

A View from the Top

“I don’t think anyone’s asked that question before,” the professor responded.¹ The question I had asked—Why are Evangelicals in the U.S. and the U.K. alike religiously but not politically?—was the one that dawned on me rather slowly and throughout my travels in Great Britain. After visiting a prominent Evangelical congregation in London, I found the style of service and manner of worship quite familiar, but the talk of civic engagement was quite different. In place of political, partisan, or ideological position-taking, there were calls to attend to human trafficking, hunger, and similar social ills. My curiosity was piqued around the time of the 2010 General Election, and thereafter I noticed no mention in media of a Christian Right bringing the Tories (or the Liberal Democrats, for that matter) to power. So I began reaching out to British elites to answer that question—Why do American and British Evangelicals differ politically?

ELITE INTERVIEWS

To begin an examination of the political attitudes and behaviors of British Evangelicals, I formulated a top-down research design. Surely religious and political elites would, first, make me aware of others asking the same question and, second, acquaint me with opinion leaders who may be active in any Evangelical political movement—if there be any such movement. Bylines in newspapers were a starting point. Most of the major newspapers maintain reporters covering religious affairs.

Emails to these journalists were sometimes successful, sometimes not. In addition to media, I reached out to fellow academics whose publications recurred in bibliographic research. The process was piecemeal and evolved rather organically as one contact connected me to another (or several) and so on. My sample was not random, and it was not selected for any measure of representativeness other than to speak to as many individuals as would agree to meet me. Thus, my sample was formed by

Table 2.1 Leaders interviewed

<i>September 2011</i>	<i>June 2012</i>	<i>Other times</i>
Professor of Sociology and Religion		
Lecturer of Politics and Religion		
Freelance journalist and researcher for Christian think tank	Freelance journalist and researcher for Christian think tank	
Labour Member of Parliament		
Conservative Member of Parliament		
Conservative Member of Parliament		
Director of a conservative Christian advocacy group		
Parliamentary Director for Evangelical advocacy group	Parliamentary Director for Evangelical advocacy group	
Research Director of Christian think tank		
PhD student and researcher for cross-party think tank	PhD student and researcher for cross-party think tank	
Newspaper editor and political consultant		
High-ranking clergy in the Church of England*	Media Director at Evangelical Anglican Church Head of Policy Programmes at independent think tank	High-ranking clergy in the Church of England* High-ranking clergy in the Church of England*

* These include bishops and archbishops

respondents' willingness and availability. In the end, during a month's stay in the U.K., I met with twelve opinion leaders across an array of fields (see Table 2.1). In subsequent interviews, I followed-up with some individuals from the previous cycle and met with new contacts as well (see Table 2.1).

The interviews were semi-structured, and conversation followed a basic list of questions that was adapted for each person (see Appendix A). These discussions were inductive in that they were meant to generate hypotheses about the political attitudes and behaviors of British Evangelicals; as such, the discussion was free-flowing and wide-ranging. I met individuals at their convenience in offices, church basements, train stations, and coffee shops. To promote conversational interaction, I did not record these sessions. Subjects could observe my making shorthand notations throughout, but I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible in my note-taking. Immediately after each interview, I completed and transcribed my notes while memory was fresh. The result is a snapshot of elite views about Evangelicals in British public life.

OBSTACLES TO POLITICIZATION

Throughout my conversations, it became apparent that elite views about the political reticence of Evangelicals settle on common themes that may be categorized as institutional or cultural. Their conventional wisdom to explain differences between American and British Evangelicals holds that the structure of the British political system as well as cultural norms inhibit the formation of an Evangelical-based political movement.

INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The narrative of the American Christian Right (Bruce 1988; Green et al. 1998; Martin 1996; Wilcox and Robinson 2011) suggests that its formation owes to three components: political elites reached out to clergy; religious elites translated religious values into political action; and willing adherents accepted the connection between religious theology and political ideology. None of these ingredients are present to any measurable degree in Britain.

It was an obvious, and usually first, response to my question that British Evangelicals in no way compare in size to those in America. It is true—British Evangelicals comprise a very small part of the population.

Christianity remains the largest religion in Britain where, according to the 2011 Census, 59.3% of individuals in the U.K. identified as “Christian.”² However, this figure represents a reduction of more than 12% since the last census a decade earlier and is largely explained by the growth in those reporting no religious affiliation. The “nones” nearly doubled their share of the population from 14.8% in 2001 to 25.1% in 2011.³ As mentioned earlier, quantifying Evangelicals among the Christian population is more art than science with the result that projections vary wildly. In their 2006 survey of churchgoing, Tearfund found 27% of regular churchgoers self-identified as Evangelical, “equivalent to around 2.0 million Evangelicals in the U.K. adult population” (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). Two million Evangelicals do not make a substantial bloc of religious identifiers out of a national population of slightly more than sixty-three million people. That figure is comparable to data from the Evangelical Alliance in the U.K., which has about 3500 churches, representing almost two million congregants, on its membership rolls and numbers Evangelicals at 3–4% of the population.⁴ Although one Member of Parliament estimates their size at 7–8% of the population.⁵ Higher still, some in these interviews refer to a “silent majority” (Nixonian language duly noted) of religious conservatives led by Evangelicals.⁶ As the leader of a conservative Christian interest group put it: “Millions still believe what I do, but won’t speak up out of fear.”⁷ There are millions of Evangelicals in Britain to be sure, but together they comprise about 3% of the national population. Three percent does not make a substantial political bloc worth competition by the major political parties. Thus, it stands to reason, size alone limits Evangelical political activity, and by it, their influence.

