

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of
evangelical Christians in the UK - Spring 2015

Faith in politics?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance

21ST CENTURY EVANGELICALS



21st Century Evangelicals is the Evangelical Alliance's ongoing study into the beliefs, habits and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK today. It all began when we surveyed 17,000 evangelicals in 2010, and since then our findings have been helping churches, Christian leaders and organisations better understand believers, enabling the Church to make effective plans for mission and ministry.

In partnership with the organisations in our Research Club, we have surveyed our online panel on a range of topics from discipleship to church life, evangelism to the family, work to education and money to globalisation. This politics report is the twelfth in our series.

At eauk.org/snapshot you can:

- download all the reports and order paper copies
- access free downloadable Powerpoint presentations and discussion questions to further explore the issues raised
- get involved by joining the research panel.

“Once again, through precise analysis and helpful insight, the Evangelical Alliance has provided us with a reliable lens through which we can better understand the context in which we seek to serve – and so enabling us to focus with clarity on issues we should prioritise.”

John Glass, general superintendant, Elim Pentecostal Churches

How we did this survey

In August and September 2014, 1,356 members of our regular panel responded to our email inviting them to take part in our online survey on the theme of politics. We also offered an open link to the survey on our website and promoted this extensively through social media. As a result a further 1,006 people took part, making a grand total of 2,362 – substantially the highest number of responses for any of our online surveys. **A total of 2,020 (88%) described themselves as evangelical Christians, and the data in this report is based on these self-defined evangelicals.**

The demographic profile of the new respondents recruited by social media was somewhat different from our regular panelists and they were far more likely to say they were interested and actively engaged in politics. We considered carefully how best to deal with the bias this might introduce to our findings, especially the fact that our sample was approximately 60% male when the gender profile of UK churches shows a female majority. We tried weighting the data to compensate but found, for example, this only adjusted the figures for voting intention by one or two percentage points (to the Left). We also broke down the responses by all the key demographic variables, and we note some of the statistically significant differences here.

However we finally concluded that it was best to present the findings as a simple record of the data from evangelicals who completed the survey. We therefore need to add a note of caution against assuming that these figure are completely representative or able to predict how many evangelical votes will be cast for particular parties in the forthcoming general election.

TOP 10 KEY STATISTICS



94% say they are certain or likely to vote in the coming General Election



24% are still undecided which way they will vote



39% say they won't be voting for the same party as they did in 2010



Only **6%** think politicians can be trusted to keep their manifesto promises



93% say when voting for candidates it is very important they are honourable and not corrupt (far more important than anything else)



In a general election **39%** (the highest proportion) would prioritise the party best helping others in need, compared to only **5%** for the party that will most help them personally



78% signed an e-petition last year (compared to **9%** of the general population)



92% think more Christians need to get involved in politics



71% say policies ensuring religious liberty are very important and would affect their vote (making this the highest-ranked issue)



Poverty/inequality was ranked the most important issue facing the UK today (selected by **32%** compared to **4%** of the national population)

Terms used in this booklet



Where you see these icons it will highlight a higher or lower than average response from those listed. 'Younger people' signifies those born after 1980, with 'older people' signifying those born before 1960. 'Undecideds' means those who are currently undecided who to vote for in the general election. Some icons used from the Noun Project under a Creative Commons license.

WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?

Disillusioned with politics

Only 6% think politicians can be trusted to keep their manifesto promises and half are less likely to believe what a politician says than they were five years ago (see page 16). Some six in 10 say they've become less trusting of the government and only a quarter think the secular political system is fair to Christians. And almost six in 10 believe none of the major parties support Christian values (see page 14).

Time to consider: Do you trust politicians and the political system? Do your complaints inspire you to act? Do you pray for our local and national leaders?

Engaged in politics

Yet, despite obvious disillusionment, Christians are not shying away from engaging in politics. Eight in 10 said they are certain to vote in the next general election – double that of the national population. Almost a quarter said they are more aware of how they can get involved in political issues than they were five years ago, and three in 10 say they are very interested in politics, with another 56% fairly interested (see page 6).

We've found that evangelicals are a lot more engaged in political activity than the average person, with 78% having signed an e-petition last year (compared to 9% of the general population), 57% having contacted a local parliamentarian or councillor (compared to just 2% – see page 12). A substantial 4% also said they have served as an MP or local councillor (see page 8).

Time to consider: How can we make sure our engagement with politics is more than an occasional vote, petition-signature or prayer? How can you make a difference in tackling local or national issues?

Looking for honourable public leaders

Personal integrity is clearly very important to evangelicals. When deciding which candidate to vote for, the most highly-ranked factors were: being honourable and not corrupt, having clear convictions and sticking to them and having a good record as a local MP or councillor.

Interestingly only a third said it was very important to be a Christian (see page 11). A huge 92% agreed that we need to see more Christians willing to get involved in party politics and stand for election, but just 7% said they had been explicitly encouraged by their church to get involved in party politics (see pages 18 and 20).

Time to consider: How can we identify, mentor and properly support public leaders and politicians of integrity and faith drawn from our churches and communities?

Prioritising the common good

When choosing which party to vote for in a general election, the highest proportion (39%) select the party most helping others in need, with just 5% selecting the party that will most help them personally (see page 11).

Our panel consider poverty/inequality the most important issue facing the UK today, contrasting sharply with the general population. Some 32% chose it as the most important issue compared to just 4% of the national population. The highest-ranked issue by the national population was race/immigration (selected by 21%), but just 6% of evangelicals thought this was the UK's key issue (see page 12).

More than seven in 10 say that policies ensuring religious liberty are very important and would affect their vote, making this the highest-ranking issue. Ranked second were policies likely to make a positive difference to the poorest people in the UK, and third were policies to eliminate human trafficking (see page 13).

Time to consider: How do you decide who to vote for? What issues are important to you and why? Do you consider God's view on these issues?

Voting differently

A quarter (24%) are still undecided which way they will vote, indicating a large proportion of the evangelical vote is still to be decided. Only 55% say they are going to vote for the same party as they did in 2010, and there is evidence of a shift away from the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. It's clear evangelicals are not a block vote, and (discounting the undecideds), if there was a general election tomorrow 31% said they would vote for Labour, 28% for Conservative, 12% for UKIP and 11% for Liberal Democrats (see pages 22-23).

Time to consider: As Christians how do we deal with disagreement in politics and relate well with others who have very different views?

Politics and the pulpit

While evangelical churches will speak publicly about some political issues and may organise hustings or prayer for the general election, it's clear they steer away from being party political or partisan.

A third of our panel have been explicitly encouraged by their church to vote, and 30% to support or oppose a particular policy. But only 2% said their church had explicitly encouraged them to support or oppose a particular candidate (see pages 20-21).

Time to consider: Does your church teach on political issues? Are there creative ways your church can encourage people to think through political issues and to engage in politics?

