21st Century Evangelicals

Reflections on Research by the Evangelical Alliance

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Chapter 4: Evangelicalism and politics

Mathew Guest

It would be fair to characterise the current political climate of the UK – at least in comparison with its recent history – as somewhat unstable. A series of scandals concerning expenses claims has eroded public trust in politicians, while widespread disillusionment with the electoral process is reflected in poor voter turnouts at local and national level. The proportion of the electorate who are members of the mainstream political parties is the lowest it has been since the early 1980s.

At the same time, the party political map of the country has been changing. Following 13 years of government under New Labour, for the most part coinciding with a period of economic boom, 2010 saw the first general election resulting in no overall majority since 1974. A coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats grappling with the challenges of the economic downturn brought mixed fortunes for both parties, with many traditional Lib Dem supporters particularly disillusioned with a party they perceived as having overly compromised to Tory policies. Labour, in the meantime, did not experience the resurgence in popularity many hoped for. All this makes the outcome of the 2015 general election hard to predict.

There is a sense that the parameters of the past are giving way to a new kind of politics, and yet the uncertainty as to what this means generates understandable anxieties among politicians, media commentators and the public at large. While party-political support appears to be at an all-time low, continued trade union action against public sector job cuts and pay freezes, as well as energetic campaigning by organisations like UK Uncut and the Global Occupy movement, suggest that large groups of people are channelling their political views in ways aside from the ballot box.

A very different kind of movement is presented when one considers the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in recent years. From minority special interest group to the UK's 'fourth party', UKIP has secured seats in the European Parliament and on local councils and, as of October 2014, has its first Member of Parliament in Tory-defector

Douglas Carswell. UKIP's success coincides with an upsurge in support for right-wing nationalist parties in other parts of continental Europe, signalling grassroots scepticism about the European Union and provoking anxieties about associated perspectives on immigration and cultural diversity.

Recent years have also seen interesting developments in the ways in which Christian churches relate to the political process. The traditional image of the Church of England as the 'Tory Party at Prayer' was finally demolished in the 1980s, when influential figures in the established church openly opposed the Conservative government's policies on a range of issues, from the handling of the Falklands War to the implications of free market economics for the inner-city poor. Instrumental in addressing the latter was Bishop of Liverpool David Sheppard, who was also a key figure behind the 'Faith in the City' report published in 1985. Sheppard is especially relevant here because he was both an influential bishop in the Church of England and a fervent evangelical, a firm advocate of evangelical theology and an equally passionate campaigner on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised in British society.

Subsequent years have found evangelicals shifting their public self-expression between maintaining a traditional focus on individual salvation – as with the so-called 'decade of evangelism' in the 1990s – and affirming an interventionist voice speaking truth to power in the public square. Such interventions have responded both to matters of individual rights and freedoms – as with legal cases involving Christians apparently penalised for expressing their faith in the workplace – and to issues of structural immorality, such as the plight of economically deprived groups exploited by 'payday loans' companies. The form of such intervention has also varied, from direct lobbying at the heart of Westminster to the issuing of church-sponsored reports, to public campaigning involving protest marches, and increasing use of social media. Evangelicals rarely speak with a united voice in these circumstances, and campaign organisations have tended each to focus their resources on a particular set of issues: gender roles and church leadership for Reform; the legal challenging of discrimination against Christians for The Christian Legal Centre; the moral decline of Britain for The Christian Institute; poverty and disease in the developing world for Tearfund.

While these various issues have become the focus of well-resourced and concerted campaigning from evangelical organisations, it is unclear how grassroots evangelical Christians engage with the broader political process. What kinds of issues are they most concerned about? To which kinds of campaign do they commit most resources? And how do their doctrinal and ethical priorities translate into political action? The data gathered from our surveys allows these questions to be pursued from a fresh evidence base, and some of the emerging trends are explored in the present chapter.

