

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Weddings in church

Only 11% of Britons now claim to attend religious services at least monthly (the conventional definition of ‘regularly’ these days), and 65% admit they never or practically never attend. Nevertheless, a slight majority (52%) still considers it is acceptable to have a church wedding even if you are not a regular churchgoer or not religious, against 31% who deem it unacceptable and 17% who do not know what to think. Discounting those in a civil partnership (too few for the results to be meaningful), the demographic sub-group least likely to judge a church wedding acceptable in these circumstances are people living as married (44%), with divorced persons (37%) most likely to consider it inappropriate. The questions were asked by YouGov as part of an online survey of 1,692 adults on 8-9 August 2016 on the subject of wedding customs, and full data tables are available via the link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/10/majority-wedding-traditions-are-still-popular-dont/>

In practice, of course, only a minority of individuals marrying now opt for a religious ceremony. In England and Wales in 2013, the last year reported, the proportion was 28%, the lowest figure since the commencement of civil registration in the early Victorian era.

Religious conversion

The overwhelming majority of Britons (85%) would not be prepared to convert to a religion, if asked to do so by a long-term romantic partner, the proportion consistently exceeding four-fifths in all demographic sub-groups. This was a far greater number than expressed unwillingness to agree to any of a partner’s 11 other requests, only opposition to becoming a vegan (76%) and cutting off contact with a friend (71%) coming close. Just over one-tenth (11%) were unsure how they would respond to being asked by their partner to convert to a religion, while 5% said they had already done so or would be prepared to do so, peaking at 7% of adults aged 18-24 years. The survey was conducted by YouGov among an online sample of 1,652 persons on 28-29 July 2016, and the data table can be accessed via a link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/01/id-do-anything-love-i-wont-do/>

Economic migrants

Religion is not a factor which Britons deem important when considering whether an economic migrant should be allowed into the UK, according to a poll by YouGov on 24-25 August 2016, for which 1,668 adults were interviewed online. In fact, it came bottom of a list of 14 characteristics, just 31% saying the religion of economic migrants was significant and 59% not. The demographic sub-groups most likely to think religion was an issue to be taken into account were people who had voted for the UK to leave the European Union in the referendum

on 23 June (44%), over-65s (45%), and UKIP voters (60%). Overall, Britons attached greatest weight as economic immigration criteria to having a criminal record, proficiency in English, level of education, and possession of skills in an area where the UK has a skills shortage. The data tables can be accessed via a link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/26/one-five-say-uk-should-not-admit-single-migrant-tu/>

Jews and DIY

Do-it-yourself (DIY) is not normally something associated with British Jews. Indeed, they have a bit of a reputation within their community for not doing it, but 47% of them (and 58% of men) claimed to have engaged in some form of DIY during the past month, in a survey commissioned by World Jewish Relief. One-third had even carried out some DIY during the past week, although they seem to be fighting a losing battle since 53% still have DIY jobs outstanding at home. Changing a light bulb and hanging pictures were the commonest tasks undertaken, but painting, changing fuses, assembling furniture, and fixing toilets also featured prominently. Two-fifths of Jews had never attempted any DIY or had not done so during the past year, lack of knowledge, time, and motivation being the main reasons. The sample of 1,002 self-identifying British Jews were members of Suration's Jewish panel and were interviewed, mostly by telephone, on 27-29 June 2016 (although the results have only just been released). Data tables can be found at:

<http://suration.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Final-WJR-Poll-270616SPRCCH-1c0d0h2-DIY.pdf>

Islamic State (1)

A majority of Britons (57%) approves of the use of military force to get rid of Islamic State (IS), according to a YouGov/Eurotrack poll on 21-22 July 2016 for which 1,673 adults were interviewed online. Men (65%), over-60s (66%), Conservatives (69%), and UKIP supporters (74%) were most in favour. A further 13% thought only non-violent means should be used to eliminate IS, while 11% opted to accept the existence of IS but to try to isolate it, the remaining 19% being don't know or giving other answers. A plurality (43%) considered the British government should be doing more to combat Islamic extremism, against 32% who judged it was doing as much as it reasonably could, 10 points up on the figure in December 2010. The data table can be accessed via a link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/04/terrorist-attack-britain-expected-84-people/>

Islamic State (2)