Show Up

The Show Up campaign calls Christians to more positive engagement in politics and was launched by the Evangelical Alliance and Christians in Politics, supported by a wide range of Christian organisations and church networks.

For more information including resources visit our dedicated election website: election2015.eauk.org

Public Leadership

The Evangelical Alliance is passionate about seeing God's people become effective voices for good in society and wants the UK Church to have a strong culture of Public Leadership.

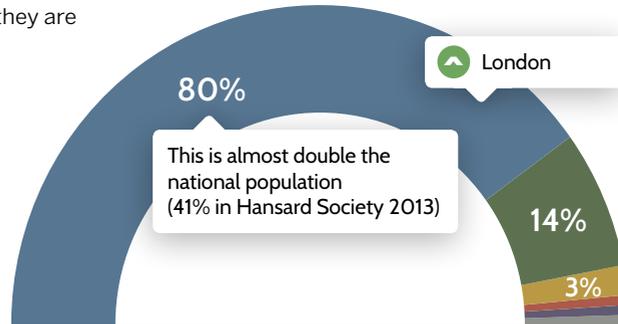
Visit www.thepublicleader.com to find out more and access stories and resources.

EVANGELICALS WILL SHOW UP

Likelihood of voting in the next UK general election

Very high proportions of evangelicals intend to vote at the next general election – 80% are certain to do so, and 14% say they are likely to. Even among those who are undecided who they would vote for, 71% still say they are still certain to vote.

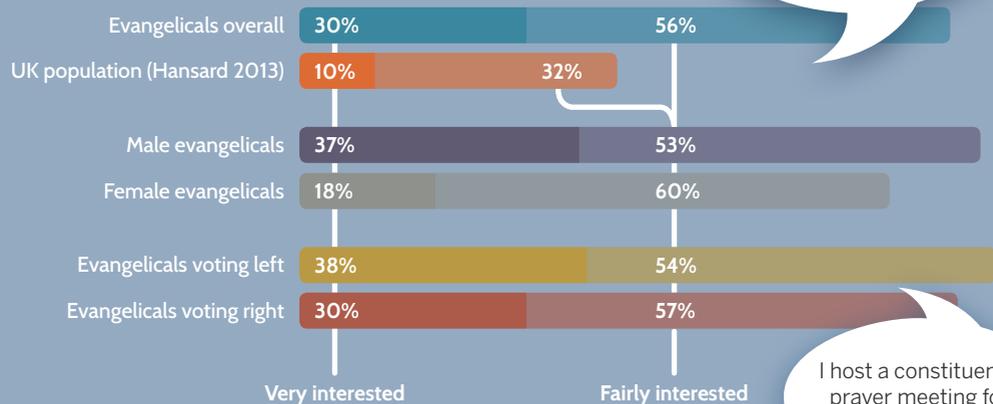
- Certain
- Unlikely (1%)
- Likely
- Certain not to (1%)
- Not sure
- Not eligible (1%)



Interested in politics?

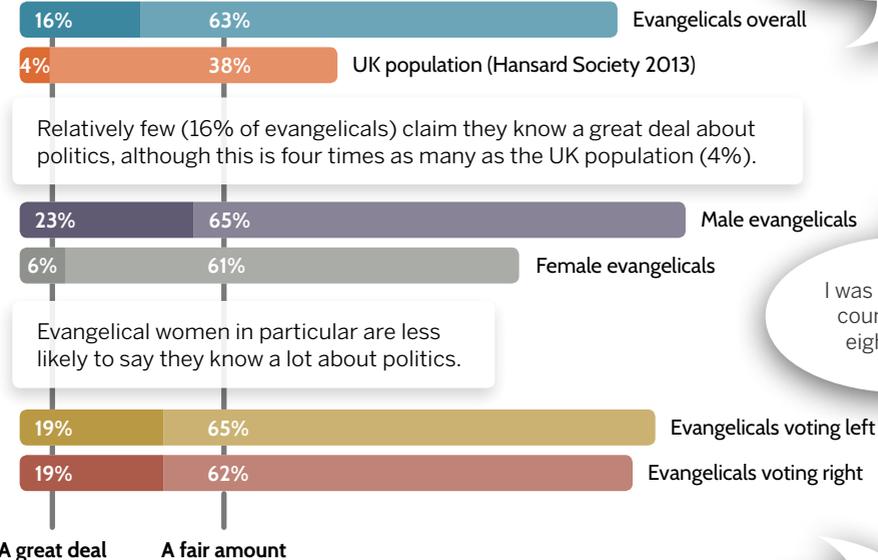
It is clear that the evangelicals who responded to our survey are much more likely to be interested in politics than the general population. Levels of interest are highest among the youngest age group and men, and higher than average among people who have made up their minds which way to vote.

I work in a group that supports asylum seekers and campaigns regularly for better outcomes for them.



I host a constituency prayer meeting for our local MP

How much do people feel they know about politics?



Relatively few (16% of evangelicals) claim they know a great deal about politics, although this is four times as many as the UK population (4%).

Evangelical women in particular are less likely to say they know a lot about politics.

A great deal A fair amount

In the past a church member stood as an MP so I supported him with leafleting and at the count.

I was an elected councillor for eight years.

Proportion who know the names of their elected representatives

Church leaders, men, older people and those intending to vote left of centre were more likely to know the names of their MP and local councillors.



...compared to just 28% of the national population

I was a member of the Conservative Party but resigned my membership over Cameron's action on the redefinition of marriage.

I was election co-ordinator for Student DUP at Queen's University, Belfast, 15 years ago. Many friends from then are now involved in local politics as elected representatives.

