

Welby's political interventions seen as inappropriate, poll finds

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A plurality of the public thinks it is inappropriate for the archbishop of Canterbury to express opinions on political issues, a poll has found.

According to a YouGov survey reported by [The Times](#), 44% of British people think it is "not appropriate" for the archbishop to "express opinions on political issues". Thirty-five per cent think doing so is appropriate, while 21% do not know.

The current archbishop, Justin Welby, made a series of political pronouncements during 2018 on subjects including welfare policy, the tax system, insecurity for workers and inequality caused by a "broken" economic model.

In a [letter](#) to *The Times* National Secular Society chief executive Stephen Evans said the poll results "should come as no surprise".

"Justin Welby is entitled to his views, but it is the privileged platform to promote them that most people will object to.

"Keeping religion and politics separate has promoted greater freedom and fairness for citizens wherever secularist principles have been put into practice. Religion should be free to compete in the marketplace of ideas but should be kept well away from the business of legislating."

The NSS campaigns for the separation of religion and politics, including through the [disestablishment](#) of the Church of England. The NSS also calls for the [removal](#) of the automatic right to sit in the House of Lords afforded to 26 C of E bishops.

In September Welby faced accusations of hypocrisy over his criticism of the tech giant Amazon, as it [emerged](#) that the Church of England held shares in the firm and had not attended its AGMs. It was also revealed that the church used zero hours contracts, which Welby [described](#) as "the reincarnation of an ancient evil".

The public largely agreed with Welby's sentiments on these subjects but still objected to his interventions. Fifty-three per cent agreed with him that universal credit left "too many people worse off".

Sixty-six per cent agreed that the current economic model was "broken" and had left "a widening gulf between rich and poor". Fifty-nine per cent agreed with his criticism of the tax system for allowing online companies to pay "almost nothing".

Thirty-nine per cent agreed with his criticism of zero-hours contracts, with 31% disagreeing.

Mr Evans said these figures were "a reminder that many people objected to the mix of religion and politics on principle, rather than because they dislike religious leaders' particular messages".

In response to the poll findings Lambeth Palace, the church's headquarters, told *The Times*: "The

archbishop has been asked by some to stay out of politics. His response is that is not what Jesus did."

On New Year's Day the BBC [broadcast](#) a new year's message from Welby on BBC One.

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