Engagement in the political process

When asked what the priorities of the Evangelical Alliance should be, respondents to the Omnibus Survey (administered August 2013, internally reported only) were given a number of options, from 'Bringing together local churches/church leaders' to 'Providing theological leadership to the evangelical community' and 'Mobilising the church locally and nationally for mission', among others. Notably, the option with the highest proportion of respondents affirming it as a 'top priority' was 'Representing the evangelical community to government and media'. A total of 53% answered in this way, compared with 31% who accorded 'top priority' status to 'Mobilising the church locally and nationally for mission', and 19% who did so for 'Providing theological leadership to the evangelical community'. Moreover, only 1% of respondents felt that representing evangelicals to government and media was an 'inappropriate' role for the EA, suggesting that support for an apolitical evangelicalism – focused exclusively on matters of personal faith – is much lower than it once was. In a striking finding from our 2010 survey, 91.9% of evangelical respondents agreed that it is important for Christians to engage with government, national assemblies and parliament (more than 75% agreeing 'a lot'). So there is an enthusiasm among the majority for a politically engaged evangelicalism, and for the Evangelical Alliance having a role in promoting the values of evangelicalism within the public sphere, including among politicians. But what do they see this as meaning in practical terms?

The most obvious place to look for evidence of political activity among evangelicals is their participation in the electoral process. Our 2010 survey, following the UK's general election, found that a large

majority of respondents – 80.1% – had voted, well in excess of the 65.1% national turnout. Among those affirming an evangelical identity, this rises to 84.7%, suggesting that an evangelical commitment may coincide with a greater tendency to engage with the electoral process.

However, this has to be considered in light of the demographic constituency of our respondents, who are disproportionately middle to upper-middle class and middle aged to elderly, and include a higher proportion of men than the national population. According to data collected by Ipsos MORI based on the 2010 general election results, all of these factors are associated with a stronger tendency to vote. This suggests we should not be surprised that our respondents appear especially well motivated, as this may have more to do with their social class, age and gender distribution than their evangelical commitment.

Nevertheless, there are signs that our respondents may well exceed patterns within the general population when it comes to engaging with the political processes of the UK. In our Easter 2011 survey, 91% said they would be voting in the imminent Referendum on the alternative vote, around double the national turnout on the day. Around 4% said they are members of a political party (compared to 1.3% nationally), and 1% are local councillors (compared to the much lower national proportion of 0.04%). Moreover, in the 2011 *Are we communicating?* survey, respondents were asked whether they had raised a concern in the political or public sphere during the previous 12 months using a variety of methods. In response, 51.9% said they have emailed their MP, local councillor or other politician; 70.9% have signed a petition on paper (80.7% have signed one online); 57% have used online media to forward campaign information; and 29% have actually met their MP or other politician to talk to them directly.

Respondents to the same survey were asked about times when they have been asked by an organisation or charity other than their own church during the previous 12 months to do something – perhaps to donate money, to undertake a volunteering role or to take part in a campaign to influence government (UK or overseas). Significantly more have been asked to donate money to a charitable cause or Christian charity than have been approached about volunteering or campaigning. However, when asked whether they agreed to do what was asked of them, political campaigning secured a higher rate of

committed responses than volunteering and donating money. Of those asked to take part in political campaigning during the previous 12 months, 81.4% had agreed to do this (compared to 70% of those asked to volunteer and 79% of those asked to make a donation). Political action is apparently not shied away from by our evangelical respondents.

Support for political parties

It is possible to build a picture of the party political profile of our respondents by examining data on voting preferences drawn from the 2010 baseline survey. These combine the results from a pre-election survey about voting intentions with post-election surveys of other evangelical populations about how they actually voted. Taking these together and comparing them with the actual general election results, we can discern just how distinctive evangelical respondents are from the national population.