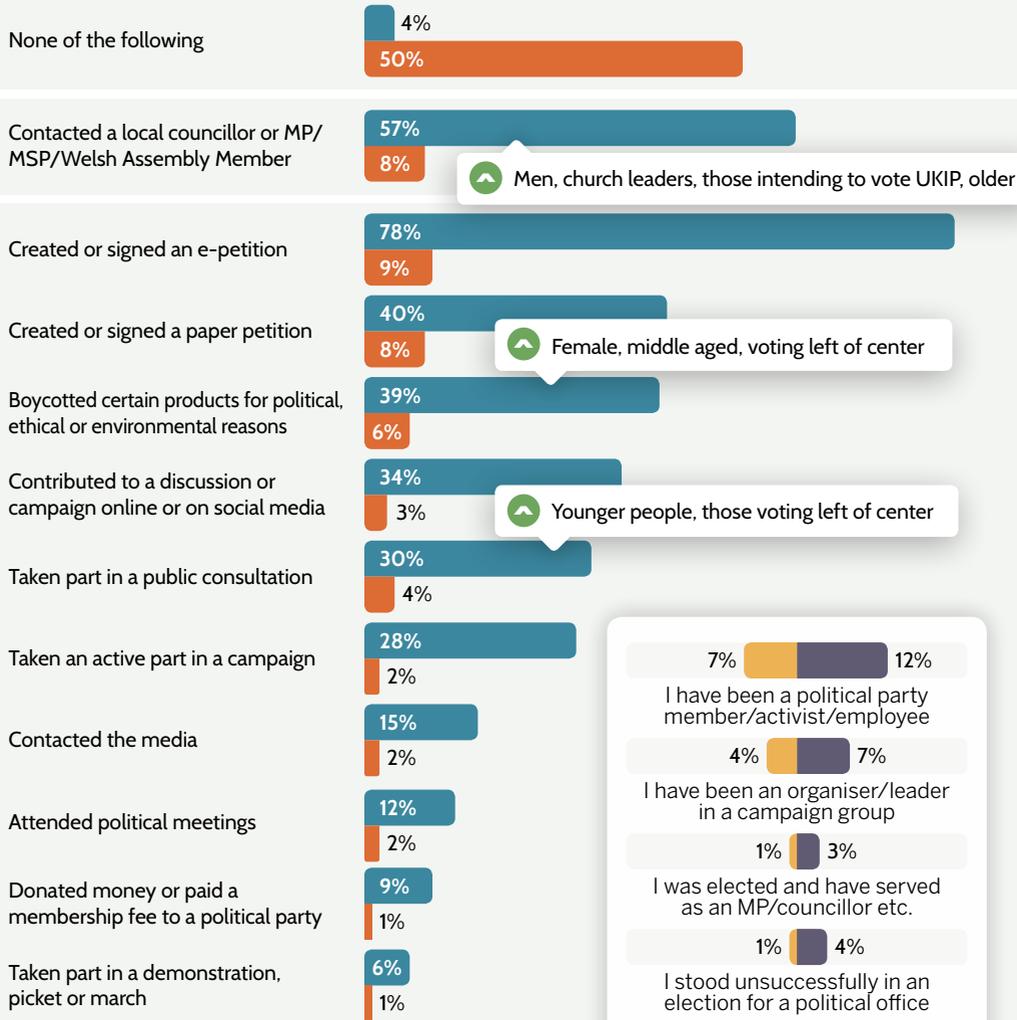
Many years ago I was a member of the Labour party, but stopped because I became disillusioned with their policies. My route there was through the Trade Unions, of which I was secretary of my local branch for a number of years.

EVANGELICALS ARE POLITICALLY ACTIVE

Evangelicals
UK population (Hansard Society 2013)

Actions to influence decisions, laws or policies in the last 12 months

The evangelicals in our survey appear to be immensely more politically engaged than the general population.



Some 23% of evangelicals have spoken or written about a political issue within their church context.



Vote against UK poverty



CAP Debt Help

CAP Job Clubs

CAP Release Groups

CAP Money Course

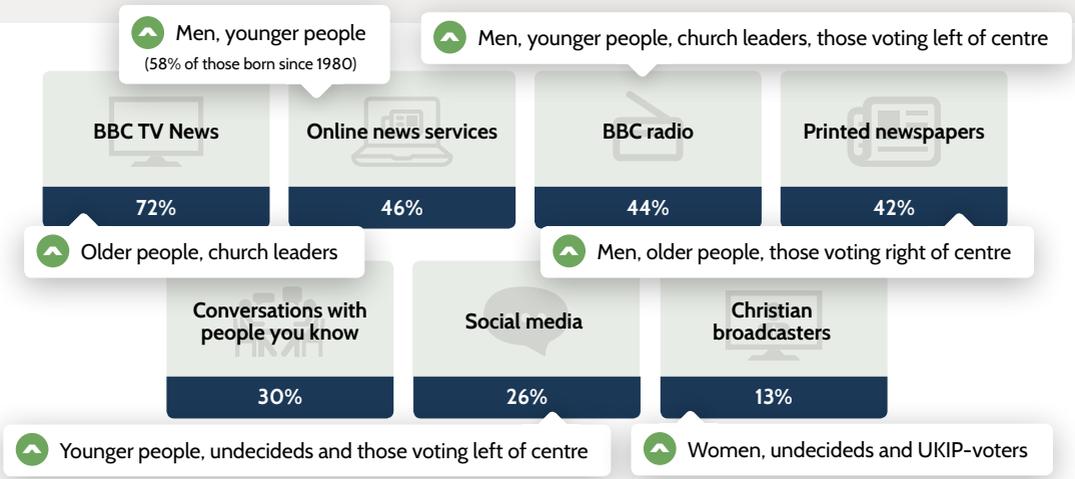
Partner with CAP so your church can break the cycle of poverty in your community.

