

LOVE, PRAY, VOTE

GENERAL ELECTION 2019

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These resources were produced by The Joint Public Issues Team, which is the Baptist Union, The Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, in partnership with Cytûn and SCPO. Not all of these briefings will be relevant to each country, due to devolved responsibilities.



GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE ELECTION

Any election is about choices. But the widely different visions for the

future course of the UK on offer at this general election mean its result will have decisive repercussions for years to come. These briefings consider some of the major issues at stake and explore how Christians might approach them, in the light of the command to love our neighbour. **Brexit** is the issue that dominates. Still unresolved 3½ years after the country narrowly took the decision to leave the European Union, it has fractured the political scene and had wider reverberations across society. Almost every outcome, from revoking Article 50 to leaving without a deal, remains on the table. None will decisively settle the issue, and very little consideration seems to be going into how to address the reality that any resolution of Brexit will leave a large number of people powerfully disappointed.

It will also have significant implications for **Britain's relationship with the rest of the world**. This includes priorities for its future trade relationships and migration policies, and the country's influence in international efforts to build a more peaceful, safe and tolerant world for all.

A second crucial question in the election is about **public services**. All the main parties have declared that the austerity years are over, but offer widely different visions for the future of public services – from headline-grabbing investments in a few key areas, to a wholesale expansion of the state's role, or meet the massive need for affordable housing, are of crucial importance to many people, but are politically tricky.

The major choices about spending priorities are paralleled by similarly challenging questions about how they are to be funded.

Debate around Brexit and public services mean that the traditional election battleground of the economy has rather faded from the forefront of public debate, but remains vitally important. The economy has changed radically from the pre-banking crisis years and, for many, not for the better. Growth has been slow, wages remain below 2008 levels, and productivity has flatlined. Rises in employment and rises in working age poverty have gone hand-in-hand. The previous consensus around generating economic growth and increasing standards of living has broken down, but has not been replaced. At the same time, the nation has made a welcome commitment to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero, as a response to the **climate crisis**. This must necessarily have huge consequences for our economy and how we live our lives, but at the moment it appears that the debate will skirt these deeper longer-term issues.

The experiences of those on the frontline of the rising tide of **poverty** also rarely make the headlines, but the question of how to tackle deprivation and mitigate its impacts on people's lives is a key issue for many communities. The freeze in benefit rates means many families do not have enough to live on - foodbank use has skyrocketed - and well documented failures in both the design and implementation of Universal Credit must be faced.

For many **refugees and asylum seekers**, poverty is compounded by restrictive 'hostile environment' policies and the denial of the right to work. The election is also an opportunity to ask how we can restore dignity within the asylum system.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Christians have an important role to play in politics: to love, to pray, and to vote. We must take part, debate with kindness, ask questions, demand

honest answers and be offended when truth is not offered. We are called to listen to those on the margins, seek good news for the poor, and stand up for those who are vulnerable – whether that is families who are struggling today, or future generations who do not have a vote but will be affected by our choices.

Each party will have its carefully selected messages to give to the electorate, which may not include the issues that we most care about. How can the scandal of foodbanks be ended? How can we avert climate catastrophe? How can we ensure refugees are treated fairly and humanely? You will have others. In playing our part in these elections, we have the opportunity to raise these questions above the fog, and hold candidates accountable to providing solutions which work for the good of all.

PRAYER FOR VOTERS

Loving God, we face a choice.

Be with us as we consider the options
weigh the arguments
and assess the claims and the candidates.

But also prompt us to listen:
to the voices on the margins
to the cry of the earth
and to those who reach a different conclusion to us.

God, we pray that you would
stimulate our minds
stir our hearts
and sanctify our choosing.

Help us also to remember
your command to love our neighbours
both during and after this election.

Amen

BRIEFING: BREXIT

There are many important issues at stake in this election. However, for many people the UK's relationship with the EU will be dominant. The bitterness of the Brexit debate can lead us to question the motives of people we disagree with and forget that other viewpoints are valuable. As Christians we are called to acknowledge that those we disagree with are also made in the image of God and may have insights we lack.