The data suggests that evangelical respondents are more likely than the general population to favour the Conservative Party, but only by 3.3 percentage points. It also suggests that they are more likely to favour the Liberal Democrats (by 6.1 percentage points) and less likely to support Labour (by 6.9 percentage points). Interestingly, support for Labour among evangelicals attending black majority churches is much higher, at 61%. In explaining this, it is tempting to cite long-rehearsed arguments that refer to the special appeal of Pentecostalism among the working classes and the poor, although recent research into British Pentecostalism within black majority churches suggests a more complex demographic constituency, including many among the aspirant middle classes (Hunt and Lightly, 2001). Moreover, according to the Ethnic Minority British Election Study, based on survey data collected after the 2010 election, around seven in every ten ethnic minority Britons are supportive of Labour irrespective of their social class status (Heath & Khan, 2012).

The same survey reveals a persistent concern among ethnic minorities about equal opportunities in society, although the fact that support for Labour, while high, is down from previous elections may suggest they have decreasing faith that the Labour Party can deliver on this issue. The still lower support among black majority church evangelicals in our survey could indicate an even more diminished

perspective on the Labour Party. Indeed, the markedly entrepreneurial spirit of such churches – many of which have raised money from their communities for their own buildings and demand high levels of practical commitment from members – reflects values of self-sufficiency, innovation and individual effort most commonly associated with the Conservatives. Admittedly, following Tony Blair's New Labour, the Tories can no longer be claimed as the only party in full support of economic enterprise.

It is unclear to what extent black evangelicals make a positive connection between their entrepreneurial spirit and the economic message of the Conservative Party. So far there seems little evidence that this is the case, whether because Labour have absorbed those associations or because associations between Labour and social justice remain paramount in their political decision making.

Among our evangelical respondents, differences from the national electorate in support of minor parties were often smaller (for example, the Green Party secured support from 1% of the national population and from 1.2% of our responding evangelicals, while UKIP achieved 3.1% of the national vote and support from 1% of evangelicals). Interestingly, only 1.1% of our respondents expressed support for Christian political parties (such as the Christian Party or Christian People's Alliance). While this may suggest a very limited appetite for political representation by specifically 'Christian' parties in national government, it is worth bearing in mind that the option to vote for a 'Christian' party is by no means available in every constituency.

Given our rather transitional political climate, it is helpful to place such snapshot findings within a more longitudinal context. Do they represent a stable arrangement or are they changing over time? Respondents were asked about their intentions with respect to voting in a UK general election at two points: in 2010 and in 2013 within our *Working faithfully?* survey. Firstly, there was a sizeable proportion of 'I don't know' responses, suggesting a strong caution against any use of these figures in forecasting election results. However, the undecided 39.3% from 2010 had considerably shrunk by 2013, to 27.3%, perhaps indicating a firmer sense of alignment with specific parties in the approach to the 2015 general election. While acknowledging this proportion of undecided respondents, several interesting patterns can be observed in these figures with respect to support for the main

political parties. Comparing the two points in time, support for the Conservative Party declines from 35.7% to 24.1% of respondents expressing a preference; Labour support increases from 23.1% to 27.3%; Liberal Democrat support decreases from 33.5% to 15.9%.

From one point of view, these figures are not surprising: one would expect the governing party to suffer declining support as we move further in time from their ascendency to power, and we can see both parties of the coalition government suffering from this mid-term dip. The Liberal Democrats appear to have suffered particularly badly, with their proportion of evangelical supporters more than halving over the three-year period. Correspondingly, the main party of opposition – Labour – received increasing support, just overtaking the Conservatives.

However, the most significant beneficiaries of disillusionment with the coalition government are the minor political parties. Among those expressing a party preference, support for the Green Party increased from 2% to 6%. Support for either the Christian People's Alliance or the Christian Party increased from 1.8% to 10.5% of respondents, suggesting a shift in willingness to consider seriously options outside of the three main parties, including those explicitly identifying themselves as Christian. UKIP appears to have benefited from the same kind of disillusionment with the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, although its recent increase in popularity has a more obvious place within broader debates, particularly those concerned with national identity and immigration. The shift to UKIP may be our most striking finding among evangelicals, securing support from 1.6% of our survey respondents in 2010, increasing to 13.2% in 2013 – a more than eight-fold increase, with evidence to suggest much stronger support among men than women. Furthermore, when respondents to our 2014 *Faith in politics?* survey were asked who among the current party leaders would make the most capable prime minister, 6.44% named Nigel Farage as their first choice, ahead of Nick Clegg who secured only 6.19%. It would seem that the national rise of UKIP as the 'fourth party' of British politics is reflected in a growing contingent of supporters among evangelical Christians.