However, this simple reason seems just that—too simple. “These may be small numbers, but there is a depth or intensity of faith that makes them matter.”⁸ In fact, more than once in my interviews, I heard it described that Evangelicals “punch above their weight.”⁹ That assessment of Evangelical influence fits with academic findings that religiosity or level of commitment matters more than label or affiliation for affecting political attitudes or behavior (Kohut et al. 2000; Layman 2001; Putnam and Campbell 2010). And campaign and election studies have found that American parties have focused their mobilization efforts on voters with intensity of affiliation rather than trying to persuade so-called “independents” that may be numerically advantageous (Levendusky 2009). The principle is that intensity of identification yields

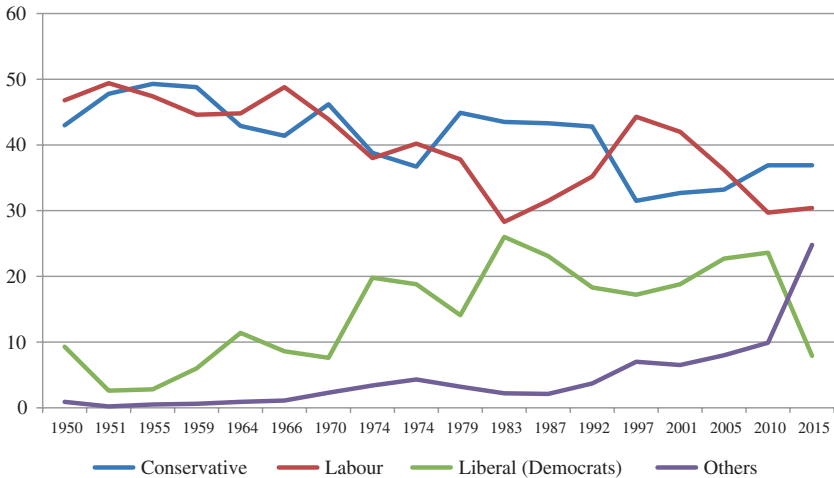


Fig. 2.1 Percent share of votes by party in general elections, 1950–2015. *Source* Data compiled from Denver et al. (2012) and “Results,” BBC News <http://www.bbc.com/news/election/2015/results> (accessed November 5, 2016)

greater predictability of attitude and behavior, like turning out to vote on Election Day. Thus, parties should target those who can provide certainty to an uncertain political system. One may argue, then, that no matter their modest numbers, Evangelicals could present a significant bloc of voters to a party coalition, made so by the intensity of belief and action and the fact that electoral margins are narrow (see Fig. 2.1).

Assuming that a bloc of voters, however small, would be desirable to a partisan coalition, there have not been overt appeals to Evangelicals by the major political parties. One explanation offered is that a party, in seeking to capture the Evangelical vote, would lose other parts of its coalition. In fact, one researcher suggested that religious rhetoric stimulates secular turnout.¹⁰ The multi-party system in the U.K. presents a broad ideological spectrum, but how parties compete along the spectrum is perhaps unexpected. Unusual for a European multi-party structure, the U.K. has retained its first-past-the-post electoral system.¹¹ The result is that major parties have to ideologically situate to capture the most voters, which assuming a normal distribution, places them in striking distance of the middle. Whereas proportional representation rewards narrow, factional interests, first-past-the-post net gains only for

“umbrella parties.”¹² The reach of the Conservative and Labour parties have stretched in eras of dealignment, forcing them to rely on interests beyond their class bases (Driver 2011; Denver et al. 2012). Thus party composition and tactics have shifted such that they are too broad to appeal to factional interests—to do so risks undermining the coalition as a whole. To make a direct comparison to the American experience, there is no Paul Weyrich among the Tories, Labourites, or the Liberal Democrats, seeking to enlarge a party’s tent by bringing in Evangelicals. To embrace one faction risks displacing another into the open arms of the opposition—so Tony Blair learned when his attempt to create “New Labour” by shifting slightly to the Right, however electorally successful, lost some traditional bases of “Old Labour” (Denver et al. 2012). One think tank representative put it this way: “As long as seculars are successful at creating a spectre, fear disincentivizes parties from appealing to religious voters or trumpeting their issues. They will lose more than they gain.”¹³ Certainly, given the small size of Evangelicals, it is possible that parties risk alienating more voters than they would gain. As one churchman noted, “Politicians who use God find it isn’t a passport to favor.”¹⁴

To be sure, each of the major parties—Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and Labour—have outreach groups to Christians. The Christian Socialist Movement was the earliest of these, formally affiliating with the Labour Party in 1988. The Conservative Christian Fellowship followed shortly thereafter to establish formal ties with the Conservative Party. These groups and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum have a pact to work together by not embarking on direct partisan appeals. To that end, the three groups have formed an umbrella organization, Christians in Politics, to coordinate advocacy for the political participation of Christians. “The message is to join and get into party politics, whichever party that may be. The message clearly is not, Christians should join *this* party.”¹⁵ The formation of a linkage organization suggests the relationship among the three groups, and thus the three parties, is more complementary than competitive about religious interests in politics. And it certainly suggests that there is no partisan monopoly on those Christian interests. No party seeks to appeal to Christians generally, much less Evangelicals specifically, as a means of driving a wedge between the other two. Rather the existence of these groups means that there are Evangelical interests represented in all the major political parties, and these groups join together to mobilize Christians to political life, regardless the partisan flavor.¹⁶