CONTEXT

VALUING OTHER VIEWPOINTS

Polling shows the British public to be frustrated with Brexit and upset with politicians for not having resolved the issue. The same polling also indicates that there is no clear majority for any of the possible solutions proposed. This is true for Christians as it is for other groups.

The issue of Brexit has cut across party political lines and created new divides. **These divides are strongly linked with how positive people feel about recent demographic and cultural changes in the UK, as well as our openness to even greater change in the future.**

Political parties have in the past tended to draw in people with shared economic views and circumstances regardless of personality characteristics such as openness to change. Brexit on the other hand tends to divide by age, ethnicity and education in a way that has not been seen before. The process of realignment has been disturbing for many and the question of how we debate, persuade and build alliances across these new divides is not nearly resolved.

THE DEAL WITH THE EU

The UK has agreed a deal to leave the European Union. The next government must decide if it is to press on with the current deal, try to negotiate a new deal or to stop the Brexit process altogether. The new Parliament could decide to hold a further referendum at some point in this process.

The current deal agrees further payments to the EU, a framework for the rights of EU and UK citizens and a transition period during which the next stage of negotiations, about the future relationship, will happen.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CANDIDATES

Any resolution of Brexit will leave a large number of people powerfully disappointed – how will you seek to include them as we move forward?

What is your vision for Britain's future relationship with the European Union?

Should the next government proceed with the current agreement, there will be little immediate change, as we will enter a transition period where existing arrangements remain in force. The EU and the UK will then enter into a new set of negotiations to attempt to agree new trade, migration, security and customs arrangements. Concern has been expressed about whether a complex trade deal can be agreed in the timescale envisaged by the process. The default position remains a “no deal” exit at the end of this transition period.

Agreements with other nations will also be needed either to replace the partnerships we already have via the EU, or to create new trading relationships.

NORTHERN IRELAND

In areas such as agriculture and food, Northern Ireland (NI) will be obliged to follow EU rules and will remain part of the EU Value Added Tax system for the long term. This is intended to minimise checks on the NI/Ireland border but does introduce checks on goods travelling between NI and the rest of the UK.

In the short term, NI will follow EU rules. In the longer term much remains unresolved as the checks, administration and the future UK/EU trade agreement are all yet to be designed.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Brexit is an issue that affects both head and heart. If you took a position on Brexit, what do you value in the arguments made by the other side?

What values do you think are important for Britain to uphold whether we remain in or leave the EU?



The UK is currently set to leave the EU on 31 January 2020.

BRIEFING: REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Bible is full of stories of people who were forced or chose to move across borders because of natural disaster, exploitation, trafficking, war and persecution. Adam and Eve are sent from the Garden. Joseph is both trafficked and then followed by his family to Egypt. Moses leads the children of Israel on a long wilderness journey. In the New Testament we discover a Jesus who migrates three times: he makes the ultimate border crossing in the incarnation; he is an undocumented infant refugee to Egypt; he becomes an itinerant preacher and healer. The Churches' concern for asylum seekers and refugees is in part recognition that in welcoming the stranger, we welcome Christ himself.



In the twelve months up to 2019 there were 32,693 asylum applications. In comparison in 2018 Germany received 161,900 and France 114,500.

CONTEXT

In the UK, the so-called '**hostile environment**' has shaped the way the state provides support for asylum seekers and refugees. Churches have been working to try to change attitudes and policies to be ones which prioritise human dignity and human rights.

It can take months or sometimes years for the UK Home Office to decide an asylum application, during which time people are offered basic accommodation, receive £37.75 per week and are not allowed to work. This is despite there being good evidence to show the importance of

employment on someone's integration, as well as meaning they do not have to be a burden on the taxpayer.

The UK Government uses immigration detention for people that they want to deport or who they think might be at risk of absconding (going underground). The UK has no time limit on detention, and so people can be locked up indefinitely without having committed a crime or been convicted of an offence. In the 2017-2019 Parliament there were cross-party efforts to seek a maximum of 28 days for immigration detention and it is very likely that this issue will return in the new UK Parliament.