capuk.org/partner
01274 760580
churchpartnership@capuk.org

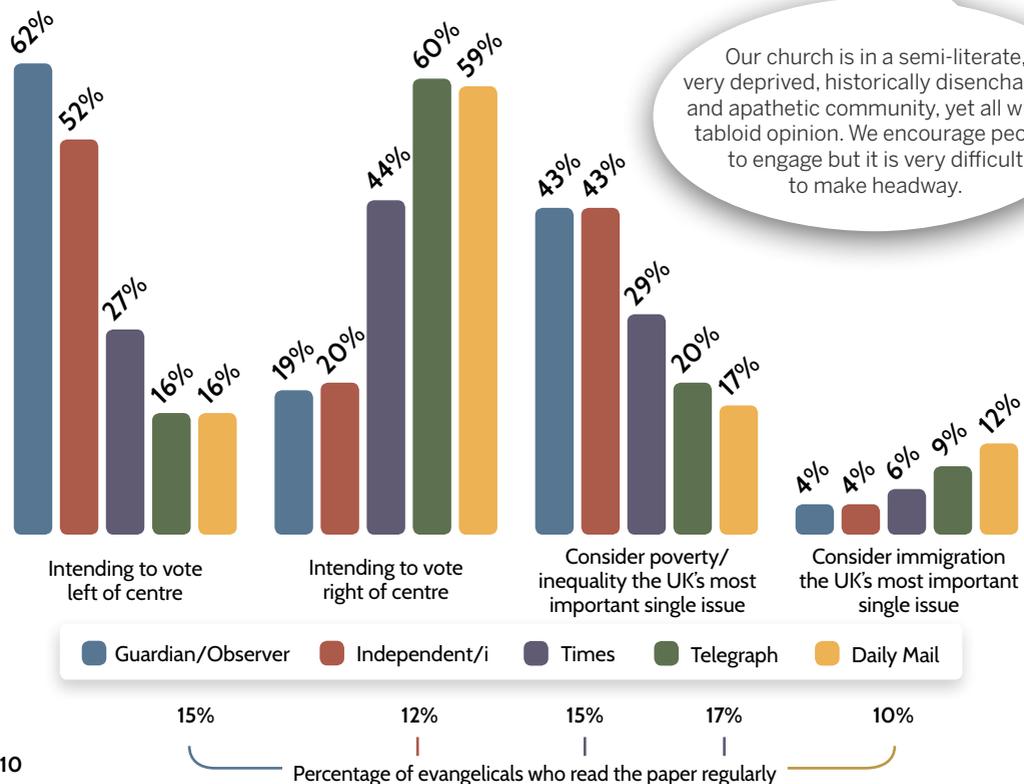


Lifting people out of debt and poverty

WHERE WE GET OUR INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICS



Political views and newspaper readership

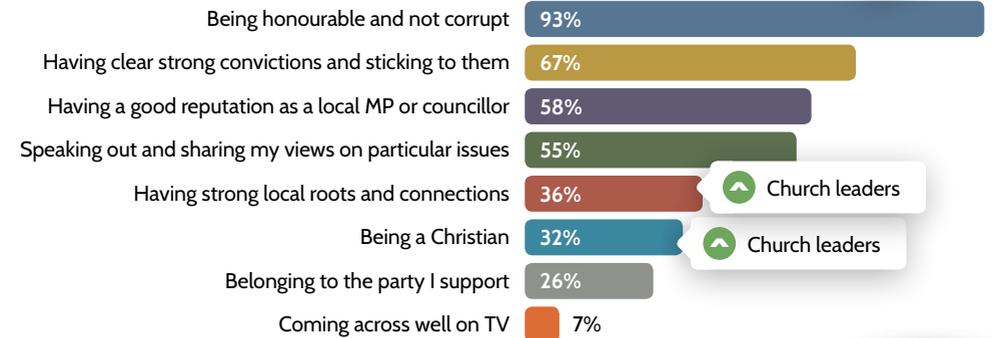


Our church is in a semi-literate, very deprived, historically disenfranchised and apathetic community, yet all with a tabloid opinion. We encourage people to engage but it is very difficult to make headway.

IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN VOTING

What evangelicals want from politicians

When voting for particular candidates evangelicals consider these issues to be very or most important:



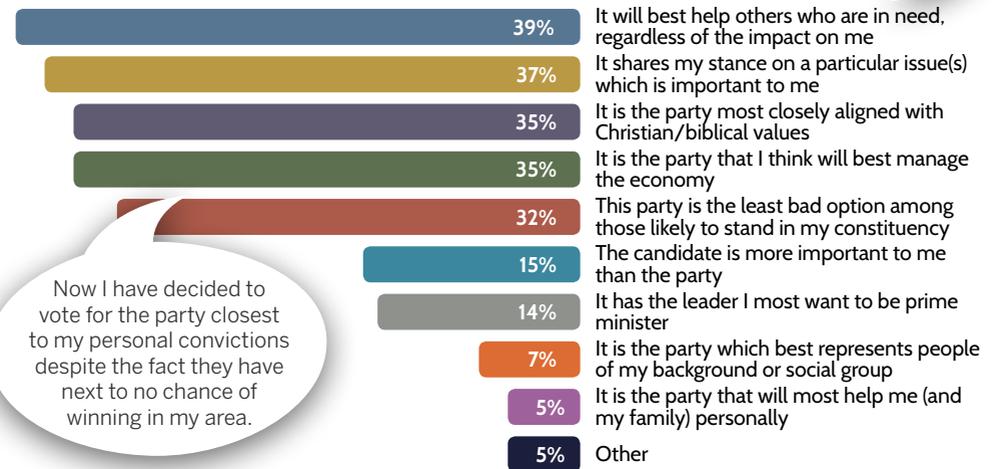
I am confused as to which party will best represent me and my views.

Above all our panel are looking for personal integrity. 93% say it is most or very important for the candidate to be honourable and not corrupt and two-thirds prioritise politicians with clear and strong convictions. For only a third whether the candidate is a Christian is a very important factor. Even less important is whether they belong to the party they support.

The three primary parties are increasingly ethically and morally bankrupt, and if I could choose to vote for "None of the above" I would.

Why evangelicals vote the way they do

People chose the top three factors influencing their decision:



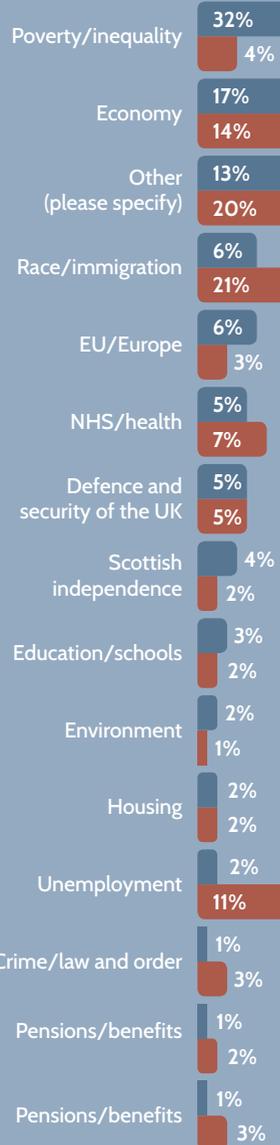
Now I have decided to vote for the party closest to my personal convictions despite the fact they have next to no chance of winning in my area.

Evangelicals appear to choose their party preference with a significant priority on helping those who are in need or standing up on issues and values they consider particularly important. Far less important was whether the party represents people like them, or will help them and their family.

WHAT ISSUES MATTER MOST?

■ Evangelicals
■ UK population (Ipsos Mori poll August 2014)

What is the single most important issue facing the UK today?



I vote for the party best able to help the poor.

Top issue for the national population

The key issues for evangelicals are very different from those of the general public.

For the national population in August race/immigration continued to be seen as the most important issue facing the UK, mentioned by a fifth (21%), compared to just 6% of our panel.

And while only 4% nationally selected poverty/inequality, it was the most important issue for 32% of our panel.

Some people felt other issues were more significant to the UK today. Issues mentioned included education, maintaining freedom of speech and upholding Christian values, fairer trade with poorer countries, policies to support strong family life and tackling modern slavery, domestic violence and female genital mutilation (FGM).