The Big Society program presents one example, noted for its rarity, of a partisan appeal to religious interests. Announced by David Cameron in the run-up to the 2010 general election, the “Big Society” represents a reframing of Conservative ideology to focus on the devolution of many issues to localities. Efforts sought to involve local councils, business leaders, voluntary groups—including churches—to drive many community-based initiatives in the creation, not of big government, but of “big society.” In this way, the program prompted civil society to assume the role of social service provision in the face of a shrinking state. The policy was met with mixed reviews by a largely confused public, elites, and especially media. A longtime political consultant I spoke with charged that it was a blatant attempt by Cameron and his advisors to appeal to a yet undefined Christian Right. “Admittedly, I have no empirical evidence for this, but I suspect they see an opportunity to exploit.”¹⁷ When asked what they were exploiting, he replied, “an opportunity. Cameron’s actions are a response to the previous government, to New Labour saying, ‘We don’t do God.’ The Big Society is an attempt to reach out to a ‘silent majority.’”¹⁸ But “it’s [Conservative Party outreach to religious groups] carefully calibrated,” he noted.¹⁹ He then described “Cameron’s u-turn” when Cameron advised his members to vote against a measure proposed by a Tory backbencher, Nadine Dorries, that would open the door for religious groups and charities to provide the required counseling for women seeking abortion.²⁰ “He [Cameron] thought the party was looking too fundamentalist.”²¹

On the other hand, a researcher at a religious-based think tank is far less skeptical. Rather than viewing it merely as a partisan mobilization ploy, he said simply, “We need that.”²² He cited an array of economic commitments that he claimed were unsustainable for government alone to meet and explained that the Big Society allows religious and social organizations to work together to solve problems. Cameron’s policy “suggests a return to ideological conservatism rather than the economic neo-liberalism of Thatcher which suggests markets alone rule.” His assessment was echoed by another, describing the Big Society as simply “community engagement.”²³ “Churches have a product that leaders are interested in, so delegations of religious leaders will meet with politicians, and vice versa, to discuss the delivery of local services.” Rather than an exploitive electoral tool, he describes the Big Society as a recognition that faith groups are “effective at delivering services.” By the 2015 campaign, the Big Society was all but abandoned in Conservative

political messaging.²⁴ That it was the case brought up in so many interviews speaks to its salience at the time, of course, but also its rarity. When questioned about direct partisan appeals to Evangelicals specifically and religious groups more broadly, the Big Society was the single example that could be offered.

Second, just as there are no activists seeking a partisan relationship with Christians generally or Evangelicals particularly, there do not appear to be any attempts by congregations or religious groups to partner with a political party. Simply put, there is no coalition-building in either direction. To be sure, there are generic calls by congregations and groups (e.g., Evangelical Alliance) that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in public affairs. But that involvement is never formalized such that Evangelicals form a base from which a party can expect political returns in elections or in governing. There does not appear any appetite among Evangelical leaders to gain partisan political influence in this way. In comparison to the American model, there is no Jerry Falwell to bridge political elites and congregational rank-and-file. As several people told me, Evangelicals in the U.K. lack a clear leader to mobilize them to political action. Some prominent Evangelical names may emerge as possibilities—Nicky Gumbel, vicar at Holy Trinity Brompton in London, and John Sentamu, Archbishop of York—but neither these nor any other religious figure demonstrates an appetite for leadership on this front. Reasons for this reluctance may be found in precedent as well as the present. At least a couple interviewees noted the example set by John Stott, rector of All Souls Church in London for 50 years and viewed as the preeminent British Evangelical leader of his generation. In 1974, he organized a conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, bringing together Evangelicals worldwide to consider their place in Christianity and the world. The result is the Lausanne Covenant—a document that pledges Evangelical action in the public arena but that, by specific order of Stott, eschews an ideological or partisan platform. In fact, his statement on the place of Evangelicals in the public square is exemplary of the contemporary British Evangelical emphasis on social rather than political transformation:

[S]ocial activity not only follows evangelism as its consequence and aim, and precedes it as its bridge, but also accompanies it as its *partner*. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick.²⁵

Stott chose social action, whereas Falwell chose the political path of engagement. “but note their respective constituencies: Falwell was an independent church leader; he had great autonomy. Stott was checked by the Establishment and deferred to the political order.”²⁶ With Stott’s example before them, Evangelical clergy—in and out of the Church of England—have avoided political leadership. “Fringe groups speak to churches and send out appeals, but church leaders are silent. The prophetic role is now filled by fringe groups.”²⁷ And for clergy to speak on political issues would be to associate themselves and their congregation with fringe groups. It simply would, a member of Parliament told me, be “repugnant” for a minister to suggest to congregants how they ought to vote.²⁸ Moreover, Evangelical leaders could not deliver the votes of the rank-and-file if they wanted to. Political parties will go where the votes are, but party activists do not pursue Evangelicals not only because the numbers are slim but also because Evangelical clergy are both unwilling and unable to deliver the votes of their parishioners.

Thus, the third ingredient of Evangelical politicization is also lacking—a rank-and-file willing and able to be mobilized. One reason is that theology does not directly translate into political ideology among British Evangelicals; there is not, I was told, an “attempt to tie political issues to theological matters.”²⁹ Churches may have efforts that are political but never partisan. For example, a prominent Evangelical congregation regularly hosts a prayer breakfast for those working in politics, but those events bring together political officials of all stripes.³⁰ It was made apparent across my conversations that there is no clear ideological direction to British Evangelicalism. One Labour MP readily identified himself as an Evangelical upon introduction, then recounted what for him was a transformative moment: His youth minister reminded the group, “Tomorrow is Election Day; you know to vote Conservative, right?” As a young man, he quickly replied, “No!” and now speculates that his career in Labour is a response to that early experience.³¹ His experience is perhaps not too far afield from what one churchman reminded me: “The great Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marxism.”³² From the youth minister to the bishop, ideological diversity marks British Evangelicalism. Universally, there was a distaste for any mention of a Christian Right. As one demurred, “You can ascribe to Christian teaching on social issues, like marriage (i.e., to be in favor of the traditional position), without being Right-wing.”³³ The ideological muddle of Evangelicals, I think, reflects the ideological muddle of the British party system. “Even if the

