Politics and Elections
Preacher's Toolkit

CARE FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Summary
Politics might be seen by many as a 'mucky business' which Christians should stay out of. But Christians are called to love our communities while also being citizens of heaven. We need Christians to vote wisely, serve courageously in politics, and do politics in a visibly different way.

A Clash of Worldviews

A better story

Politics is about living well together in society. Since God has made us for community, he has called us into politics, whether voting, campaigning, or standing for election. Knowing that Jesus is Lord, we want those in politics to reflect his character and pursue policies that please him. How we do politics is also just as important as what we do. We want to reflect Jesus' command to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39), including towards those we disagree with.

Points of difference

Some think that politics is an unhelpful distraction for Christians. They argue that Christians should concentrate on the gospel and not get bogged down in politics. However, Christians believe that mankind has been created to rule the earth and subdue it, and government is a means by which we steward God's creation. Even though we are exiles in the world, God wants his people to seek the peace and prosperity of our nation. Christians also have a special calling to speak up on behalf of the voiceless and the most vulnerable.

Some believe that politics is the most important thing, expecting it to be the way to solve all of our problems. Politics is certainly useful and can be a force for good in the world. But politics cannot solve all humanity's issues; we need God's salvation through Jesus Christ. Politicians are sinful humans who make mistakes; Jesus is the only perfect man and our true King. As Christians we can engage with politics without expecting too much from it.

Some see government as the way to solve all our problems. There is much that governments can do which is good. But finding just the right policies, laws and societal structures won't be enough. We need God's salvation in Jesus Christ. He is our true King and we belong to his kingdom. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns and his kingdom comes in all its fullness.

Some people dislike politicians and think they are just in it for themselves. The Bible tells us about occasions where leaders have led people astray. But every person is made in the image of God, and has inherent worth, including politicians. Since politicians act as public servants, they are worthy of honour. While 'bad' politicians make the headlines, most people in politics are genuinely trying to make a difference for the good, even if we disagree with their policies.

Some argue that Christians need to fight for a voice in politics. Speaking in public life is important, but how we speak is as important as what we say. Scripture tells us to pursue truth and grace, not shouting or bullying but winning people over with goodness. We are to care for our political leaders and to pray for them, speak well of them even when we disagree, and engage in debate with kindness and respect.

Politics

General elections are usually held every five years, but a Prime Minister can call an election earlier if they choose. After an election has been called, there is a short period of time for Parliament to be dissolved, and polling day occurs 25 working days after that point. Elections are typically held on a Thursday although this is convention rather than a statutory requirement.

The UK Parliament is made up of 650 constituencies and each elects one MP using a First Past the Post system. Voters cast their vote for a preferred candidate and the person who receives the most votes is elected. For a party to form a government they need to get a majority – more than half of the

seats in Parliament – which currently means 326 MPs or more. If no party achieves this it is called a 'hung parliament' and negotiations occur between parties to form a coalition government, one made of more than one political party.

The UK also has devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. These nations elect MPs to constituencies in a General Election in the same way as England. They also elect representatives to their respective Parliaments as well, 90 in the Northern Ireland Assembly, 129 in the Scottish Parliament, 60 in the Welsh Senedd.

There are also local elections across the UK which happen every four years. Elections in England and Wales are conducted using First Past The Post, while Scotland and Northern Ireland use the Single Transferrable Vote system. There are currently 317 local authorities of different types in England, as well as 9,000 town councils. There are 19,273 elected councillors across the whole of the UK. There are also locally elected mayors in some parts of England, a Mayor of London, and a London Assembly.

Political parties in the UK are often labelled as 'left wing' or 'right wing' depending on where they stand on certain issues. A left wing party, such as Labour, believes that the government should take an active role in helping society and promoting equality. They tend to favour greater welfare and regulation, and higher taxes to pay for them. A right wing party, such as the Conservatives, promotes the idea of smaller government with a more limited role. They tend to favour lower taxes and more individual choice, along with private sector involvement in public services. The Liberal Democrats would typically be seen as a 'centre-left' party, favouring individual freedom while supporting social responsibility. Reform UK would be seen as a right wing party, further right on the political spectrum than the Conservatives, and Restore Britain further right again. The Green Party now occupies a position further on the left wing than the Labour Party.