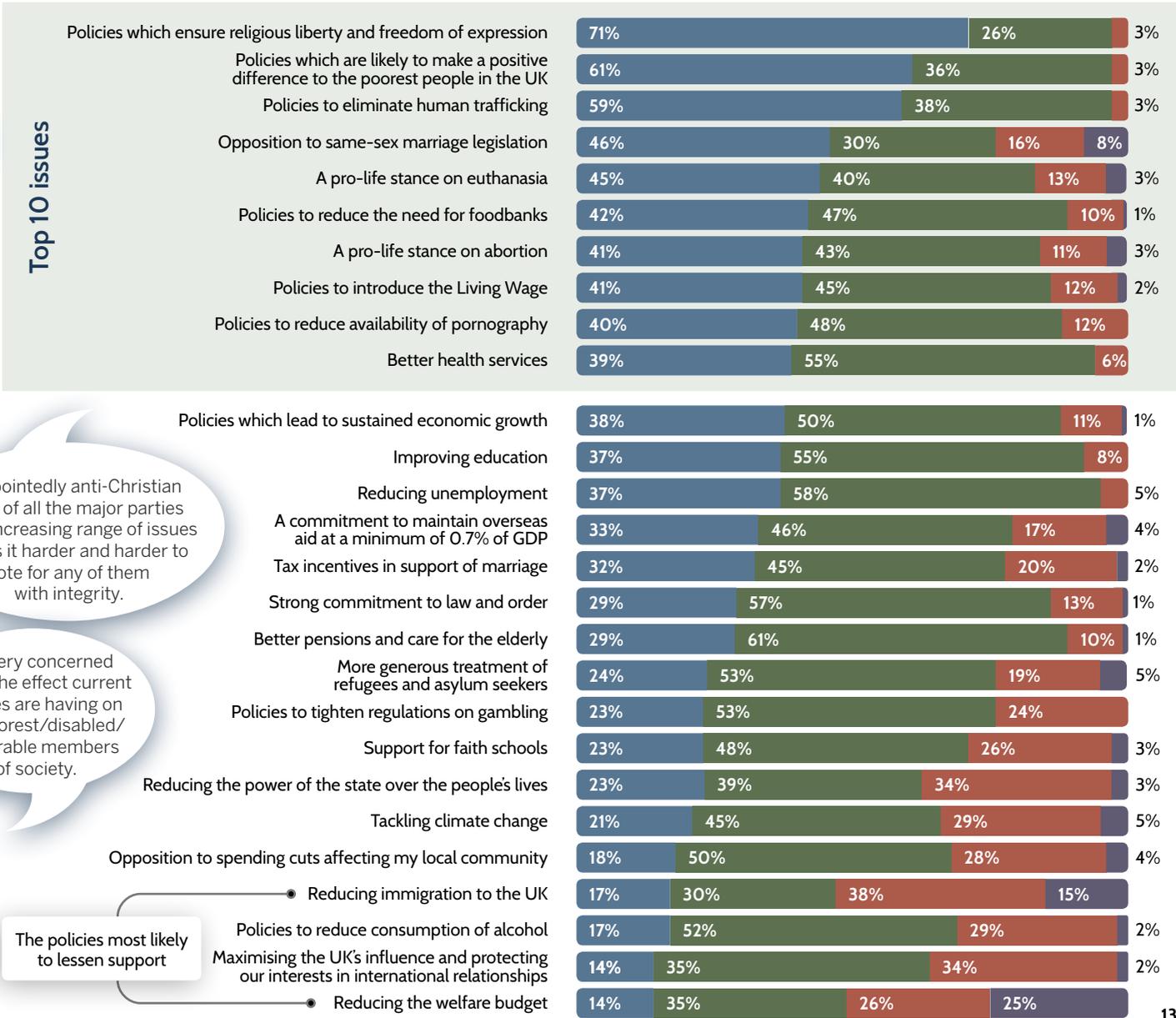
The pointedly anti-Christian views of all the major parties on an increasing range of issues makes it harder and harder to vote for any of them with integrity.

I'm very concerned about the effect current policies are having on the poorest/disabled/vulnerable members of society.

The policies most likely to lessen support

When considering how you will vote, how important are these policy positions or issues?

■ Important to me and will affect my vote
■ Important to me but will not greatly affect my vote
■ Not very important to me
■ This would lessen my support for them



IS POLITICS WORKING?

Does the UK political system work well?

More than half of our panel (57%) see the need for improvement in the UK's political system. Below we see that 58% would like to see a more representative or proportional voting system.

However evangelicals are more likely to say that the political system works well (40%) than the wider population (27% - Hansard Society 2013).

I am totally disillusioned by politics in this country.

Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well (40%)

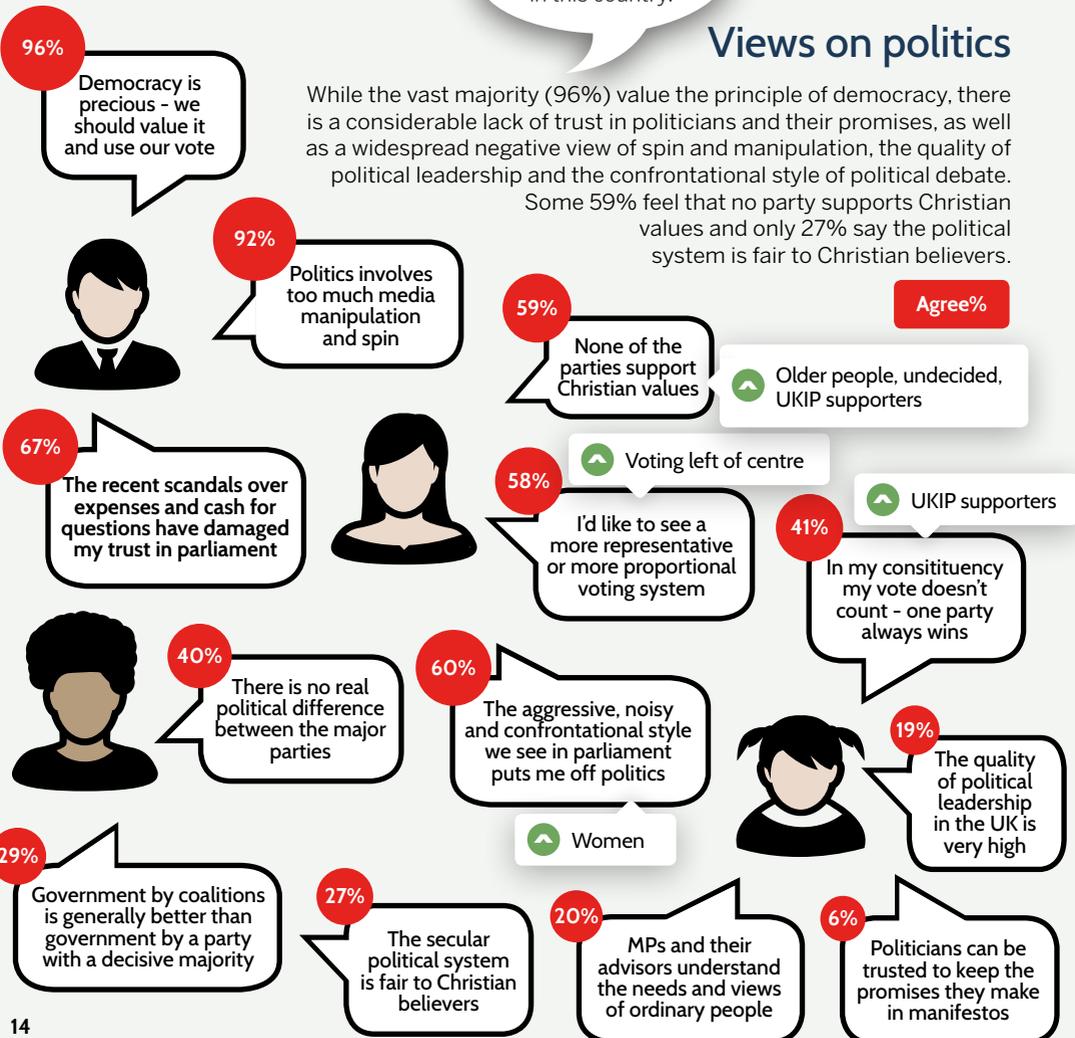
Needs a great deal of improvement (20%)

Could be improved quite a lot (37%)

Views on politics

While the vast majority (96%) value the principle of democracy, there is a considerable lack of trust in politicians and their promises, as well as a widespread negative view of spin and manipulation, the quality of political leadership and the confrontational style of political debate.