Evangelical grassroots are ideologically pure, the parties are not! So who would they vote for? Which party would Evangelicals align with?”³⁴

Therefore, without the numbers to merit such effort, no political party in Britain seeks the monogamous relationship with Evangelicals that Republicans have found with Evangelicals in the U.S., in part at least because British Evangelicals lack the ideological uniformity to find a ready partisan home. And it is equally apparent that neither pastors nor laity show any appetite for partisanship or the political activities that require clear partisan stances. “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the same for us all. It unites us, whether we’re liberal or whatever,” said a representative from a large Evangelical congregation in London.³⁵ So it seems to elites that a Christian Right (or Left, for that matter) is not gaining traction in British politics: “We follow America in many ways, but I doubt we’re 30–40 years behind them.”³⁶

Beyond lacking the ingredients requisite of a religio-political movement, Soper (1994, 128) offers that hindrances endemic to the political system of Great Britain inhibit the political involvement of Evangelicals there: “Simply put, America’s federal political system and weak political parties provided more opportunities for effective participation by Evangelical pro-life interest groups than Britain’s unitary polity and strong political parties.” Lack of access to party leadership, parliamentary agendas, the executive branch, and civil servants, which are “insulated from pressure from all but a few well-established organizations,” have kept British Evangelicals on the political sidelines (Soper 1994). That argument echoed in my interviews 20 years later: “Religious voters don’t believe they can change anything. What’s different about the American context that allows groups to come together? Confidence in their ability to effect change. The U.K. political system is a closed shop, partially because of the legacy of the class system, partially because of the centralized media in London.”³⁷ Another noted that religious-based interest groups form, “but have no access.”³⁸

The political system may be “closed,” but it is not impermeable. For one, these analyses overlook the dealignment of identification with political parties at the individual level (Denver et al. 2012). The class divide, though observably strong, is no longer immutable, and as identification in the electorate weakens, it is a principle that party organizations weaken (Key 1964). With that, all of the political and party machinery has become more diverse. Party leadership has included avowed Evangelicals—Iain Duncan Smith, former Leader of the Conservative

Party, to name one—as have the other offices of government that Soper (1994) mentions.³⁹

Also, it would be a mistake to ignore that the Church of England is one of those “well-established organization[s]” to which Soper refers (1994, 128). It, too, was offered as a common and perhaps oversimplified explanation for the difference between American and British Evangelicals. What is banned by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is endemic to British social and political systems.⁴⁰ From Henry VIII’s divorce from Katharine of Aragon and the resulting breach with the Catholic Church in Rome, the British Reformation was a “parliamentary transaction” (Powicke 1941, 1). The church in England fell no longer under Rome’s jurisdiction, but by the Supreme Head Act (1534), the king was given the title to the church. As the monarch was empowered “to define doctrine and to punish heresy,” the church was now situated in the realm of state (Moorman 1980, 168). Its place would shift in the following century with changing monarchs and doctrines, but finally in 1661, under Charles II, “the Church of England was fully and exclusively restored” (Moorman 1980, 252). Today, the Church of England is not just a religious body but also a political body.

The difference an Established Church makes for religious life has been well-studied (Iannaccone et al. 1997). The development of American religion has followed a free market model, in which religious groups compete for adherents. This competition has made for vigorous beliefs and practices in the U.S. (Iannaccone 1991, 1994; North and Gwin 2004; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). Dis-establishment also means that no religious voice can claim ownership over the public square. As such, even as religious interests have competed for adherents, they also have competed for a place in civil society and in politics. Pluralistic democracy in America encourages interests to strive for access to and influence in the political system. Because their skills have been honed in the competition for believers in a society where religious affiliation is a choice, not a birth-right, American religious interests, especially Evangelicals with their fluid denominational structures, have adapted well to the contested realm of politics.

Establishment, with its placating rather than stimulative effects, is one reason why the U.K. is less religious overall than the U.S. (Lindsay 2008). Lindsay (2008) examines the different levels of religiosity in the U.S. and U.K. through the lens of race and ethnicity, and he attributes the lower levels of religious commitment in the U.K. to the religious

marketplace dominated by the Established Church that, for example, inhibits marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, from finding solidarity in religion. “The structure of the religious market in Great Britain has kept peripheral groups from turning to religion for support or encouragement in their resistance to the establishment” (Lindsay 2008, 655). The Establishment does not seem to dampen the religious fervor of Evangelicals (see Chap. 3), but it may affect their civic behaviors. As Turnbull and McFadyen (2012, 3, emphasis original) describe, “it is the Church *of* England and not simply a church that happens to be *in* England.” The Church “belongs to England and ... serves England in all its manifestations;” thus, the Church is part of the religious, social, and political life of the nation (Turnbull and McFadyen 2012, 3). Indeed, the bishops in the House of Lords serve as political representatives as much as, or perhaps at times more than, religious representatives. A bishop notes these 26 persons of the Lord’s Spiritual are regional figures, who “do not speak for the Church of England.”⁴¹ There is, he observes, “an ethos that the Church is not a membership organization but represents all to play a role in social cohesion.”⁴² “Because the Established Church is interwoven with politics and society, it is duty-bound to be an all-party church. That the head of state is the Supreme Governor of the Church makes it a politically-universal church.”⁴³ Thus, the bishops’ purpose is “not to pass laws that will favour Christians. It’s to argue for laws that are influenced by the Christian tradition, and are good for all” (Turnbull and McFadyen 2012, 53).