The House of Commons has rules governing politeness and barring politicians from using rude or insulting language, or accusing each other of lying. Part of the Speaker's role is policing this 'unparliamentary language'. Over the years the Speaker has taken objection to various words used, including blackguard, coward, guttersnipe, hooligan, rat, swine, stoolpigeon and traitor. Refusal to withdraw a comment when asked by the Speaker can lead to an MP being disciplined. Some politicians use creativity to bend the rules, such as Churchill using the phrase 'terminological inexactitude' to mean 'lie'.

Glossary

EXIT POLL
Exit polls are conducted as people exit the polling station, asking them who they voted for. Across a General Election they give a picture of the potential outcome of the election. Recent exit polls have been reasonably reliable, however in 1992 two separate polls predicted a hung parliament when it turned out the Conservatives had won a majority.

BY-ELECTION
An election that occurs in-between general elections because a seat becomes vacant.

DEVOLUTION
The process by which governmental powers are given to particular areas. The UK has devolved governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and devolved powers to mayors and local authorities.

CONSTITUENCY
The geographic area represented by each Member of Parliament.

COALITION GOVERNMENT
A government that is formed of more than one political party. This usually occurs after an election results in a hung parliament, where no one party wins an overall majority. The parties who form a coalition work together and divide cabinet positions between them.

DISSOLUTION
The close of Parliament before a general election, at which point every seat in the House of Commons becomes vacant.

FIRST PAST THE POST
The election system used by UK general elections. Voters cast their vote for one candidate and the person who gets the most votes is elected.

HUNG PARLIAMENT
A situation where no one party wins the majority at a general election. This can often lead to more than one party sharing power in a coalition government.

MANIFESTO
A publication that is produced by a political party in advance of a General Election. A manifesto lays out the main policy positions that a party intends to enact if it comes to power. For the winning party it forms the governing document for the incoming administration.

MAJORITY
When a political party has more than half of the MPs in the House of Commons. There are currently 650 seats in the Commons, so a party needs at least 326 MPs to command a majority. A party with a majority is able to form a government and will be able to pass legislation, assuming they can keep their members in line.

HUSTINGS
A meeting held in a constituency before a general election where candidates can speak, debate, and answer questions.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR)
An electoral system where the distribution of seats closely matches the proportion of votes cast. An alternative to First Past the Post, which is seen by critics as unfairly representing the actual votes, PR is used for elections in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly use a Single Transferrable Vote, where voters rank candidates in order of preference. Scottish Parliament elections use the Additional Member System, with some members elected by First Past The Post, and others by party. The Welsh Senedd now uses the Closed Proportional List system where voters cast their vote for a party and the seats are awarded based on the proportion of the vote.

Key Bible Passages

GENESIS 1:28
"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.""

PROVERBS 11:14
"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers."

PROVERBS 14:34
"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people."

PROVERBS 31:8-9
"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

PROROGATION
The act of temporarily suspending Parliament for a time. Prorogation happens between the end of one session of Parliament and the start of the next, and before a general election.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
An MP who has been elected to act as chair for the House of Commons, and who is responsible for order in debates and ensuring that rules are followed. An MP who is elected as Speaker becomes politically neutral and usually stands unopposed at a general election.

For Further Research

CARE's Topic Page (care.org.uk/cause/politics-and-elections)

Christians in Parliament (christiansinparliament.org.uk)

Christians in politics (christiansinpolitics.org.uk)

St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology (saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Democracy)

Christians in Politics on Christianity and political parties (christiansinpolitics.org.uk/books-guides)

UCCF Politics Network: Should Christians engage in politics (politicsnetwork.uk/think/should-christians-engage-in-politics)

Eugene Cho: How Should Christians Approach a Fraught Election? (logos.com/grow/nook-christian-voting-election/)

Tim Keller: Reflections on Faith and Politics (gospelinlife.com/article/reflections-on-faith-and-politics/)