Some 59% feel that no party supports Christian values and only 27% say the political system is fair to Christian believers.



We provide loving Christian homes for people with learning disabilities, giving them access to the life they deserve.

Government failing people with learning disabilities finds review

People with learning disabilities are being kept in 'inappropriate' institutions, according to a damning report in the wake of the Winterbourne scandal.

Following the 2011 exposé of Winterbourne View, the Government pledged to move all people with learning disabilities and/or autism out of institutions and into community care by June 2014.

However, a new review published today reveals that not only has this not been achieved, but more people are being admitted into institutions than are being discharged.



¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

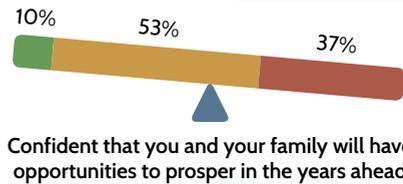
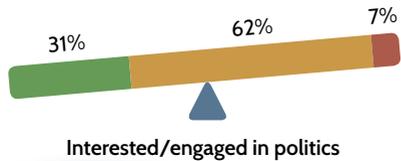
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. **Psalm 139**

For more information call us on 0118 9508 781 or visit www.prospects.org.uk

VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

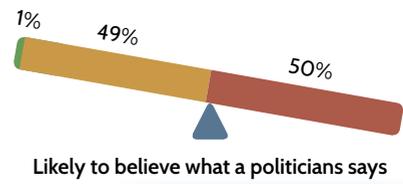
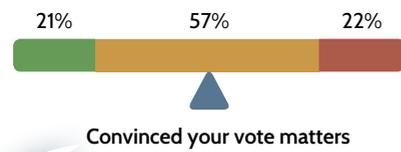
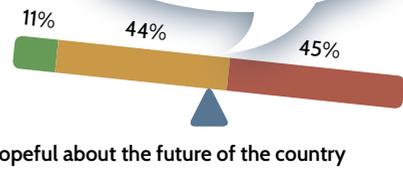
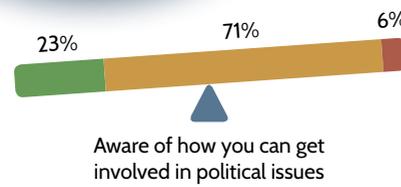
Compared to five years ago, our panel are:

The majority say that over the last five years they have become **less** trusting of the government and politicians and less optimistic about the future. Yet at the same time people seem to have become **more** engaged in and aware about politics.



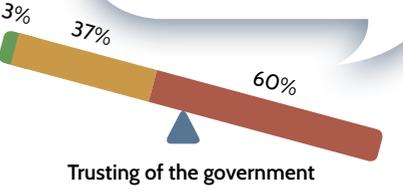
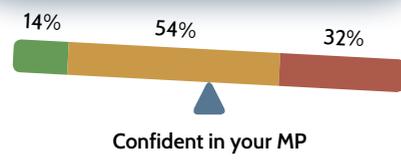
MPs in the main are out of touch with the electorate and introduce laws and policies without consultation.

There is a huge loss of trust and respect for political leaders which needs to be regained for our system to work.



Our political culture no longer nurtures democracy. Election turnout is shamefully low and political discourse is too often shallow and ill informed. There is no vision about the sort of society we want Britain to become.

The government don't seek God, nor would they have a clue how to. They need to, and we need to desperately pray on their behalf for God to influence their decisions.



Sam needed to ask politicians whether she could talk about her faith at work

BE THE MISSING PIECE



We meet with MPs regularly, raising issues affecting Christians directly with government

We can't do this without your help. By supporting us for as little as £3 a month, you ensure Christians have a voice in parliament.

Please can you be the missing piece? Go to www.eauk.org/support

BIBLE, THEOLOGY AND POLITICS

Political views

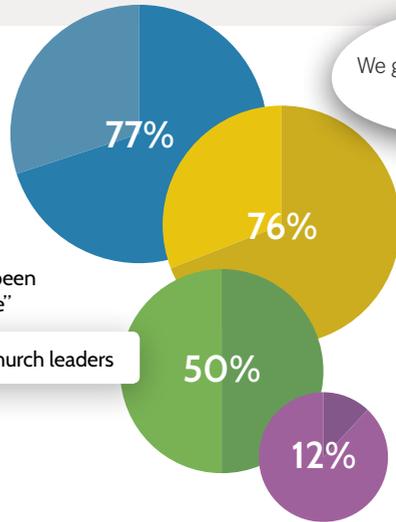
Strongly agree & tend to agree

“My political views and the way I vote have been greatly influenced by my upbringing, social background and life experience”

“My political views and the way I vote have been greatly influenced by my reading of the Bible”

“I spend time in prayer to seek God’s will about who to vote for”

“I am convinced I heard God leading me to vote in a particular way”



We get the government we pray for.

Church leaders

Women

“I find it hard to understand how any Christian could vote Tory or for other parties to the right”



Men



“I find it hard to understand how any Christian could vote Labour or for other parties to the left”

“We need to see more Christians willing to get involved in party politics and stand for election”

“Christianity has deeply shaped the UK’s political culture and democratic process”

“We should support legislation that encourages traditional Christian values”

“There are some issues where it is right for Christians to resist or disobey the law”



“Christians in the UK are good at tackling the symptoms of social problems, but not the underlying issues”

“The UK is a Christian country and this should be reflected in its laws (57%)”

“Christians in the UK are generally good at speaking out when we see people oppressed or suffering (57%)”

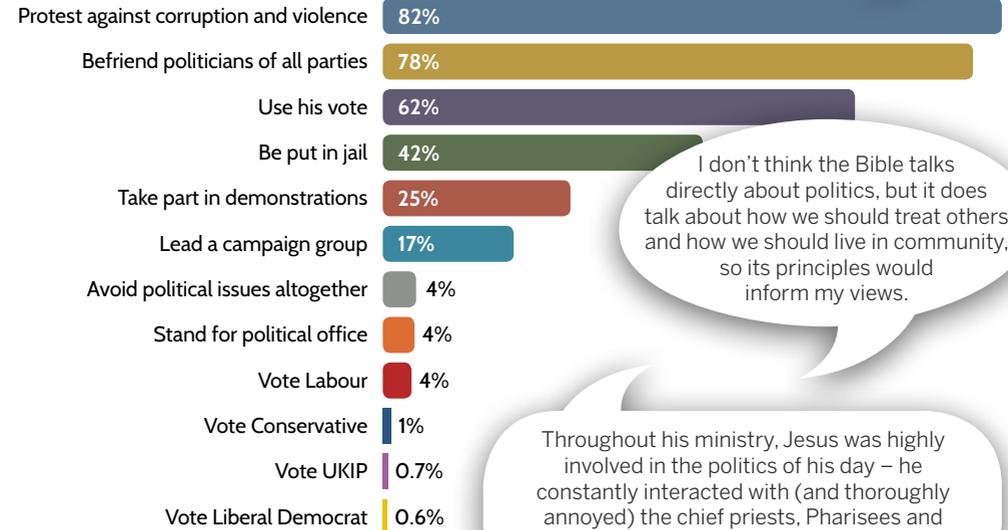
“The Church should concentrate on preaching and teaching the gospel and leave political issues to the politicians”