Establishment, in part, suppresses the politicization of Evangelicals in Britain. That 27% of British Evangelicals are located within the Established Church suggests that Evangelicals have a ready voice in the political process (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). That is not to say that Evangelicals are privileged among other religious or political interests seeking access in British politics. Rather, because the Church of England provides political representation, Evangelicals feel there is an existing place for religion in the public square and, unlike the American free market, there is no need to strive for political influence. “We leave it to the Church of England,” simply said a leader in one of London’s largest Evangelical congregations.⁴⁴ “The Bishop of London represents our views beautifully. He sits in the Lords and has a say. He’s more experienced, adept, and powerful than we are.”⁴⁵ Thus, Establishment has created a historical relationship between the church and state that mutes political demands by religious groups.

Still, others present a different take on the political role of the Church of England. For one, “the Church of England is the most disestablished in Europe in terms of financial support.”⁴⁶ This churchman claims that exclusive state support “would undermine the Church, which is compelled to create a voluntary culture to appeal to the public.”⁴⁷ To be precise, “the Church of England lacks a monopoly.”⁴⁸ That, of course, can cut both ways. Lacking a monopoly, the Church has been adrift in politics and within itself. In its power struggle, the battle once was between the liberals and the Anglo-Catholics, but “within the last generation, Evangelicals have won the battle for supremacy.”⁴⁹ But its internal divisions mean it cannot speak with confidence on any given issue.”⁵⁰ One researcher marvels at the partnerships among diverse religious groups in the U.S. working together toward a common goal. He doubts that such groups in the U.K. could put aside their differences to come together. The fractured nature of the independent churches, by design, prevents a coherent voice, but perhaps surprisingly, the Church of England also is unable to play the role of coordinator for collective action. “The Archbishop of Canterbury can’t provide leadership on moral issues because Anglican doctrine is now too varied. The past two decades have all been about compromise so that it isn’t leading in any direction. It’s hard to say what it stands for.”⁵¹ His frustration was echoed by a head of a Christian interest group who also is a member of the Church of England Synod. “The Church was invited to the seat of power and wasted the opportunity. Shame on it. Internal debate in the Church has prevented it from exercising a firm voice externally. The Church is confused doctrinally on these issues [Culture War issues], which means they can’t have a coherent statement to the public about the policy implications of its theology.”⁵²

In conclusion, elites universally agree that the politicization of Evangelicals is a dim prospect. To form grassroots, Evangelicals lack key ingredients—party stimulus, clerical leadership, and, above all, a willingness to be led into the political fray. Add to that the structure of the British political system, and, some argue, access is limited, even for the Established Church, which in theory could provide ready entree into the political system for Evangelicals. Indeed, the path to politics for Evangelicals seems clear considering the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby comes from the largest, and likely wealthiest, Evangelical Anglican congregation in London.⁵³ Political resources, though debatable, are nonetheless apparent. So to understand why British Evangelicals differ politically from their

American counterparts, it is necessary to think beyond institutional variables, to investigate the inclination—or lack thereof—of British Evangelicals to form a political movement. For that, let us consider British culture.

CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

I was somewhat surprised to hear a common refrain among elites that the American model of politicization would never work in the U.K. because it would be, simply, “un-British.”⁵⁴ According to both religious and political elites, cultural reasons do much better than institutional factors to explain the difference between American and British Evangelicals. “An explanation for the different behaviors that must be confronted is that the collective psyches of the U.S. and the U.K. are very different.”⁵⁵

British Evangelicals share the broader proclivity to blend in, and one aspect of this cultural sensitivity is a tendency to keep individual religion private. A prominent churchman described this quintessential British propensity toward calm: “There is a natural Anglo-Saxon phlegmatism, an innate diffidence in the expression of faith here. I have confidence in that complacency or phlegmatism to check the rise of a Christian Right.”⁵⁶ Part of that phlegmatic British personality is a sense of tolerance: “One aspect of British identity, although that is now in question, is tolerance... Do you tolerate the intolerant?”⁵⁷ There seems to be a time of questioning about the cultural response to certain religious groups, including Evangelicals and Muslims. Among my interviews there was often an equivalence between the two groups, suggesting both are somehow outsiders to this British identity, even if there remains divergent opinion about which represents the biggest antithesis to British culture. One figure describes Evangelicals as “lacking cultural sympathy” because most Britons “fear dogmatism, demonstrative behavior, and coercion.”⁵⁸ For this, she claims, “Evangelicals are not part of our national identity.”⁵⁹ She concludes that “most British are scared of Evangelicals—even more so than Muslims.”⁶⁰ Another researcher, however, concludes that “however scared seculars are of a Christian Right, they are more scared of political Islam.”⁶¹

But Evangelicals, it seems, have claimed this very British value of “tolerance” as their own guide to civic engagement. “British Evangelicals are simply more tolerant of multiple interpretations of doctrine, and policy that flows from it. There is an agreed upon set of principles—compassion, integrity, a heart for the poor—but different ways to meet those

goals. Tolerance is key.”⁶² This is to say that mainstream British culture may not view Evangelicals as part of it, but Evangelicals clearly view themselves as part of British culture. “British Evangelicals want to be relevant and want to be liked for doing good; hence, their rejection of American stridency.”⁶³

Along with tolerance, a stated British cultural trait is to keep religion personal. No matter their level of personal devotion, British politicians do not make their religious beliefs or practices a matter of public discourse, at least not without running a significant political risk (Crines and Theakston 2015). “We don’t do God,” Alistair Campbell, advisor and communications strategist to Prime Minister Tony Blair, preempted Blair before he could answer an interview question about his faith.⁶⁴ And Campbell went so far as to stop Blair from closing a major address to the nation during the Iraq War with, “God bless you.”⁶⁵ There is the fear among British political and Evangelical elites that they will be lampooned in the public and in media for such outbursts of piety.⁶⁶ Perhaps with good reason.

