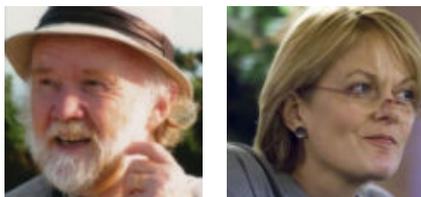


How Anglicans tipped the Brexit vote



*Two-thirds of Anglicans voted for Brexit, a much higher proportion than in the country as a whole. **Greg Smith (William Temple Foundation)** and **Linda Woodhead (Lancaster University)** look at the reasons for the disparity and note the divergence between the beliefs of UK evangelicals – including the Archbishop of Canterbury – and ‘normal’ Anglicans.*

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has been busy again attacking the markets and calling for more welfare. His views are at variance with those of ordinary Anglicans, [two-thirds of whom](#) think that welfare spending is too high.

Research we have [just published](#) reveals an equally significant ‘values gap’ when it comes to the EU. ‘In the run up to the referendum of 2016 Welby was against Brexit but in the vote Anglicans strongly supported it. Our exit poll of 3,242 UK adults, commissioned by Linda Woodhead immediately after the referendum, shows that exactly two-thirds (66%) of the Anglicans in England who cast a vote, voted to leave the EU. That’s higher than for England as a whole, where just over half of voters (53%) chose Leave.



Stained glass at St Mary’s Church, Godmanchester. Photo: [Steve Day](#) via a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 licence](#)

Anglicans are more enthusiastically pro-Brexit than affiliates of other major religions. In England, 55% of Catholics voted Leave, 45% Remain. Amongst other non-Christian faiths – though sample sizes are small – the tendency was to favour Remain over Leave. The increasingly large group who report ‘no religion’ also favoured Remain: 53% Remain, 47% Leave.

Anglican support for Brexit is so high that it’s natural to think that the fact of being Church of England may be disguising other factors. For example, we know that Anglicans tend to be older than the population as a whole, and that older people were more likely to vote Leave. We tested this by correcting for all the factors that might have influenced, including age, region of residence, gender, and social class. This shows that age and social class do make a difference. Nevertheless, even when all these factors are corrected for, the ‘Anglican effect’ remains. Table 1 shows this most clearly.

Table 1: Percentage of voters voting Leave: All England, CofE, None (No Religion)

	All	CofE	None
Percentage voting Leave	53	66	47

Female	All CofE	None
Male	50 64	44
ABC1	46 63	37
C2DE	64 71	63
Under 40	37 49	35
40-59	57 66	51
Over 60	66 72	61
London	41 57	35

Of course, being 'Anglican' for these purposes is purely a matter of stated self-definition and sense of belonging. It may be that active churchgoers – who are only a small minority amongst Anglicans – take a different view, closer to that of the Archbishop.

Earlier surveys carried out by Woodhead in 2013 allow us to test this hypothesis, because they asked about voting intention in a referendum on the EU, as well as frequency of church attendance. They show that Anglicans who go to church regularly (at least once a month) are indeed more likely to say they would vote Remain – but they are still in a minority. The majority of Anglicans in England, churchgoing or not, favour Brexit.

These earlier polls also shed some light on why Anglicans are so pro-Brexit, despite what their leaders tell them. They show that Anglicans are generally centre-right in politics but liberal on matters of personal morality. Newspapers like the Telegraph or Daily Mail reflect their views. They take a generally negative view of the EU, with a quarter saying they can see no benefit at all in being a member. What they object to most are 'EU rules and regulations', followed by weak borders and unchecked immigration, and taking power from Parliament. Over half object to every one of these things. After that come economic objections.

In other words, most Anglicans take a positive view of English culture and ethnicity, and regard the EU as a threat to their heritage, values, identity and parliamentary sovereignty. These concerns, which are sometimes lumped together as 'nativist' are greater even than their economic ones.

By contrast, none of these concerns figure highly in the statements of the Archbishops.

Greg Smith's surveys of evangelical opinion in the UK suggest an interesting reason why. He finds that evangelical Christians in the UK differ significantly from their counterparts in the US. Both groups are predominantly white, but in the UK evangelicals are generally of much higher socio-economic status and have a more global, cosmopolitan outlook. In the US, the evangelical vote went overwhelmingly to Trump, in the UK, evangelicals were more likely to Remain than Leave.

As an evangelical, Justin Welby's views reflect the views of British evangelicalism more generally. Evangelicalism is increasingly influential amongst bishops and senior clergy in the Church of England, but appeals to only a minority of the laity.

Over time, as older, more traditional Anglicans die out and the CofE continues its precipitous decline, that balance may change. In the process the CofE from a moderate religion of the people to a more sectarian religion for an evangelical minority. In that case, the views of Church leaders will, eventually, prevail over those of laity.

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor the LSE.

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