UKIP and evangelical values

Ascertaining why UKIP might appeal to evangelical voters in increasing numbers is a difficult question to answer. However, some recent data collected in the summer of 2014 in a panel survey specifically concerned with politics offers some helpful clues. This survey included a number of questions about politics and political choices, including one about why individuals might have a different party preference compared to how they voted at the last election.

Those who find themselves disillusioned with the Tory Party mentioned one issue far more than any other: the introduction of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in 2013, which effectively made it possible for adults of the same sex to marry in a religious ceremony. Unsurprisingly, the majority of evangelicals appear firmly opposed to same-sex marriage: no fewer than 80% of our 2011 Easter survey respondents stated that the legal status of marriage should *not* be extended to include other relationships, including partnerships between same-sex couples. For many evangelical respondents, this is such a fundamental issue of Christian principle that, following the legal changes of 2013, they do not feel able to vote Conservative again. The same-sex marriage Act is an accommodation too far to the values of modern society for many who would otherwise have remained faithful Tory supporters. With this as a defining issue, it is not surprising that these same individuals did not shift allegiance to Labour or the Lib Dems, both of whom fully backed the 2013 bill. Within the context of this debate, for some evangelicals, UKIP has emerged as the party most supportive of the traditional view of marriage that they most fervently defend. As one respondent put it, 'UKIP is the only party that supports marriage.'

For some respondents, the perceived 'attack' on marriage by the three main parties is associated with an anti-Christian agenda, including opposition to the teaching of creationism in schools. Some even go a step further in characterising UKIP as the party of Christian values, such as the respondent who, echoing the words of Nigel Farage, commented that, 'Nobody except UKIP is coming anywhere near the problem of the UK forsaking its Judeo-Christian heritage.'

The issue of Europe was the second most cited reason for switching to UKIP, and our respondents include a significant number of Euro-sceptics who see the European Union as diverting resources from the

UK's interests, and/or as an organisation not to be trusted. One respondent went as far as to say, 'It is an institution set up with deceit and I would not trust it a millimetre, ever.' UKIP support also seems to be strongly associated with perspectives that connect immigration to the economic plight of the country. Our 2013 *Working faithfully?* survey revealed that those likely to vote UKIP are much more likely to agree that the government should reduce immigration in order to safeguard jobs for British workers (75.4%, compared to 31.9% of all other evangelical respondents).

However, it is important to note that, for those wholeheartedly embracing UKIP as their new party of choice, there are just as many making a careful differentiation between how they would vote in different kinds of election. For these respondents, UKIP would receive their vote in a European election – as a protest against the EU – but not in a general election. As one put it, 'UKIP have valuable things to consider regarding Europe and immigration, but not necessarily regarding domestic issues.' This reflects a broader tendency among some respondents to vote tactically, to oppose rather than support a party, or vote differentially in different types of election. For others, their vote was motivated less by policy concerns than by the religious identities of their local candidates or the party leaders. One respondent commented that the 'local Conservative candidate is a Christian therefore I will probably vote for him although I am really Labour in my thinking'. When asked about the reasons why they would vote for a particular candidate, only 28.9% of respondents to our 2014 *Faith in politics?* survey said their being a Christian was 'not important'. However, when asked which factor was 'most important of all', a much smaller proportion opted for this answer, with far more affirming the importance that the candidate be 'honourable and not corrupt'.

This relates to the most overwhelmingly evident perspective arising from this data: one of disillusionment with all of the major parties. When asked whether, compared to five years ago, they were more or less trusting of the government (or about the same), 59.4% said 'less', and 49.7% were less likely to believe what a politician says. Against this negative impression of compromise and broken promises, UKIP has acquired an image associated with conviction and principle that is clearly attractive to a small but significant number.

