterosexual couples by the end of 2019.²⁵⁵ The Scottish Government also intends to introduce opposite-sex civil partnerships.²⁵⁶

Marriage tax breaks

In April 2014 MPs voted 279 to 214 in favour of a tax break for married couples and civil partners. The transferable tax allowance, which became available on 6 April 2015, is worth up to £250 in 2019-20.²⁵⁷

Parental smacking

Parents throughout the UK have been able to use a loving smack under the defence of reasonable chastisement. This remains lawful in England and Northern Ireland and there are currently no plans to change it. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance covering England says anything that causes ‘more than transitory’ reddening of the skin is not reasonable and therefore is a criminal offence. The Welsh Assembly is considering a Bill to abolish the reasonable chastisement defence. The Scottish Parliament passed legislation to abolish it in October 2019, which will criminalise all parental smacking when it comes into force.

Adoption

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples in England and Wales. Before this, some 95 per cent of all adoptions were by married couples and the other five per cent by single persons.²⁵⁸ In England and Wales in 2018-19, twelve per cent of adoptions were to same-sex couples.²⁵⁹ The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting and homosexual couples in Scotland.

Transgenderism

The UK's Gender Recognition Act 2004 allows an adult who has been diagnosed with 'gender dysphoria'²⁶⁰ by two doctors and has lived for two years in the opposite sex to change legal sex, including on their birth certificate.

There have been increasing calls to liberalise the 2004 Act, in particular so people can change their legal sex without any need for a medical diagnosis ('self-declaration'). There are also calls for the minimum age for changing legal sex to be reduced from 18 to 16, and for legal recognition for those who say they are neither male nor female ('non-binary').²⁶¹

The UK Government consulted on changing the Act for England and Wales in 2018. Its stated aim was to make it "less intrusive and bureaucratic" to change legal sex.²⁶² The consultation closed in October 2018 and received over 100,000 responses.²⁶³ The Government has not announced the outcome. Ministers have conceded that the issue is more contentious than they anticipated.²⁶⁴

In 2017 the Scottish Government launched a consultation on a proposal to allow self-declaration. There were over 15,000 responses. Of those answering the

relevant question, 60 per cent were in favour of the plans.²⁶⁵ The Scottish Government has announced a further consultation on a Bill to "bring Scotland's process of Gender Recognition in line with international best practice".²⁶⁶

MEDICAL ETHICS

Abortion

The present law allows abortion up to 24 weeks' gestation, but 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 been used as a ground for an abortion.²⁶⁷ Overall in 2018 in Great Britain, 98 per cent of the 218,581 legal abortions were carried out for social reasons.²⁶⁸

In 2008 pro-life MPs sought a reduction in the upper gestational time limit for abortion from the current limit of 24 weeks. Several votes to lower this were sadly lost.

The coalition Government stated on numerous occasions that sex-selective abortion is illegal in Britain. However, the head of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has claimed that the "law is silent on the matter of gender selection".²⁶⁹ The Daily Telegraph carried out an investigation in 2012 that caught two doctors offering abortions to women who said their babies were the 'wrong sex'.²⁷⁰ The CPS decided not to charge the two doctors, saying it was not in the public interest.²⁷¹ In February 2015, MPs did not back an amendment proposed by Conservative MP Fiona Bruce to clarify that abortion on the grounds of sex alone is illegal in the UK.

Department of Health guidance on abortion released in May 2014 says there is "no legal requirement" for doctors to

see women seeking an abortion before approving it. It suggests that nurses could see the patient instead. The guidance also suggests that doctors can reach an opinion by talking to the patient over the phone or via a webcam.²⁷² This has been seen as the biggest liberalisation of abortion practice in England and Wales since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed.

In September 2019 new guidelines on abortion were published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). The guidelines have been criticised for making recommendations that could encourage abortion. These include self-referrals to abortion providers and replacing face-to-face consultations with phone or video consultations.