In the 2015 General Elections, British voters resoundingly expressed their disapproval of the coalition government that had narrowly formed 5 years earlier. Particularly, voters signaled their displeasure at one-half of the coalition, the Liberal Democrats. Public opinion of the party had fallen rather precipitously after it formed a government with the Conservative Party in 2010 and culminated with a forty-eight-seat loss in the House of Commons, swinging the party from 56 members of Parliament before the election to just eight afterward.⁶⁷ With the worst election results since 1970, Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, resigned as party leader. Quickly moving to frontrunner was Tim Farron, a member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale since 2005, who was duly elected leader of the Liberal Democrats on July 16, 2015. Tim Farron also is an Evangelical, and his election came with a baptism by fire in the media:

So let us talk about your leadership now and your convictions and your beliefs, particularly your religious beliefs. You said that you sought advice from God before you decided whether to put your name forward for the leadership. Would you seek advice from God when it came to making important policy decisions, such as whether to invade Iraq, or whatever it may be?⁶⁸

The interviewer, John Humphrys on BBC Radio 4 Today program, continued to press after Farron offered a self-deprecating reply about how shocking it is “that a Christian says his prayers sometimes.”⁶⁹ Humphrys replied:

Now, many people find that a rather chilling thought and what I’m trying to get from you is whether when you have a big decision, you find yourself in a position,...do you pray to God to give you the right, the wisdom that you need, and do you take your guidance from your religious conviction? That is a very important point.⁷⁰

On the same day, another interviewer, Cathy Newman on Channel 4 News, asked him about his views on homosexuality: “Personally though, do you think as a Christian that homosexual sex is a sin?”⁷¹ Farron replied, “First of all, somebody who is a Christian does not go, then, enforcing their views on other people.”⁷² He then demurred by saying, “To understand Christianity is to understand that we’re all sinners.”⁷³ In a third attempt, Newman asked, “But when the Bible says that ‘you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination,’ you don’t have any problem with that?...Those aren’t liberal values.”⁷⁴ Farron explained, “It’s a peculiar thing to say that somebody who happens to belong to a religious group, is a Christian, can’t be a liberal. Exactly the opposite. To be a member of a minority group of any kind is to understand in a very clear way why it is that every minority, every individual’s rights matter.”⁷⁵ The exchange lasted nearly 5 min with both acutely aware of the consequences of his answers: For Farron to reply according to the orthodoxy of his religion would be to violate the contemporary orthodoxy not only of his party but also of mainstream British culture.

These interviews and others like them—e.g., on the day after his election, *The Times* published an editorial “Illiberal Democrat,” which committed Farron to a literal reading of the Bible and for that, in part, described him as a “maverick”—illustrate clearly the widespread feeling among British religious and political elites that there is little room in public discourse for Christianity, especially Evangelical Christianity.⁷⁶ Evangelical elites fear being mocked or ridiculed in media for public expressions of faith, which, as the depictions of Farron suggest, are based on assumptions that are extremist, if not fundamentalist, and are portrayed as being utterly incompatible with contemporary Britain.

Even “religious leaders are criticized for making statements that are seen as too ‘looney Left’ or ‘stridently Right.’”⁷⁷ Such outbursts would evidence that “demonstrative behavior” that strikes fear into the heart of ordinary Britons and suggests a lack of tolerance for other beliefs and practices. A leader in a prominent Evangelical congregation in London told me, “[We] would never use the label ‘Evangelical.’ It’s far too divisive. We just try hard to be Christian, and we would go to some length to discourage others from using ‘Evangelical’ to label us.”⁷⁸ By all measures of creed, institutions, and social groups (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014), this congregation is well and truly Evangelical but recoils from the label because of its negative connotations. In fact, the church openly states that its mission is the “re-evangelisation of the nations.”⁷⁹ But while it carries out evangelization, it refrains from carrying the Evangelical label.

It is not only the label that this congregation shuns but also the policy position-taking and ideological claims common to American Evangelicals. “There are many in this church who have strong views about those issues [abortion, gay marriage], but we keep our eye on the main thing. The primary calling of the church is Alpha and, with it, the re-evangelization of the U.K. and the world.”⁸⁰ Church leaders seem to have settled that the divisiveness of these and other political issues would inhibit its fundamental mission of evangelization: “A disunited church is unattractive to people, so we can’t evangelize if there’s not unity.”⁸¹ More pointedly, they think that Evangelicals, traditionally defined by the American model of vigorous political attitudes and actions, undermine evangelism. “If we put our heads above the parapet, we will be labeled negatively. It’s the negatives we’re nervous about. The danger is being seen as negative, negative, negative.”⁸² And, of course, negativity does not net much in the way of capital to influence individuals, society, or politics.

Evangelicals, then, are a suspect group in British culture, and because of that, Evangelical churches and organizations have checked their behavior. One interest group representative notes, “The American model has had a chilling effect on most British Evangelicals.”⁸³ Even the flagship organization of British Evangelicals, the Evangelical Alliance is concerned about the negative impression its name might present: “There is a debate every few years to drop ‘Evangelical.’”⁸⁴ As a result, the EAUK is “trying to get smarter, not more aggressive because damage has been done by aggression.”⁸⁵

This cultural assessment is recognized even by those Evangelicals who would adopt a more active, if not aggressive, role in British politics. “Temperamentally, the British differ from the Americans, which explains the reluctance of British Evangelicals to get involved in politics. They like to ‘go along’ to ‘get along.’”⁸⁶ But she continues,