Carl Trueman: Voting in a fallen world (wng.org/opinions/voting-in-a-fallen-world-1730758503)

Tim Wyatt: The Christian vote (religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/general-election-2024-the-christian-vote/)

Tim Farron: A Better Ambition: Confessions of a Faithful Liberal, 2019

Tim Farron: A Mucky Business: Why Christians Should Get Involved In Politics, 2022

Frank Field: Politics, Poverty and Belief: A political memoir, 2023

Andy Flannagan: Those who show up, 2019

Alan Storkey: Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers, 2005

JEREMIAH 29:7
"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

ROMANS 12:2
"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

ROMANS 13:1
"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."

EPHESIANS 4:25
"each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully"

PHILIPPIANS 3:20
"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ"

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2
"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority"

TITUS 3:2
"to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone."

JAMES 1:5
"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

JAMES 1:19-20
"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

JAMES 4:17
"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

Quotes

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies."
GROUCHO MARX, comedian

"We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all."
PERICLES, 5th-century BC Greek politician

"The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter."
WINSTON CHURCHILL, Former Prime Minister

"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors."
PLATO, Philosopher

"Politics should be the part-time profession of every citizen."
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, 34th U.S. President

"A vote is like a rifle; its usefulness depends upon the character of the user."
THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 26th U.S. President

"There are many men of principle in both parties in America, but there is no party of principle."
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, 19th-century political writer

"Some men change their party for the sake of their principles; others their principles for the sake of their party."
WINSTON CHURCHILL, Former Prime Minister

"Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone, and you may cherish the sweetest reflection that your vote is never lost."
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 6th U.S. President

"It is not in the nature of politics that the best men should be elected. The best men do not want to govern their fellowmen."
GEORGE MACDONALD, Scottish author and minister

"[My life] has appeared and yet appears to me to carry the marks of the will of God. For when have I seen so strongly the relation between my public duties and the primary purposes for which God made and Christ redeemed the world?"
WILLIAM GLADSTONE, Former Prime Minister

"I believe, you know. I am a sort of typical member of the Church of England. As Boris Johnson once said, his religious faith is a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes. That sums up a lot of people in the Church of England."
DAVID CAMERON, Former Prime Minister

"I always cheer up immensely if an attack is particularly wounding because I think, well, if they attack one personally, it means they have not a single political argument left."
MARGARET THATCHER, Former Prime Minister

"My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 16th U.S. President

"When a politician is in opposition he is an expert on the means to some end; and when he is in office he is an expert on the obstacles to it."
G.K. CHESTERTON, Author and apologist

"I don't deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. Nor do most people—all the people who believe advertisements, and think in catchwords and spread rumours. The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows."
C.S. LEWIS, Scholar and author

"If you are more concerned about abortion, changing sexual mores, and the severe secularization of the public square, then you will tend to vote Republican. If you are more concerned about racial discrimination, marginalization of the poor, and the erosion of the environment, then you will tend to vote Democrat. Of course the problem is that all of these things are concerns for anyone who reads and trusts the Bible."
TIM KELLER, Pastor and author

"The Bible is the book by which all our political activity will be judged…the Bible does not tell us what to do on trade policy, carbon dioxide emissions, and public education. But it does tell us that whatever we do in these domains will be measured by the principles of righteousness and justice explicitly established in the Bible."
JONATHAN LEEMAN, Pastor and author

"Parties are good servants, but bad masters; useful instruments, but awful identities."
JONATHAN LEEMAN, Pastor and author

"The unavoidable truth is that each candidate and party possesses weaknesses and is prone to sinful temptations and idolatrous trajectories. No candidate or party has a monopoly on justice. Only Jesus's kingdom—an eternal kingdom that "is not of this world"—is ultimately worthy of our trust."
DAVID PLATT, Pastor and author

"The Christian vocation is neither pious longing for heaven nor scheming to make Jesus king by exerting force over unwilling subjects. Instead, Christians should be ready to speak truth to power, being concerned with the righteous exercise of government, seeing it bent towards the arc of justice and fulfilling the service that God expects of governing authorities."
N.T. WRIGHT, Theologian and former Bishop of Durham