Some local councils have started to use powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2014 to create **'buffer zones'** around abortion clinics. These zones prevent pro-life groups from having a presence within a certain distance of abortion sites. In 2018 the Government reviewed whether it should create buffer zones for all abortion venues nationwide, but said that doing so would not be "proportionate".²⁷³

In July 2019 MPs at Westminster voted to liberalise abortion law in Northern Ireland, if the Stormont institutions were not restored by 21 October 2019. From 22 October, abortion became legal in the Province for any reason, unless the baby is capable of being born alive. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is under a duty to create a new abortion framework by regulations, before 31 March 2020.²⁷⁴ Until the new framework is in place abortions will not be available on the NHS in Northern Ireland, but the UK Government is paying for women to travel to England for the procedure.²⁷⁵

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

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Act 2008

This became law in November 2008, liberalising UK law covering the use of embryos. The most controversial elements 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.²⁷⁶ The work on animal-human hybrids was abandoned as a failure a year after the Act was passed.²⁷⁷

GM babies

The HFE Act permitted future regulations allowing scientists to create genetically modified children for women who have mitochondrial disease. The coalition Government introduced these regulations in February 2015, making the UK the first country in the world to legislate for the techniques to create GM children with three or four parents.²⁷⁸ The procedures involve germline modification, which will affect future generations in unknown ways. The first licence to create three and four-parent babies was granted by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in March 2017.²⁷⁹

Assisted suicide/euthanasia

Euthanasia by acts of commission, such as by administering a lethal injection, is illegal in the UK, as is assisting someone to commit suicide. Pro-euthanasia campaigners have made repeated attempts to change the law.

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

MSPs rejected the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill in May 2015 by 82 votes to 36.

In June 2014 the UK Supreme Court dismissed an appeal to allow doctors to assist in suicides. Judges upheld an earlier decision by the High Court, saying that it is for the UK Parliament to decide.²⁸⁰ The European Court of Human Rights has confirmed that the law on assisted suicide is a matter for Member States.²⁸¹ In November 2018, the Supreme Court declined to hear a case brought by a man with motor neurone disease who was trying to change the law.²⁸²

Blood donation

In 2011 the coalition Government removed a safeguard preventing blood being donated by men who have ever had sex with other men.²⁸³ It had been in place since the 1980s to prevent the risk of HIV contamination. But from November 2011 men who had not had sexual contact with another man for more than twelve months were able to donate blood in Great Britain. The Government reduced this deferral period to three months in 2017. Men who have sex with men have a higher risk of sexually acquired blood-borne viruses.²⁸⁴

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN THE UK

Counter-extremism strategy

The Government's counter-extremism strategy goes beyond tackling terrorism and violence to address 'non-violent extremism'. This is described as vocal or active opposition to "fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs".²⁸⁵

Concerns have been raised that this definition is too vague and subjective, potentially catching any person with strong beliefs, no matter how peace-loving or innocuous. The difficulty in agreeing a legal

definition of extremism reportedly led to the Government abandoning a proposed Counter-Extremism Bill.²⁸⁶ David Anderson QC, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, said an early draft extremism Bill was the most alarming single document he saw in his time in the role, because of its implications for freedom.²⁸⁷

The Conservative Government established the Commission for Countering Extremism in 2018 to advise on new policies to deal with extremism, including the need for any new powers. The Commission held a call for evidence, to which 2,500 members of the public responded. Nearly 60 per cent said the Government's extremism definition was "very unhelpful" with a further 17 per cent describing it as "unhelpful".²⁸⁸ The Commission's first report was published in October 2019. It criticised the Government's extremism definition for damaging freedom of speech and said there was no evidence of new laws being required. It recommended that the focus should be on tackling 'hateful extremism'.²⁸⁹ The Government has not responded to the report, but plans to publish a new Counter-Extremism Strategy in 2020.²⁹⁰

'British values' in schools – In 2014 Ofsted inspectors began carrying out 'British values' checks on schools across the education system in England. There were multiple reports of Ofsted inspectors failing to understand or respect the ethos of Jewish and Christian schools. Intrusive questions were asked of children and teachers about issues including same-sex marriage and transgenderism.