“Politics is a corrupt worldly business, so it is better that Christians don’t take part in it at all”

I have absolutely no idea what the Bible teaches or does not teach about politics.

If Jesus was living in the UK today our panel think he would...

The Bible tells us we should care for the poor and vulnerable – this requires a political as well as charitable response to tackle the root causes.



I don’t think the Bible talks directly about politics, but it does talk about how we should treat others and how we should live in community, so its principles would inform my views.

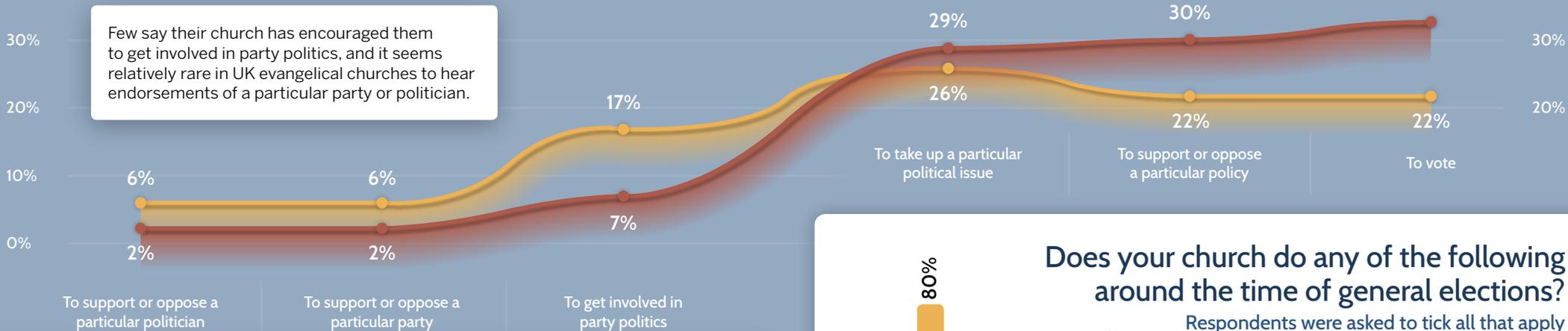
Throughout his ministry, Jesus was highly involved in the politics of his day – he constantly interacted with (and thoroughly annoyed) the chief priests, Pharisees and teachers of the law by challenging them about the bad things they were doing and saying.

Most admired politicians of all time



POLITICS AND THE PULPIT

Has your church leadership encouraged your church...?

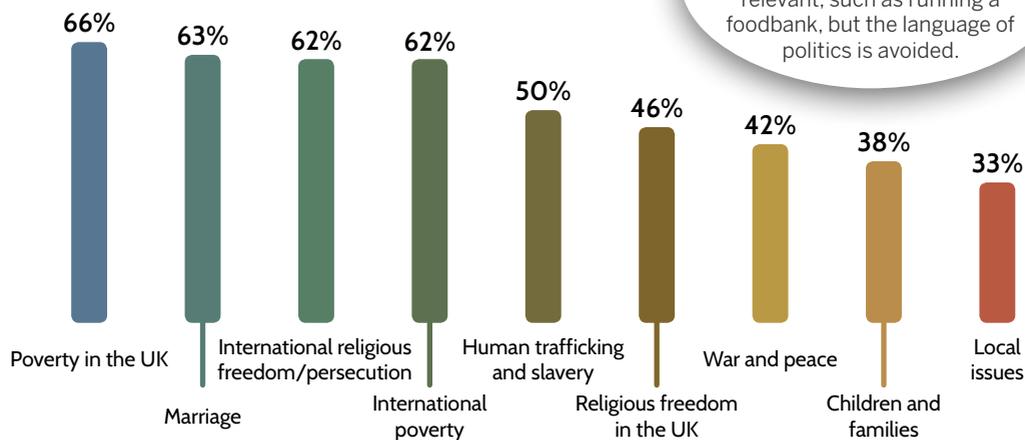


It seems that about half attend churches where there is some encouragement to vote and take up particular issues or lobby on particular policies.

While 32% said there were politically active people in their church, another 37% said there were not, and 31% were not sure. Free Church members were more likely than average to have people involved.

Political issues that have been publicly talked about in churches in the past year or so

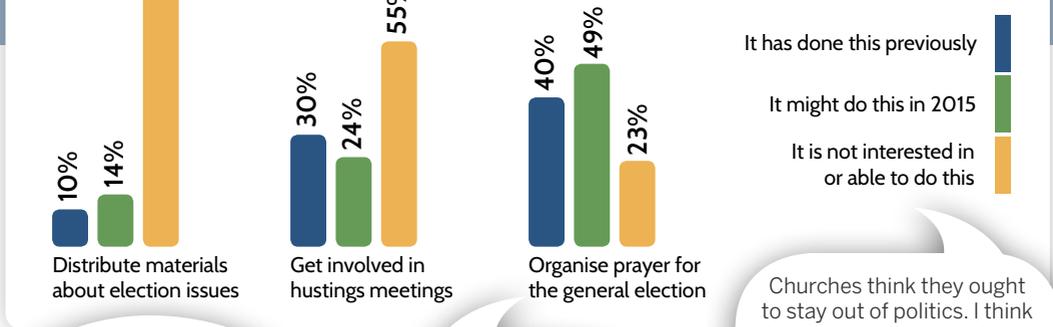
Two thirds said the issue of UK poverty had been talked about in their church in the last year. Other top issues were marriage, persecution, international poverty and human trafficking.



My church encourages involvement in issues which I would describe as politically relevant, such as running a foodbank, but the language of politics is avoided.

Does your church do any of the following around the time of general elections?