"All individual Christians should be politically active in the sense that, as conscientious citizens, they will vote in elections, inform themselves about contemporary issues, share in the public debate, and perhaps write to a newspaper, lobby their member of parliament or congress or take part in a demonstration. Further, some individuals are called by God to give their lives to political service, in either local or national government."
JOHN STOTT, Pastor and author

Key Stats

Voting and elections

- The UK is divided into 650 constituencies, each of whom elects one MP, which means a party needs at least 326 seats to have a majority
- In 2025 47.5 million people were registered to vote in the UK, 39.8 million in England, 2.3 million in Wales, 4 million in Scotland and 1.4 million in Northern Ireland.
- The turnout for the 2024 General Election was just under 60%, the lowest since 2001. The highest turnout was nearly 84% in 1950 when Clement Attlee's Labour government was re-elected.
- In 2024 Labour won the election with 33.7% of the vote, the lowest level in 100 years. Despite this they won with a majority of 174 seats.
- In three elections, 1929, 1951, and 1974, the party with the most votes did not win the most seats in Parliament
- In August 2026 the public's top issues facing the country were the economy (48%), immigration (48%), health (28%), defence (26%), and the environment (22%).

- 60% of the public are in favour of changing the UK's voting system from first-past-the-post to proportional representation, with 36% wanting it to continue as it is.
- While 57% of people believe that UK elections are not manipulated or rigged, 31% believe they are to some extent.

Government and politicians

- 125 MPs serve as government ministers, of which 23 form the Cabinet
- There are 24 ministerial departments in the UK government and a further 20 non-ministerial departments
- Margaret Thatcher was the UK's longest serving Prime Minister at nearly 12 years, while Liz Truss served for the shortest time at only 49 days.
- Only 14% of people in the UK say they trust politicians. 54% believe that those elected do not care about people like them, while only 22% believe they do.
- Between 2014 and 2024, the proportion of people with low to no trust in MPs rose from 54% to 76%.
- 25% of the public do not have faith in any institution including the health service, government, police or church.
- 43% of people believe Britain needs a strong leader willing to break the rules, while 31% disagreed.
- Following the 2024 general election, public concerns about intimidation of political candidates increased, with 35% of people identifying it as a problem.
- Fewer people now say that bullying behaviours towards candidates is unacceptable, with younger people more likely to find it acceptable. Only 25% of 18-24 year olds believe it is totally unacceptable to verbally threaten a politician in public, compared to 71% of those aged 75+.
- 67% of the public feel politicians primarily act out of self-interest, while only 4% see them as doing what is best for their country.

Stories

William Wilberforce is an example of the way in which Christians can influence politics. Wilberforce became an MP in 1780, and then became a Christian five years later. The former slave-trader and author of 'Amazing Grace', John Newton, became his mentor and encouraged him to stay in politics. He wrote that the "advance or decline of faith is so intimately connected to the welfare of a society that it should be of particular interest to a politician." Wilberforce used his political platform to campaign for an end to the transatlantic slave trade. He introduced his first Bill in 1791 and kept persevering despite great pressure. The Act to end the slave trade was eventually passed in 1807, and legislation to free slaves across the British Empire came in 1833, just before Wilberforce's death.

Politicians do not need to be Christians to be a force for good. **The creation of the National Health Service in 1948** is one such example. Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee identified the need to plan for reconstruction after the Second World War, even while still fighting it. They commissioned Sir William Beveridge to produce a report which outlined a blueprint for the welfare state. When Attlee was elected Prime Minister in 1945, he vowed to implement the changes, saying: "We had not been elected to try to patch up an old system but to make something new". He appointed Aneurin Bevan as Health Minister to implement the new National Health Service. It took Bevan three years of arduous political work despite much opposition to put the plans into practice. NHS provision started on 9th February 1948. Bevan commented to his Parliamentary Private Secretary Barbara Castle:"Barbara, if you want to know what all this is for, look in the perambulators [prams]."