Nationalism and the devolved Parliaments

The nationalist cause associated with UKIP is articulated in terms of Great Britain – 'For a Britain Independent, Free and Fair', as the party website states. Not all are so keen on a united kingdom, however, and the subdivision of the UK into constituent countries, each with their own history, has engendered movements of a nationalist kind that are framed by a much more provincial set of boundaries, often defined over and against a dominant England and Westminster-based central government. Such nationalist causes have a much longer history than UKIP, and some have a more explicit relationship to Christian identities, calling upon Christian symbolism in affirming their cause and/or with popular support that coalesces along both religious and political lines. This is certainly the case in Northern Ireland, in which a long history of political turmoil and conflict has seen nationalist movements – calling for a united Ireland – associated with Roman Catholics, while unionist movements – maintaining the importance of unity with the rest of Britain – have often found expression among the Protestant communities.

Among those evangelicals who completed our baseline survey in 2010, 764 individuals were from Northern Ireland. Like other respondents, they were asked about their political party preference, although given the complex multi-party system in Ulster, the emerging picture is understandably different. The results are given in table 4.1, alongside the results of the popular vote in Northern Ireland in that same year's general election.

There are few surprises here, with the two parties most closely associated with the nationalist cause and Roman Catholic communities – Sinn Fein and the SDLP – receiving far less support among evangelicals than among the general population. Correspondingly, the unionist parties – the DUP and the Ulster Conservatives – received much more support, although not enough to make up the difference. These results reflect the close alignment between both 'evangelicalism' as an identity marker and the Protestant denominations, and between the Protestant denominations and the unionist cause in Northern Ireland. However, Ulster evangelicals demonstrate more than three times as much support than the population of the province as a whole for the Alliance party (20.8% compared to 6.3% of the NI vote). The Alliance Party was established in 1970 as a moderate unionist party,

Table 4.1 Party preferences of evangelicals living in Northern Ireland

	Voter support among Northern Ireland population	Stating as party of preference in baseline survey	Difference
Democratic Unionist Party	25.0%	37.2%	12.2
Sinn Fein	25.5%	0.5%	-25.0
Social Democratic & Labour Party	16.5%	6.8%	-9.7
Alliance Party	6.3%	20.8%	14.5
Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force	15.2%	24.7%	9.5
Traditional Unionist Voice	3.9%	1.9%	-2.0
Green Party	0.5%	0.8%	0.3
Others	7.1%	7.1%	0

although in recent decades it has developed a neutral position on the issue of union with the UK, preferring to stand for a non-sectarian agenda in order to promote cooperation rather than division. Disproportionately high levels of support for the Alliance Party among evangelicals could suggest a strong endorsement of a post-sectarian, consensual agenda that is, for many, supplanting traditional party alignments.

The provincial boundaries of governance have also been subject to challenge and reconfiguration in other parts of the UK. Devolution was a New Labour project which saw significant powers devolved to national elected bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish case was always the most significant, and after the Scottish National Party secured a majority in the Scottish Parliament in 2011, a campaign for Scottish independence was soon underway. The referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014 raised the prospect of the most radical redrawing of the UK's borders in 300

years, and campaigns from both sides of the debate revealed strong feelings and a divided Scotland (the 'no', pro-unionist camp prevailing with a relatively slim majority of 55.3% among a very high turnout of 84.6% of the electorate).