The attitude is one of “We’re British,” so we expect values and liberties like free speech. But that means we don’t notice a threat when it confronts us, when Christian voices are restricted. And among many religious groups, they refuse to see the threat, or they rationalize it away as not serious enough. Like, not being able to wear the cross to work isn’t a religious discrimination issue, it’s merely a uniform issue.⁸⁷

Thus, to focus on the cultural difference between American and British Evangelicals, there is no evidence of the “fear factor” among British Evangelicals that is present in the U.S. Campbell (2006, 104) notes that American Evangelicals “see themselves in tension with a secular society.” As a case of group conflict theory, when Evangelicals are confronted with their “others,” namely seculars, they perceive a threat to their group, and even national, identity (Blalock 1967; Hunter 1991). This threat perception, according to Campbell (2006), is one reason that American Evangelicals are likely to vote Republican. American Evangelicals fear the loss of cultural dominance whereby their traditional values once held sway over national identity (Crawford 1980; Lipset and Raab 1981; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014).

British Evangelicals, however, do not exhibit the “status politics” that mobilized their American counterparts (Crawford 1980; Lipset and Raab 1981; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). Rather, because of Establishment, the status of the church to state in the U.K. has been fixed, and British Evangelicals particularly never had to navigate the transition from majority to minority: “Evangelicals have always been a minority here, so they never felt supremacy was theirs to lose. They were always small, at times lively and influential, but never dominant.”⁸⁸ British Evangelicals similarly fear marginalization, but the fear is not grounded in loss of cultural supremacy. It is a fear of being marginalized from the mainstream.

These variants of fear lead Evangelicals in the U.K. and in the U.S. to act out in different ways. The diminishment of prevailing traditional values—indeed, the diminishment of a “de facto Protestant Establishment”—sent American Evangelicals grappling to retain, or

restore, their dominance in American politics and culture. American Evangelicals seem to take their public mission from I Peter 2:9 (KJV): “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” They pride themselves on being a “peculiar people” within American society and politics (Ernst 1977). They are not ashamed of public condemnation. Indeed, such criticism is a badge of honor for American Evangelicals and an indication of the secular drift they are called to battle. As a “voice of one calling in the wilderness” (John 1:23, KJV), American Evangelicals fulfill a prophetic role in American culture and politics. And prophets are always scorned. British Evangelicals, on the other hand, do not want to stand out from British culture. In combination, fears of being mocked, losing adherents, and violating norms of British culture cause British Evangelicals to abstain from organized political action.

SUMMARY

The reasons offered by religious and political elites for why British Evangelicals have not been politicized were surprisingly cohesive for conversations held in different times, places, and among leaders differently positioned. Explanations focus on institutional and cultural constraints. Party structure and the ideological placement of British political parties account for much, in that they preclude a ready home for an Evangelical agenda. But even that explanation presupposes an Evangelical agenda that does not exist. Rather, there is no cohesive political view of British Evangelicals because there is no clerical leadership translating Evangelical doctrine, even informally, into a political manifesto.

The Church of England, especially as it is home to the largest denominational bloc of British Evangelicals offers an access point to an otherwise closed political system, but even there, neither parties, nor clergy, nor religious interests seek to co-opt its resources for that purpose. That unwillingness to mobilize or be mobilized leads to consideration of concepts of identity—both national and Evangelical. It is clear there are hindrances to group politicization in British culture. Norms of restraint and tolerance restrict British Evangelicals to pursue social, not political transformation. Evangelical civic engagement is contextualized by national identity, by what makes for appropriate discourse and behavior in the public square, by what is appropriately “British.”

These, at least, are the views of elites, of those who are already connected to the political system. But research in the American context suggests that elite views may not reflect those of the rank-and-file (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Layman 2001). Might these elite perspectives mask an underlying and incipient grassroots politicization among British Evangelicals? Might the view from the top be distorted?

NOTES

1. Professor, personal interview, September 3, 2011, Euston Station, London, U.K. Names in this chapter have been deleted inasmuch as possible to protect the identities of the speakers.
2. "Religion in England and Wales 2011," Office for National Statistics, December 11, 2012, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulation-andcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11> (accessed February 18, 2017).
3. Ibid.
4. "Join us," Evangelical Alliance, <http://www.eauk.org/connect/join-us/> (accessed July 27, 2015).
5. Conservative MP, personal interview, September 7, 2011, Palace of Westminster, London, U.K.
6. In 1969, Republican President Richard Nixon had noted the presence of a "silent majority" to counter the Vietnam War protests of the time. His recognition of a hitherto "silent" group of white, working class, rural, religious suggested fertile ground for party leaders and activists. See Perlstein (2008) and Reeves (2001) for more on Nixon's use of the term.
7. Director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
8. Journalist and activist, personal interview, September 12, 2011, International headquarters of the Salvation Army, London, U.K.
9. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride's Church, London, U.K. And director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
10. Researcher for think tank, personal interviews, June 22, 2012, Starbucks, Birmingham, U.K.
11. In Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system, candidates run for a geographically defined constituency. Voters vote for only one candidate in the race, and the candidate to receive the most votes, wins the seat.
12. Because of the distribution of voters in the electorate, some parties, especially in two-party systems, find it advantageous to grow their coalition by co-opting smaller, special interests. The result is an "umbrella party"