Ofsted inspections of churches – The 2015 Counter-Extremism Strategy proposed that out-of-school institutions teaching children would in future have to register with the state. The Government consulted on giving Ofsted legal power to investigate

any setting in England that provides instruction to children for more than six to eight hours in any week. The proposals stated that any “extremist” or “undesirable” teaching which is incompatible with ‘British values’ would be prohibited.²⁹¹

The plans could have encompassed various forms of church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, church weekends away, some summer camps and even Sunday schools. Sanctions potentially included banning leaders from working with children. Failure to register would have been a criminal offence. The consultation closed in January 2016. In April 2018 the plans were formally dropped.

Extremism Disruption Orders – Plans for Extremism Disruption Orders (EDOs) stalled due to the failure to agree a definition of ‘extremism’ for the Counter-extremism Bill (see above). EDOs were to be aimed at “harmful activities of extremist individuals who spread hate but do not break laws”.²⁹² Theresa May said the measures would cover “extremism in all its forms”.²⁹³ ‘Banning orders’ were also proposed to close down groups promoting ‘extremism’.²⁹⁴

Prevent – The *Prevent* strategy was first introduced under Labour after the July 2005 London bombings. After the coalition Government reviewed the strategy in 2011, it began to focus more on non-violent extremists. The *Prevent* strategy has been controversial. It has been linked to well-publicised incidents of over-reaction. However, there are also reports of the scheme operating successfully. The Government has committed to a review, which must be completed by August 2020.²⁹⁵

Reform of Section 5

The misuse of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 led to several instances of Christians being arrested, detained and

even prosecuted simply for expressing their religious beliefs. In December 2012 the House of Lords overwhelmingly supported former police Chief Constable Lord Dear’s amendment to remove the word “insulting” from the scope of Section 5, voting 150 to 54. In January 2013, the Government agreed to give way.²⁹⁶ The reform officially came into force on 1 February 2014.

Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance (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 IPNAs. The proposed injunctions would have outlawed “causing nuisance or annoyance to any person” in a public place and were widely criticised as being too vague.²⁹⁷

In January 2014 the House of Lords voted 306 to 178 to replace the proposed “nuisance or annoyance” threshold with the safer, longstanding threshold of causing “harassment, alarm or distress”. The Government subsequently backed down and agreed to accept the basis of the amendment.²⁹⁸

Hate crime and aggravated offences

Currently, certain racially and religiously aggravated crimes automatically carry a tougher penalty in English law. Crimes motivated by hostility to sexual orientation and transgenderism can also receive a more serious sentence. There are moves to elevate such offences to the same category as religion and race. The most serious forms of hate crime are ‘incitement to hatred’ offences, which currently cover race (Great Britain) and religion and sexual orientation (England and Wales).

Incitement to religious hatred law –

After several earlier attempts, the Labour

Government succeeded in passing an incitement to religious hatred offence in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. After an extensive campaign, vital safeguards were introduced to protect, among other things, religious debate and evangelism. As amended, the law (which has a maximum seven-year prison sentence) only covers threatening words or behaviour intended to stir up hatred, and there is an explicit protection for free speech and evangelism. The Government opposed these safeguards, which were introduced by the House of Lords, and said it would remove them in the Commons. However, MPs voted in January 2006 to keep the safeguards.

'Incitement to homophobic hatred' law – An 'incitement to homophobic hatred' offence was passed in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008. The offence outlaws any threatening words or behaviour intended to stir up hatred on grounds of sexual orientation and 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 but did not include an explicit free speech protection. In response the late Lord Waddington, a former Home Secretary, tabled a cross-party amendment in the House of Lords to protect free speech. 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.

Islamophobia

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims published a definition of 'Islamophobia' in November 2018: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness".²⁹⁹

This definition was adopted by several political parties but was rejected by the Government. An open letter to the Home Secretary criticised the definition as not being fit for purpose and carrying the danger of being used to "shut down legitimate criticism and investigation". The letter had more than 40 signatories, including the National Secular Society, Richard Dawkins, Peter Tatchell, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali and Baroness Cox.³⁰⁰

Employment laws

In 2003 the Labour Government introduced special employment rights for homosexuals, having agreed to an EU Directive in this area. After a long campaign by church schools, churches and Christian organisations, the Government gave an exemption in the UK laws so that such bodies are not forced to employ practising homosexuals.