While perspectives differ within Scotland, the independence debate has triggered some renewed engagement in the political process, with the SNP standing out as an exception to widespread political disillusionment in attracting large numbers of new members in recent years (McGuinness, 2012). The debate has also generated reflection across the UK about its national identity, further resonating with discussions about our relationship to the rest of Europe. A question about Scottish independence was included in our *Are we good neighbours?* survey, and the overwhelming majority of evangelical respondents appeared firmly unionist in their position. In fact, 73.7% said they would be unhappy or very unhappy if Scotland became independent from the UK. Among those resident in Scotland, even more (75%) shared this position, so our evangelicals appear especially pro-unionist. The 'What Scotland Thinks' website, which tracks opinion polls on the independence issue, has opposition to independence among English and Welsh citizens at 63%, suggesting that our non-Scottish evangelicals are markedly more unionist than the nation as a whole. Whether this pattern has anything to do with their evangelicalism is unclear, although strongly embedded associations between Protestantism and British national identity are likely to be a factor for some.

Long-standing sectarian tendencies within certain parts of Northern Ireland and Scotland have highlighted how Protestantism can be co-opted into political movements of a nationalist character. The symbolic connection between Christian identity and British identity has also been exploited by UKIP as they seek to consolidate their grassroots appeal, with leader Nigel Farage calling for 'a much more muscular defence of our Judaeo-Christian heritage'. As Christians of various backgrounds emerge in concert with or passionately opposed to Farage's party, it will be interesting to observe whether such alignments feature more prominently in public debate in the 2015 general election campaign.

Evangelical values and political alignments

In the current climate, any debate about politics involves reflection on the widespread cynicism that apparently leaves many members of the electorate disillusioned with the political process. According to the British Election Study of 2010, 42.7% of the general population either agreed or agreed strongly with the statement, 'The main political parties in Britain don't offer voters real choices in elections because their policies are pretty much all the same'. A similar question in our 2014 *Faith in politics?* survey found 36.2% of evangelicals answering in the same way. Assuming the 2010 figures have not changed dramatically during the last four years, it would seem that our evangelical respondents are in keeping with country-wide levels of cynicism about the main political parties. Having said that, in the same survey, 79.8% said they were certain they would vote in the 2015 general election. The age profile of our respondents may mean that it includes a large number of individuals for whom political change is primarily achieved via the ballet box.

Evangelical Christians are commonly assumed to be preoccupied with issues of personal – and especially sexual – morality. There is some truth in this, and the importance of the same-sex marriage issue in shaping political orientations is a revealing illustration. However, the media appetite for personal controversy, together with the highly vocal campaigns concerning homosexuality and abortion among the US Christian Right, often colour popular opinion in a way that overshadows important complexities. A reorientation around a much broader range of political issues is especially evident within British evangelicalism. Moreover, the destabilisation of traditional party political alignments (see above) means that – as with the nation as a whole – we often learn a lot more about evangelicals' political values by examining their professed attitudes towards specific issues rather than by looking at how they cast their votes.