In the UK at the end of 2018 there were 126,720 refugees, 45,244 pending asylum cases and 125 stateless persons - around 0.26% of the UK population (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What does welcoming the stranger or loving your neighbour mean to you in the context of this election?

If you were forced to leave your home and your country, how would you want to be treated in the place that you sought safety?

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What will you do to restore dignity to people seeking asylum in this country?
Will you support:

- a) a time limit for immigration detention of 28 days?
- b) restoring asylum seekers' right to work?

BRIEFING: CLIMATE CHANGE

When the earth was created God proclaimed “it is good”. Loss of biodiversity and a changing climate brings home to us the challenge to be good stewards of God’s creation. The Bible exhorts us to act justly towards all God’s children and to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute” (Proverbs 31:8-9). Our calling to be just should extend toward justice for future generations who will be impoverished if we consume the earth’s resources unsustainably.



Across 58% of the world's land surface, the level of biodiversity loss is substantial enough to **threaten the ability of ecosystems to support human societies.**

CONTEXT

THE 2020 IPCC SUMMIT IN GLASGOW

Over the coming year the UK is ideally placed to influence global climate action. The UK government will host the climate summit in Glasgow in December 2020 at which there are expected to be 30,000 delegates including the leaders or representatives of most nations. This crucial summit will be the first opportunity since the 2015 Paris Summit for governments to increase their climate commitments. This is necessary to ensure that the objective of limiting global warming to 1.5°C degrees becomes achievable. In the preparations for the 2020 Summit strong leadership on the part of the UK Government is vital.

ACHIEVING UK NATIONAL TARGETS

In 2019, the UK Parliament declared a climate emergency and committed to achieve net-zero emissions in the UK by 2050. But there is currently a huge gap between this stated intention and the necessary policies to bring this about. There is a

danger that the UK government might factor-in the use of offsets achieved by financing action in other countries but this should be avoided. We must achieve UK targets with actions in the UK, including in the following areas:

HOUSING

All new homes should be built to zero-carbon standards as soon as possible providing benefit both to residents and the environment.

POWER GENERATION

The Committee on Climate Change has proposed that by 2050 99% of our electricity should come from ‘low-carbon’ sources which could include nuclear power, or make use of Carbon Capture and Storage (a technology that has not yet been used at scale).

TRANSPORT

The electrification of transport has the potential to make a big impact on UK carbon emissions. However, phasing out diesel and petrol cars will only be feasible with a major expansion of charging points in the UK and also needs to have public acceptability.



Across our four nations there are almost 2700 registered Eco Churches and Eco Congregations.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

In order to get us on track for achieving net-zero emissions in the UK what policies must the government introduce over the next year?

What would your targets be to get new build homes contributing to net-zero?

Can a goal of unlimited economic growth be compatible with the declaration of a climate emergency?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How will future generations reflect on the current debates around the climate crisis?

What changes are needed in your local area to help reduce emissions from transport?

BRIEFING: BRITAIN IN THE WORLD

Christians recognise that we live our lives on a broader canvas than our own self-interest, with responsibilities that do not stop at our national borders. We believe that every human being in the world is made in God's image and are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. When Jesus is asked 'who is my neighbour?', he tells the parable of the good Samaritan, illustrating that our responsibilities to each other transcend earthly boundaries. We are called to seek justice and peace for all of God's children. Britain has a part to play in this as part of an international community of interdependent nations.



10% of the world's population, 736 million people, live below the international poverty line of £1.50 a day.

CONTEXT

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

For the majority of the world's population 'security' is about reliable access to food, water, education and healthcare, around which the armed forces have little impact. However, UK military spending has increased to 2% of GDP, three times the amount spent on international development aid. The new United Nations [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#) has growing international support but is opposed by the UK.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite good progress in tackling global poverty over the last three decades, there is still a very long way to go to address global inequalities and ensure that all people have the opportunity to thrive. Successive British governments have committed to spending 0.7% of national income on overseas development aid, and this is an important tool in tackling poverty. It is vital that this funding is focused on the poorest people and contributes to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



The number of countries experiencing 'high' or 'very high' levels of government restrictions on religion has risen over the past decade from 40 to 52.