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.

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.

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

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Bill debated by Parliament in 2009-10 sought to consolidate all discrimination laws, including the Equality Act 2006 and the SORs, into a single Act. Yet the Labour Government's Bill as introduced would have narrowed the employment freedom of churches and religious organisations even further than the 2003 employment laws (see above). The Government was defeated three times in the

House of Lords, preventing any narrowing of the 2003 laws.

Lobbying Act 2014

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 changed electoral law. It does not target professional lobbyists but instead hinders the work of voluntary groups and grassroots organisations.

During the passage of the Bill some 130 groups 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 those sought by the Commission.

PUBLIC MORALITY

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 class B to class C. This came into force in 2004 across the whole of the UK. However, the drug was restored to class B in 2009 due to overwhelming evidence of cannabis damaging mental health.

There is a concerted campaign underway to dismantle the UK's drugs legislation. Two House of Commons committees – the Health and Social Care Committee and the Scottish Affairs Committee – have called for possession of drugs for personal use to be decriminalised.³⁰¹

Significant attention has focused on 'medical cannabis' after high-profile cases of sick children seemingly benefiting from using cannabis oils. From 1 November 2018 the law was changed to permit specialist doctors to prescribe unlicensed cannabis-derived products. This could allow products to be prescribed that have not been subject to rigorous tests and trials as medical treatments usually are. Access to cannabis-derived medicinal products has so far been limited, with campaigners arguing that the law change has not gone far enough.³⁰² Doctors have been reluctant to prescribe cannabis without more evidence that it is safe.³⁰³

The Psychoactive Substances Act came into force in May 2016. It prohibits 'legal highs', which mimic the effects of banned substances such as cannabis and heroin. Also known as psychoactive substances, they were linked to 204 deaths in 2015.³⁰⁴

Gambling

In 2005 the Labour Government passed the new Gambling Act. The Act removed restrictions controlling 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 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 rejected plans for the one super casino allowed by the legislation.³⁰⁵

In October 2016 the Government

announced a review of gaming machines, asking whether changes should be made to maximum stakes or prizes. FOBTs allowed gamblers to stake up to £18,000 an hour. The Government announced in May 2018 that the maximum stake on FOBTs would be reduced to £2. This was implemented from April 2019.³⁰⁶

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

Sunday trading

Sunday trading was legalised in England and Wales in 1994, when the Sunday Trading Act allowed six hours of unregulated trading for large stores.

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

Deregulation undermines Sunday as a day of rest. It also puts pressure on employees to work on Sundays. Employee protections in legislation have proved to be weak.

THE CONSTITUTION

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

Council prayers

In February 2012 a High Court judge ruled that local councils had no lawful power

to hold prayers during official business. In response, the coalition Government fast-tracked the commencement of new laws which overtook the Court's ruling. The Localism Act restored the right of councils to hold prayers as part of their formal meetings. The later Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 was supported by the coalition Government and the Opposition and provided the legal right for smaller councils not covered by the Localism Act to hold prayers at the start of their meetings.

Parliament

Christians should be particularly concerned about any 'party list' system that concentrates power in the hands of the political parties and prevents the public from voting for a particular candidate. 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. In a 'party list' system of proportional representation, a political representative is entirely dependent on the party for his or her position, meaning such pressure can only grow.

Clearly there is no uniquely biblical model for how a second chamber should be organised. Yet many Christians will be concerned at any curtailment of the role of the House of Lords. In recent years it has been the House of Lords, not the Commons, that has been the more effective protector of religious liberties.

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Election Briefing 2019

AN ANALYSIS OF PARTY POLICIES ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO CHRISTIANS

The General Election takes place on 12 December 2019.

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

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

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



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- Voting records of MPs
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