Kate Forbes was a minister in the Scottish Parliament until 2026 and served as deputy leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP). She is also a committed Christian and member of the Free Church of Scotland. Forbes stood as a candidate for leader of the party in 2023 where she was considered the likely front-runner for the role. However, she lost supporters after she said that she would have voted against same-sex marriage if she was an MSP back in 2014 when gay marriage was approved. She also faced criticism for expressing orthodox Christian views on abortion and transgender rights, as well as saying that having children outside of marriage was wrong. She said "I answered questions honestly about my faith, and the way it shaped my view of sex and gender, of marriage and family. The backlash was instant and fervent." She lost the leadership election to Humza Yousaf.

Caroline Ansell was elected to Parliament as MP for Eastbourne and served for seven years. On her first day she had over 2,000 emails in her inbox to consider, from national and international affairs to personal pleas for help. In 2017, a local man went to prison for threatening to kill her, which was the first case of its kind in the country. Sadly it has become much more common, especially after the murders of MPs Jo Cox and David Arness. During her time in parliament, Caroline had a device on her letterbox to deal with incendiary devices, a panic button by her bed, and her team was trained in self-defence. Despite the danger, Caroline also values the privilege of serving in politics. "It is a very precious thing when someone gives you their vote," she said, "it is an honour to speak for the 80,000 people whose interests you represent and whose hopes and concerns you carry." After leaving the House of Commons in 2024, Caroline now serves as Director of Policy at CARE.

Pastoral Issues

Someone wondering whether they should vote

- God calls the people of Israel in exile to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you" (Jeremiah 29:7). Voting enables us to elect good leaders and representatives who will enable peace and prosperity.
- When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, he said to love God and to love your neighbour. Voting is one way we can work on behalf of those around us.
- The Bible calls us to submit to governing authorities and one way we do that is by participating in the political process through voting.
- Not voting is not a neutral act: we are still influencing the outcome, just as if we do vote. God will hold us accountable for the actions we do not take, just as He will for those we do take.

Someone who thinks Christians should all vote the same way

- No one political party has things exactly right, and no one party completely represents the views and wishes of Christians.
- It is good to be passionate and support a party you believe is good. But we should not criticise other Christians who genuinely support other political views. Unless the Bible is clear about a specific issue, Christians can disagree about various policies.
- We can easily get dragged into the polarisation of politics in our world today. People are pushed to the extremes and encouraged to see those who disagree as enemies. One of the best ways to counter this is to pray for those we disagree with.

Someone who is unsure who to vote for

- The Bible tells us what it means to love God and live a life that pleases him. God does not tell us who to vote for in an election; that is for us to discern.
- Think about the key issues involved: Does the Bible speak clearly about any of them? Could you vote for a particular political party with a clear conscience?
- Read what other people have said about their views as Christians. There are believers in most mainstream political parties.
- Remember that you are voting for a candidate, not just a party. Find out what you can about your local candidates and hear them at a hustings if possible. What do you know of their character and integrity, even if you would not agree with them on everything?
- You will never find a candidate who agrees with you on everything; vote for the person who you believe will do the most good.

Someone who doesn't think that the church should engage with politics

- God has called us to live in community, not just in the church but in the wider world. This means we are involved in politics whether we like it or not!
- Politics does not need to be a distraction from the gospel, but can help commend the gospel to non-believers.
- Churches don't need to tell people who to vote for to be involved in politics. They can help Christians think through the issues involved, what it means to live for Jesus and how this affects the way we approach voting.

Someone who wants to get involved in politics

- We need Christians in every area of life, including politics. If you are considering entering politics you are embarking on a worthwhile journey.
- Consider why you want to be involved in politics. If it is to gain power and influence and status, then this is at odds with the way Jesus calls his followers to act; if you want to serve your country and community, this is commendable.
- Be prepared for a rough ride! Politics is not an easy place to serve and may involve many sacrifices. If you have a family, you will need their support and blessing.
- Think deeply. Study God's word as well as political manifestos, and be convinced in your own mind about your positions on specific issues. Talk with wise Christians to help guide your understanding.