



How faith communities vote in UK elections

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- Faith leaders, in contrast to the convention that they leave politics alone, have had an exceptionally high profile in the 2019 general election campaign.
- Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who represents half of the UK’s 280,000 Jews, strongly criticised Labour and its leader Jeremy Corbyn for failing to deal with antisemitism.
- The Muslim Council of Britain accused the Conservative Party of “denial, dismissal and deceit” over its handling of Islamophobia.
- The Archbishops of Canterbury and York urged people to exercise their “democratic duty to vote”. But they were careful not to express any opinion on whom voters should support.
- To have done so would have been in contravention of the [1983 Representation of the People Act](#) which bans religious leaders from exerting “undue spiritual influence” on voters.
- How significant is the vote from people with a religious affiliation in this election campaign? Dr James Tilley, professor of politics at Oxford University, says religion is “normally dismissed” as a marker of vote choices. But he has [shown](#) that religion remains an important predictor of party vote choice, with historical allegiances dating to religious divisions in the past 200 years.
- According to the [2011 census figures](#), two-thirds of the population have a religious affiliation, of a total population of 63.1 million:

33.2 million	Christian
2.7 million	Muslim
817,000	Hindu
423,000	Sikh
263,000	Jewish
248,000	Buddhist
14.1 million	No religion

- A report by [Dr Ben Clements](#), for British Religion in Numbers, based on research conducted by YouGov among 31,000 voters in June 2017, showed voting patterns of people affiliated with a faith:
 - 58 per cent of Anglicans voted Tory compared with 28 per cent for Labour. Support among Anglicans for the Conservative Party has remained reasonably solid for 60 years. In 2017, slightly more Anglicans voted Tory than in the 1959 election. Only for two short periods in the intervening period did Labour manage to overtake the Tories in the Anglican voters' affections – once in the 1960s, and then for a short time in the late 1990s, in the early years of the Blair government.
 - 42 per cent of Catholics supported Labour, compared with 40 per cent for the Tories. But Dr Clements suggests this traditional Catholic support for Labour [appears to be declining](#). As recently as 1997, about three times more Catholics voted Labour than Conservative. Since then, the gap has narrowed dramatically. [James Tilley](#) suggests religion is linked to party loyalty in an intertwined identity, through parental influence on children and grandchildren.
 - Despite the oft-quoted maxim that the Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marxism, it appears that old allegiances may be shifting. In 2017, slightly more Methodists voted Conservative than Labour. The same was true of Baptist voters.
 - In other denominations, Labour support was 42 per cent and Tories 38 per cent.
 - A 2014 [report](#) by the Theos think tank, a well-regarded Christian organisation that researches faith and public policy, reviewed faith groups' voting record and concluded that, unlike mainland Europe, the UK never developed a specific Christian Democratic political movement because Christian groups were already well-affiliated with political parties.
 - An overwhelming majority of Muslims (85 per cent) canvassed in 2017 said they voted Labour, with 11 per cent supporting the Conservatives. The Muslim Council of Britain says Muslim voters could have a significant impact in [31 marginal seats](#) in this election, and appealed to political parties to engage with Muslim communities on their concerns. The [Muslim Engagement and Development](#) (Mend) group says 25 constituencies have Muslim electorates of 20 per cent or more.

- Among Jews, a strong majority expressed support for the Conservative Party (63 per cent), with about a quarter (26 per cent) saying they voted Labour. This was a similar picture for the 2005-2015 general elections. Andrew Barclay, lecturer at Manchester University, says research carried out by the [Institute of Jewish Policy Research](#) shows Jews to be evenly split between the main parties as recently as 2010. But he says [Jewish voting patterns](#) have swung substantially from Labour to Conservative since then. A 2017 Survation poll confirms the YouGov data, putting Jewish voting intention for the Tories at 72 per cent and for Labour 17 per cent.
- For people with no religious affiliation, 47 per cent voted Labour in 2017, while 32 per cent voted Conservative. [Another poll](#) of 14,000 voters after the 2017 election, by Lord Ashcroft, suggested non-Christians and those with no religion were inclined to favour Labour, partly reflecting their relative young age.

COMMENTATORS

- [Dr Ben Clements](#), associate professor, Leicester University
- [Andrew Barclay](#), Manchester University, School of Political Science
- [Dr James Tilley](#), Oxford University
- [British Religion in Numbers](#)

QUOTES

- Dr Ben Clements, author of the BRIN report ‘Religion Affiliation and Party Choices at the 2017 General Election’, Associate Professor at the University of Leicester:
“The long-term evidence for post-war general elections reaffirms the strong denomination-party links, but more recent evidence points to a weakening of this linkage between Labour and the Catholic community in Britain. The higher levels of support that Anglicans have historically given to the Conservative Party have been maintained at recent elections. While, historically, non-Christian religious minorities were thought to be strong sources of electoral support for Labour, including Jews, evidence from the 2017 election shows that the Conservative Party received more support than Labour from within the Jewish community.”

- Dr Siobhan McAndrew, British Religion in Numbers:

"The relationship between religion and party preference is often neglected in contemporary polling where more attention is paid to age, gender, social class and education.....but we should in fact think of religious affiliation as fundamental, long-running cleavages which shape other attitudes and world views. Associations between religious identity and party preference persist because parents encourage children into having particular loyalties and perspectives with regard to both politics and faith. Religious and political socialisation primarily from the family then structures other political values and attitudes."