Subsequent to the preceding poll, footage emerged of members of the SAS (British special forces) fighting IS in Syria. In one of its instant app-based surveys, on 10 August 2016, YouGov ascertained that 55% of the British public endorsed the deployment of the SAS in Syria without a vote in Parliament, 30% disapproving and 15% being unsure. However, this sample of Britons was split on the commitment of additional British ground troops in Syria to fight IS, 39% being in favour, 38% against, and 22% undecided. These topline findings are reported at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/10/sas-fighting-isis-british-troops-syria-hinkley-poi/>

Islamic State (3)

In a further release of data from its Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey, the Pew Research Center revealed that 71% of the 1,460 Britons interviewed supported the US-led military campaign against IS in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, when it came to a broader strategy to defeat terrorism around the world, 57% feared that relying too much on military force would create hatred leading to more terrorism, compared with 34% thinking overwhelming military force is the best way to defeat terrorism. Unsurprisingly, the sub-group endorsing the use of overwhelming military force against terrorists in general was also disproportionately more likely (82%) to back the campaign against IS. Pew's press statement is at:

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/22/europeans-back-anti-isis-campaign-but-have-doubts-about-use-of-force-in-fighting-terror/ft_16-08-17_terrorismglobal_isisfight/

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Faith schools

Faith schools in general, and non-Christian and Catholic schools in particular, have an unusually low proportion of poor pupils in England compared to what would be expected from their catchment areas. The comparison was made between the number of children eligible for free school meals and levels of economic child deprivation in the area, both official statistics. These data have been extensively mined in the recent past by key stakeholders in the debate about faith schools, either to defend their record of social inclusion (especially on the part of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales) or to criticize them for exacerbating inequalities. This latest research was conducted by education data analysis organization SchoolDash and published in its blog (with faith school statistics in figures 4, 8, and 11) at:

[https://www.schooldash.com/blog.html#20160802](https://www schooldash.com/blog.html#20160802)

Church leaders and football

August is traditionally the 'silly season' for the media, when 'real' news is hard to find, and Christian media organization Premier is apparently no exception. According to a report in the *Church of England Newspaper* for 19 August 2016 (p. 3), it has surveyed 200 Christian leaders in the UK and ascertained that one in seven admit to skipping a church service in order to watch their football team play and one in five to praying for it to win. Respondents were also asked which Premier League team they supported, Arsenal, Liverpool, and Manchester United topping the list, in that order.

Anglican church growth

It is the number of clergy in a benefice, rather than the number of churches, which is associated with the likelihood of church growth or decline in the Church of England (measured in terms of attendance), according to an unpublished report by Fiona Tweedie and summarized in the *Church Times* for 5 August 2016 (p. 6) at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/5-august/news/uk/church-growth-is-linked-to-more-clergy>

Jewish statistics

The *Jewish Chronicle* has become the second UK religious newspaper to launch a regular column focusing on religious statistics. Jonathan Boyd, Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and a previous occasional contributor to the newspaper, launched his monthly 'View from the Data' in the issue of 10 June 2016 with a piece on defining Jewish identity. This has been followed by articles on JPR's report on intermarriage and Jews (8 July 2016) and Pew Research Center's measurement of anti-Semitic attitudes in Britain since 2004 (5 August 2016). The latter, entitled 'We May Be Better Off in the UK', noted that 'the vast majority of Brits actually view Jews in an overwhelmingly favourable light', with Britain shown by Pew to be 'one of the least antisemitic societies in the world'. This most recent column can be found at:

<http://www.thejc.com/node/161537>

The first religious newspaper to publish a regular column on religious statistics was the *Church of England Newspaper*, to which Peter Brierley has been contributing on a monthly basis for several years.

Anti-Semitic incidents

The Community Security Trust's latest report on anti-Semitic incidents in the UK covers the period January-June 2016, during which 557 were logged, a rise of 11% over the equivalent six months in 2015 and the second highest total for the first half of any year since the Trust began to collect statistics. Three-fifths of incidents occurred in April-June when anti-Semitism (particularly in relation to the Labour Party) and racism and extremism more generally were to the foreground in public debate and the media. However, there was no spike immediately following the Brexit vote in the European Union referendum of 23 June, as was seen with other forms of hate crime. Four-fifths of incidents were recorded in the main Jewish centres of Greater London and Greater Manchester, although the number in the latter area actually fell. The report is available at:

https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/4/f/Incidents_Report_-_Jan-June_2016.pdf