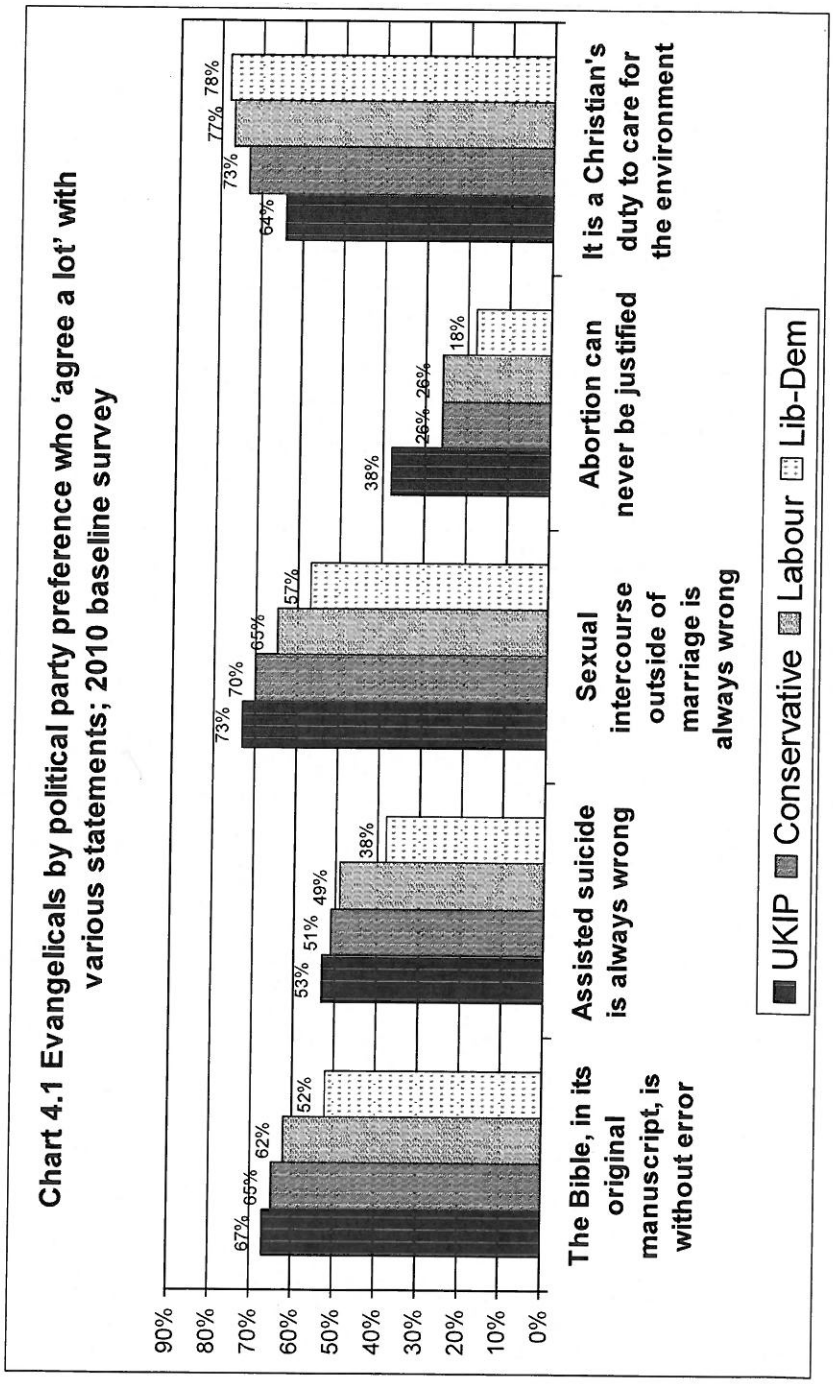
Broadly speaking, evangelicals appear to be fairly conservative on issues of theology and sexual ethics, while fairly left-leaning in their politics. More specifically, their political values appear strongly in favour of high taxes for the rich and lower taxes for the poor, and of government intervention to ensure fair working conditions for all and the eradication of injustice, including on the international stage. They are also strongly focused on issues of poverty and social inequality:

31.5% in 2014 state this as the 'single most important issue facing the UK today' (by far the most popular response, and compared to only 0.7% of the general population according to 2010 data collected as part of the British Election Study). Moreover, such patterns do not appear to be significantly different across age groups, although there are some exceptions. The under-35s express more uncertainty or more liberal inclinations with respect to assisted suicide and the blessing of civil partnerships in church, and yet are slightly more conservative with regard to abortion and women's roles in the church. More predictably, perhaps, younger respondents are less sympathetic than their older peers to the notion that the UK is a Christian country and that this should be reflected in its laws. There is also more wariness about immigration among older generations, for whom the jobs of British workers are more of a priority. Aside from these differences, comparable proportions oppose homosexual practice and sex outside marriage, support biblical inerrancy and tithing, and believe that it is a Christian's duty to volunteer in activities that serve the local community. In sum, there is some difference in values that can be associated with generational factors, but these differences are not dramatic, are outweighed by similarities, and do not follow an obvious pattern.

There is evidence that on a range of theological and moral issues, evangelical orientations are associated with their party political alignment. In 2010, we asked survey respondents how they had voted in that year's general election. Taking those who voted for the four main parties, it is possible to compare responses to questions and plot them on a broadly conceived conservative–liberal spectrum (see chart 4.1).