- that covers a diverse gathering of demographics or interests. See Aldrich (1995) to answer “why parties?” (Aldrich 1995).
13. Research director of think tank, personal interview, September 15, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
 14. Cleric, personal interview, January 24, 2012, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, U.S.A.
 15. Journalist and activist, personal interview, September 12, 2011, International headquarters of the Salvation Army, London, U.K.
 16. Christians in Politics provides resources, including hustings posters and organizational videos for churches and religious interests groups (“Resources,” Christians in Politics, <http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk> (accessed February 18, 2017).
 17. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride’s Church, London, U.K.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Polly Curtis, “Downing Street forces U-turn on Nadine Dorries abortion proposals,” *The Guardian*, August 31, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/31/downing-street-urn-aborton-proposals> (accessed July 31, 2015) (Curtis 2011)
 21. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride’s Church, London, U.K.
 22. Research director of think tank, personal interview, September 15, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
 23. EAUK representative, personal interview, September 27, 2011, Pret A Manger Café Victoria Station, London, U.K.
 24. Caroline Slocock, “What Happened to David Cameron’s ‘Big Society?’” *Huffington Post*, January 20, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/caroline-slocock/big-society_b_6505902.html (accessed August 15, 2015) (Slocock 2015).
 25. “Evangelicalism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment,” Drafting Committee of the International Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, 1982, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/79-lop-21.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).
 26. Journalist and activist, personal interview, September 12, 2011, International headquarters of the Salvation Army, London, U.K.
 27. EAUK representative, personal interview, June 18, 2012, Portcullis House, London, U.K.
 28. Labour MP, personal interview, September 5, 2011, Portcullis House, London, U.K.
 29. EAUK representative, personal interview, September 27, 2011, Pret A Manger Café Victoria Station, London, U.K.

30. "Faith & Politics," Holy Trinity Brompton, <http://www.htb.org.uk/faihandwork/faith-politics> (accessed May 19, 2014).
31. Labour MP, personal interview, September 5, 2011, Portcullis House, London, U.K.
32. Cleric, personal interview, January 24, 2012, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, U.S.A.
33. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride's Church, London, U.K.
34. Director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
35. Communications director, personal interview, June 10, 2012, Holy Trinity Brompton, London, U.K.
36. Conservative MP, personal interview, September 7, 2011, Palace of Westminster, London, U.K.
37. Researcher for think tank, personal interviews, September 22, 2011, National Liberal Club, London, U.K.
38. Director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
39. Participants in focus groups included members of the civil service, local councils, and party organizations.
40. "Congress shall make no law...respecting an establishment of religion." (U.S. Const., amend. I)
41. Cleric, personal interview, January 24, 2012, The University of the South, Sewanee, TN.
42. Ibid.
43. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride's Church, London, U.K.
44. Communications director, personal interview, June 10, 2012, Holy Trinity Brompton, London, U.K.
45. Ibid.
46. Cleric, personal interview, January 24, 2012, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, U.S.A.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Professor, personal interview, September 3, 2011, Euston Station, London, U.K.
50. Program director for think tank, personal interview, June 20, 2012, group headquarters, London, U.K.
51. Researcher for think tank, personal interviews, September 22, 2011, National Liberal Club, London, U.K.
52. Director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.

53. Andrew, Brown, "Justin Welby's ascension shines light on powerful evangelical church," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/20/justin-welby-powerful-evangelical-church> (accessed July 31, 2015) (Brown 2013).
54. Conservative MP, personal interview, September 7, 2011, Palace of Westminster, London, U.K.
55. Journalist and activist, personal interview, September 12, 2011, International headquarters of the Salvation Army, London, U.K.
56. Journalist and cleric, personal interview, September 8, 2011, St. Bride's Church, London, U.K.
57. Journalist and activist, personal interview, September 12, 2011, International headquarters of the Salvation Army, London, U.K.
58. Professor, personal interview, September 3, 2011, Euston Station, London, U.K.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Research director of think tank, personal interview, September 15, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
62. Conservative MP, personal interview, September 7, 2011, Palace of Westminster, London, U.K.
63. EAUk representative, personal interview, September 27, 2011, Pret A Manger Café Victoria Station, London, U.K.
64. Colin Brown, "Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: 'We don't do God,'" *The Telegraph*, May 4, 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1429109/Campbell-interrupted-Blair-as-he-spoke-of-his-faith-We-dont-do-God.html> (accessed August 29, 2015) (Brown 2003).
65. Ibid.
66. Lecturer, personal interview, September 29, 2011, Paul Café Covent Garden, London, U.K.
67. At the start of coalition government, voting intentions for the Liberal Democrats stood about 23% but by the month of the 2015 general election, those voters intending to vote for the party numbered between 8 and 11% ("Voting Intention," U.K. Polling Report, <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/voting-intention-2>, accessed July 29, 2015).
68. Isabel Hardman, "Yes, we should be suspicious of Tim Farron's Christian worldview," *The Spectator* July 17, 2015 <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2015/07/yes-we-should-be-suspicious-of-tim-farrons-christian-worldview/> (accessed July 31, 2015) (Hardman 2015).
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. "Tim Farron asked three times if gay sex is a sin," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNA3-YntZk4> (accessed July 29, 2015).

72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. "Illiberal Democrat," *The Times*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article4500356.ece> (accessed August 15, 2015).
77. Lecturer, personal interview, September 29, 2011, Paul Café Covent Garden, London, U.K.
78. Communications director, personal interview, June 10, 2012, Holy Trinity Brompton, London, U.K.
79. "Welcome from the Vicar," Holy Trinity Brompton, <http://www.htb.org.uk/about-htb> (accessed May 19, 2014).
80. Communications director, personal interview, June 10, 2012, Holy Trinity Brompton, London, U.K.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. EAUk representative, personal interview, September 27, 2011, Pret A Manger Café Victoria Station, London, U.K.
84. EAUk representative, personal interview, June 18, 2012, Portcullis House, London, U.K.
85. Ibid.
86. Director of Christian interest group, personal interview, September 30, 2011, group headquarters, London, U.K.
87. Ibid.
88. Labour MP, personal interview, September 5, 2011, Portcullis House, London, U.K.

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