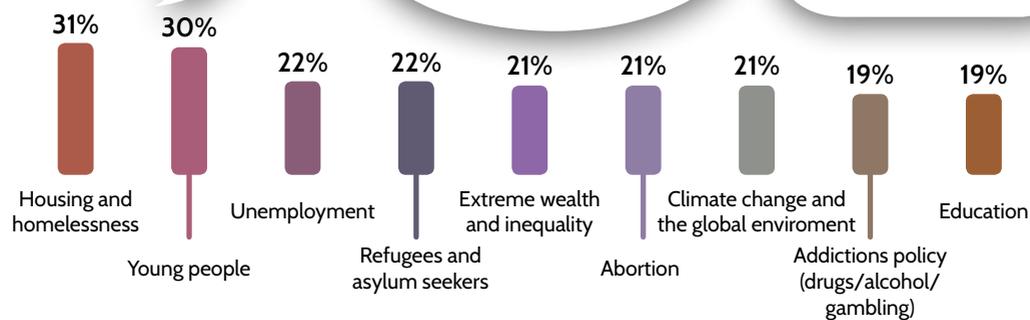
Respondents were asked to tick all that apply



I would leave any church that took a party political stance.

Surely we need more Christian politicians who will work for the good of the people and not their own selfish ambitions.

Churches think they ought to stay out of politics. I think that's wrong. Recently I have been urging my church to become more politically active. If the Church doesn't wake up, we might not have a Church at all in 10 years.



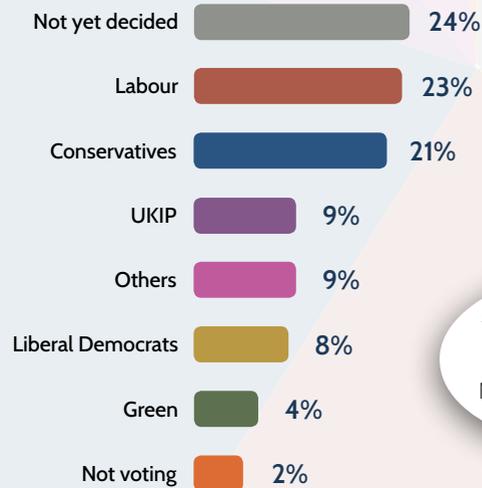
SO HOW WILL EVANGELICALS VOTE?

Evangelicals' voting intentions: September 2014

It is striking that almost a quarter of our respondents have not made up their mind about who they would vote for in a general election. Labour is slightly more popular than the Conservatives, and there is significant support for UKIP and the Liberal Democrats. Some 4% opted for the Greens.

About one in 10 chose other parties – many of these are our panellists in Scotland and Northern Ireland, although there are also people inclined to support the Christian Party or the Christian People's Alliance.

Church leaders are slightly more likely than other evangelicals to have made up their minds and to support Labour. Labour have the most supporters in all parts of England except the South, where the Conservatives are narrowly ahead.



I vote for UKIP not because I am clear about all they stand for (except on Europe) but because I am utterly disillusioned with the other parties.

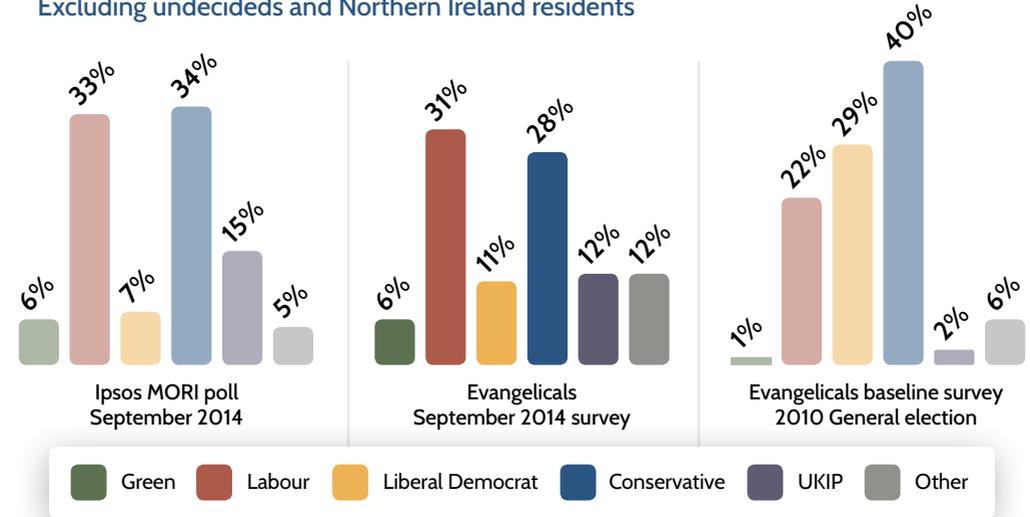
As a matter of conscience before the Lord I will spoil my ballot paper with the words: 'Excellent MP. Cannot vote for a party which redefines marriage.'

I am currently undecided how to vote and have lost trust in politics. I think it is vital we vote but would struggle to vote for anyone at this time.

The three main parties all seem to be moving closer together in outlook and further away from justice and fairness and ignoring the widening poverty gap. What viable alternative is there?

Evangelicals' voting intentions compared with public opinion and 2010

Excluding undecideds and Northern Ireland residents



Do you intend to vote for the same party in the 2015 general election as you did in...

	Yes	No	I did not use my vote then	I was not eligible to vote then
The 2010 general election	55%	39%	3%	3%
Your most recent local elections	55%	34%	9%	2%
The 2014 European elections	57%	31%	11%	2%

I rejected Labour in 2010 because of their attitude towards religion. Now I just want the Tories out as they are really hurting the poor – I spend too much time trying to help their victims.

My local MP is a man of integrity who has faithfully served the area for many years. In national elections I have voted for him as he votes according to his conscience (which is largely in line with Christian values).

AFTERWORD

We're all aware that many people are disillusioned with politics in the UK today, and we see in this survey that many evangelicals feel let down and hesitant to trust the promises of politicians.

Many also feel that none of the major parties support Christian values, and that the secular political system is unfair to Christians.

Yet, despite obvious disillusionment, I'm so encouraged to see through this report that evangelicals across the UK are engaging in politics – and markedly more than the general population. Whether that's being a local councillor, meeting regularly with their MP or signing petitions, Christians are getting involved. Evangelicals are also twice as likely as the general population to say they are certain to vote on 7 May 2015.

But, as the Alliance's Public Leadership programme (www.thepublicleader.com) has

recognised, there is a need for more Christians to get involved in public life – a fact reflected in this survey, where more than nine in 10 evangelicals agreed that we need to see more Christians willing to get involved in party politics and stand for election.

Evangelicals clearly care about the common good and how politics impacts the vulnerable in our society, considering poverty and inequality to be the most important single issue facing the UK today. Other issues ranked as really important are religious liberty, human trafficking, marriage and assisted dying.

I encourage churches across the UK to take the exciting opportunity of actively encouraging Christians to engage with local and national politics and prayerfully support those who are already involved in public life.

Steve Clifford, general director
Evangelical Alliance

Discussion questions and a Powerpoint presentation of key findings can be downloaded free on our website.

For more detailed information about the research, and to join our research panel, visit eauk.org/snapshot

A fuller data report is also available on request from g.smith@eauk.org

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