FUTURE TRADE RELATIONSHIPS

If the UK leaves the European Union and the customs union, it will be able to develop independent new trading relationships with other countries. These create opportunities, but at what cost should these trade deals be pursued? Subjecting them to impact assessment and parliamentary scrutiny would ensure that they do not undermine or erode commitments to tackling global poverty, upholding human rights and meeting high environmental standards.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

In many places in our world people's freedom to exercise religion and belief is under threat. People find themselves denied opportunities and rights, and vulnerable to physical violence, jail and torture, because of their faith. State authorities are often complicit in this and fail to protect religious minorities from intimidation or persecution. A future UK government could play a key role in promoting freedom of religion or belief as a foundational human right.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What role and responsibilities does Britain have in tackling global poverty?
What compromises do you think should be acceptable to secure a trade deal?

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What will you do to ensure Britain continues to play a role in tackling global poverty?
Would you support MPs having a role in scrutinising new trade deals negotiated by the UK after Brexit, especially with regard to their impact on human rights, poverty and the environment?
How would you encourage progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons?

BRIEFING: POVERTY IN THE UK

Christians believe that every person is made in God's image (Genesis 1:26) and should have the opportunity to flourish and realise the potential that God has put within them. Poverty denies people these opportunities. In the Bible, God often speaks to and through those on the margins, and comes to the world in Jesus, proclaiming a mission to be good news for the poor. We are called to tackle all that traps people in poverty and to listen to the voices of those who are experts through lived experience.



Between April 2018 and March 2019, the Trussell Trust distributed a record 1.6 million three-day emergency food parcels to individuals in crisis, 73% more than five years ago.

CONTEXT Poverty, hunger and deprivation are rising in the UK. There are now **14.3 million people held back by poverty**, and an estimated **1.5 million people experience destitution** – meaning they lack the most basic resources to eat and stay warm, dry and clean. In his **April 2019 report**, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty found that the experience of being held back by poverty and needing support was both increasingly common and increasingly undignified – even humiliating. Children and young adults are the groups most likely to experience poverty.

IN WORK POVERTY

Employment rates are currently high, but work, even full-time work, no longer protects families from poverty. **70% of children in poverty are in working families. The economy has grown very slowly over the past decade, and despite a rise in the minimum wage, average earnings remain below their 2008 peak.** Much low-paid work is insecure.

Low income working families, especially those with children, have also experienced large cuts to their benefits. While rises in the income tax threshold have helped most working families, they have been **of more value to high earners, with 75% of the benefit going to the wealthiest half of families.**

WELFARE SYSTEM

Universal Credit is gradually replacing previous benefits for people of working age and is intended to simplify systems and incentivise work. It has been unreliable and poorly administered, and there are problems inherent in

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What are your plans to improve Universal Credit?

Which groups of people have you spoken to when looking at how to tackle UK poverty?

its design, including the 5-week wait for an initial payment, which has been linked to rising levels of debt and hunger. **There are also growing concerns that even when it is administered and paid correctly it simply does not provide enough money for families to live on.**

Around £47bn has been cut from the benefits system since 2010, and benefit rates have been frozen since 2016, meaning a 6% drop in their value in real terms.

Most people who rely solely on the benefits system are those unable to work due to disability, illness or caring responsibilities. They do not benefit from policies to encourage work or to reduce income taxes.

LIVING IN POVERTY

Lower income households end up spending more on basic goods and services – such as transport, food and energy – than higher income households. This 'poverty premium' is exacerbated in rural communities.

Increasingly families in poverty are housed in the private rental sector, leading to higher costs not covered by welfare payments, and less security.

Building effective policies to address poverty will require a combination of more resources, better work, and the insights of those who experience poverty every day.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How do you actively value the voices of people who experience poverty?

What do you think the purpose of the welfare system should be?

BRIEFING: THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE UK (SCOTLAND)

The constitutional future of Scotland within the United Kingdom has been a key factor in Scottish politics over the past decade. As Christians we should be inspired by hopes to create a better future, but does this future reflect the values that we believe are important?