As can be seen, on issues of biblical inerrancy, assisted suicide, sex outside marriage and abortion, proportions affirming a conservative position are highest among UKIP voters and lowest among Lib-Dem voters, with the Conservative and Labour voters in between. Conversely, support for the notion that it is a Christian's duty to care for the environment follows the opposite pattern, with Lib-Dem voters most supportive and UKIP voters least. It is important to note that such a straightforward linear pattern is not in evidence on all issues, but nor is any alternative pattern consistently in evidence either. It would seem that party alignment among evangelicals can be

Chart 4.1 Evangelicals affirming they 'agree a lot' with various statements, according to 2010 baseline survey (P=<.001)



associated with professed theological and moral values, and that these values can be placed along a conservative–liberal spectrum.

What this data also suggests is that, while disillusionment with the main political parties is widespread, the clusters of ideas and priorities associated with each of them remains, to some extent, intact. Further analysis will need to explore whether especially conservative Christians tend to gravitate towards UKIP or the Conservatives, or whether existing UKIP/Conservative supporters gravitate towards evangelical churches.

Conclusion

UK evangelicals are best known for their theological or moral convictions rather than their political persuasions, which remain less visible to the public eye. Unlike the situation in the United States, the evangelical vote has not become a major factor in national elections, partly on account of the smaller proportion of evangelicals in the UK, and partly because of our political history. The Christian parties of the European continent did not emerge here as there were already close affinities between the Roman Catholics and Labour, the non-conformists and the Liberals, and the Tories and the established Church of England. This historical splitting of the Christian vote also diluted its capacity as a force of political influence, which was diminished further by ever-increasing religious nominalism within all three factions.

Within this context, politically engaged evangelicalism has emerged from the margins with no clear affinity with any single political party. This is reflected in the data discussed above, illustrating that, in terms of party political support, evangelicals are not significantly dissimilar from the UK population at large. However, political orientations among evangelicals do coalesce around certain tendencies and issues, suggesting their evangelical identities are significant to their political perspectives, albeit in complex and subtle ways.

The Christian think tank Theos published a report in 2013 entitled 'Is There a "Religious Right" Emerging in Britain?' The report concludes in the negative, referring to the tendency of UK evangelicals – in contrast with those in the US – to be economically left-of-centre, interested in an overlapping but also quite different set of moral issues,

and lacking any enduring alignment with a single political party whose interests are seen to echo their own. Our own data confirms this picture, suggesting an evangelical population which, while fairly conservative on theological issues and on issues of sexual morality, nevertheless also tends to affirm perspectives on global justice, financial propriety, poverty and inequality that are most often associated with the progressive left. This does not translate into majority support for Labour or the Liberal Democrats, however, and evangelicals appear to be just as disillusioned with the main political parties as the rest of the population, some having diverted their support to Christian parties or UKIP in the years following the 2010 election.

This disillusionment is, for some, reinforced by cross-party support for the same-sex marriage Act in 2013, suggesting that issues of personal morality can be a shaping influence over the Christian vote. Here is where the UK and US evangelical movements appear most alike, while also radically different. According to sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, the US coalition of the religious that has lent dependable support to the Republican Party in recent decades depends in part on sex and family issues remaining at stake in an election (Putnam and Campbell, 2010: 414). UK elections are typically not won or lost on issues such as abortion or sexual morality; instead, voters are most interested in the economy and its impact on their own welfare. The Conservative Party have attempted to use the rhetoric of family values to woo the electorate, but with mixed success, and a general liberal consensus across the main three parties – especially on free market economics and respect for individual freedoms – has alienated those who hold a more traditional perspective on issues of family, gender and sexuality. The rise of UKIP can be seen, in part, as a consequence of this, and its emergence as a symbol of British traditionalism has influenced a small but not insignificant proportion of evangelical voters. The future will reveal whether this indicates a more general shift towards a more 'values-based' politics, and what role evangelical Christians will have as the political landscape continues to change.

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