CONTEXT

The Acts of Union in 1707 merged the two countries of England and Scotland into the Kingdom of Great Britain. In September 1997, the people of Scotland voted in a referendum for devolution. The UK Parliament then passed the Scotland Act 1998 which established the Scottish Parliament, which met in May 1999 – adjourned since March 1707. Some powers previously held at Westminster were transferred to the Scottish Parliament.

In 2007, the Scottish National Party won the Scottish Parliament election and formed a minority administration. They have remained in power since then and now lead a majority government in the Scottish Parliament. A referendum on Scottish independence was held in September 2014 on the question, 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'

The 'No' side won with 2,001,926 (55.3%) voting against independence, and 1,617,989 (44.7%) voted Yes. The turnout for the referendum was 84.6% which is the highest recorded for an election or referendum in the United Kingdom since the January 1910 General Election, which was held before the introduction of universal suffrage. The electorate (which included 16 and 17 year olds and EU citizens) were told that the vote would be once in a generation.



An exit poll from the 2014 referendum found that retention of the pound sterling was the deciding factor for those who voted No, while "disaffection with Westminster politics" was the deciding factor for those who voted Yes.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CANDIDATE

What would you do to ensure that Scotland, either as part of the UK or as an independent Scotland is able to care for the poor and most marginalised in our society?

What will you do to ensure that respectful dialogue characterises relations between Scotland and the rest of the UK whatever happens in the election?

The referendum was quickly followed by the 2015 UK General Election, in which the SNP won an unprecedented 56 out of 59 seats. In 2017, the SNP again won the General Election in Scotland, winning 35 seats.

The 2016 Brexit referendum means that the political landscape has changed considerably since 2014, and the SNP want another opportunity for the people of Scotland to readdress the question of independence.

Given that the majority of Scotland voted against leaving the European Union, the SNP are demanding the right to choose independence. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP has said: "This election is Scotland's chance to escape Brexit and to put our future in our own hands." The UK Conservative Government has repeatedly ruled out the possibility of authorising a second independence referendum. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has said that he would not rule out consenting to a referendum if he became Prime Minister, and the Liberal Democrats have said they do not want another Scottish referendum.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

People disagree for a variety of reasons on whether or not Scotland should remain part of the United Kingdom. What are the values you believe are important to maintain in either of these scenarios?

If Scotland votes to become independent, how will this affect the way you see others in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Since devolution, the powers of the Scottish Parliament have increased to include agriculture, forestry and fisheries, education, environment, health and social services, aspects of social security, housing, law and order, local government, sport and the arts, tourism and economic development, many areas of transport and tax raising powers.

A video talking about the devolved powers can be viewed [here](#).



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CANDIDATES

BRITAIN IN THE WORLD

- ⇒ What will you do to ensure Britain continues to play a role in tackling global poverty?
- ⇒ Would you support MPs having a role in scrutinising new trade deals negotiated by the UK after Brexit, especially with regard to their impact on human rights, poverty and the environment?
- ⇒ How would you encourage progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons?

REFUGEES

- ⇒ What will you do to restore dignity to people seeking asylum in this country?
- ⇒ Will you support:
 - a) a time limit for immigration detention of 28 days?
 - b) restoring asylum seekers' right to work?

CLIMATE CHANGE

- ⇒ In order to get us on track for achieving net-zero emissions in the UK what policies must the government introduce over the next year?
- ⇒ What would your targets be to get new build homes contributing to net-zero?
- ⇒ Can a goal of unlimited economic growth be compatible with the declaration of a climate emergency?

BREXIT

- ⇒ Any resolution of Brexit will leave a large number of people powerfully disappointed – how will you seek to include them as we move forward?
- ⇒ What is your vision for Britain's future relationship with the European Union?

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

- ⇒ What are your plans to improve Universal Credit?
- ⇒ Which groups of people have you spoken to when looking at how to tackle UK poverty?

Please get in touch with any
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The Church of Scotland



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