Scottish Jewry

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities has published a 34-page report on the results of a small-scale investigation into Scottish Jewry which it conducted in 2015, with financial assistance from the Scottish Government: Fiona Frank, Ephraim Borowski, and Leah Granat, *What's Changed about Being Jewish in Scotland – 2015 Project Findings*. The questionnaire (reproduced in appendix 2) was completed by a self-selecting and demographically rather skewed sample of 119 Jews in Scotland, 46 of whom had also responded to a similar survey in 2012. Additionally, 195 people attended focus groups in connection with the study. The principal impression to emerge from the survey was that living in Scotland has become a more negative experience for many Jews, in terms of a sense of insecurity and alienation born of societal anti-Semitism largely rooted in the Middle East situation (and specifically the conflict in Gaza in the summer of 2014). The report can be read at:

<http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis2.pdf>

Jews and the Labour Party

After conducting a ballot of its members, in which 59% voted, the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) has nominated Owen Smith for leader of the Labour Party in the current Labour leadership election. Smith secured a resounding 92% of JLM votes against just 4% for Jeremy Corbyn, the Party's present leader, a further 4% making no nomination. This result is perhaps unsurprising, given that Corbyn has not entirely succeeded in dissociating either the Party or himself from accusations of condoning anti-Semitism. The JLM, which has been affiliated to the Labour Party since 1920, reported the ballot on its website at:

<http://www.jlm.org.uk/labourleadership>

Islamophobic tweets

Demos has recently published a report on *Islamophobia on Twitter, March to July 2016*, written by Carl Miller, Josh Smith, and Jack Dale from the think-tank's Centre for the Analysis of Social Media. It focuses especially on the 215,000 tweets sent in English and from around the world in July 2016, and which were identified (from automated content analysis) as being of an Islamophobic nature. In addition to analysis of the global dataset, the report contains a section on Islamophobic tweets sent from the UK during the months of May, June, and July 2016, the daily average being 468 in July compared with 380 in May and 351 in June. There was a particularly large spike in Islamophobic tweets in the UK between 11 and 17 July, coinciding with the Islamist atrocity in Nice and the attempted military coup in Turkey. The report, which also includes a reasonably full description of methodology, can be found at:

http://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Islamophobia-on-Twitter_-March-to-July-2016-.pdf

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Employment opportunities for Muslims

Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK, the second report for Session 2016-17 of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, is partially based on quantitative evidence, abstracted from official and other sources. It shows that Muslims still suffer the greatest economic disadvantage of any group in society. For example, according to the Department for Work and Pensions, Muslim unemployment rates for persons aged 16-64 in 2015 were more than twice the national average (13% compared to 5%), while 41% of Muslims were economically inactive against 22% of the whole population in this age range. The disadvantage was greater still for female Muslims, 58% of whom were economically inactive, with 65% of economically inactive Muslims being women, albeit there has been some improvement since 2011. More generally, the Committee highlighted a lack of detailed data and research on faith and race discrimination and disadvantage, urging the Government to take steps to address this deficiency. The report, including links to the published evidence, is available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/89/89.pdf>

Ritual slaughter of animals

The Times of 13 August 2016 reported that the new monthly survey of abattoirs to be undertaken by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) would not routinely record the number of animals killed without being stunned first. This legal exemption from pre-stunning is granted to meet the ritual slaughter requirements of Jews and Muslims, to the consternation of the British Veterinary Association (BVA), which has long campaigned to end it on animal welfare grounds. The BVA had been hoping that the FSA would regularly report on animals killed in this way but the FSA claimed this would impose too onerous an information-gathering burden on abattoirs. Instead, the FSA proposes to collect statistics on religious slaughter periodically but has not set a date for doing so next (the last exercise being in 2013).

In a letter to *The Times* published on 16 August 2016, the FSA's chairman (Heather Hancock) sought to clarify its position. She wrote: 'Our new system for gathering animal welfare data will capture information on a more continuous basis than the former animal welfare survey. This data will show the number of establishments in England and Wales using non-stun slaughter or a combination of stun and non-stun slaughter. This routine data will be regularly supplemented with additional information on the numbers of animals that are slaughtered by these methods.' According to a report in the newspaper on the same day, the FSA's clarification has been welcomed by the BVA, which believes that more animals are killed without being stunned than is strictly necessary to meet the needs of Jews and Muslims.

Religious Studies GCE A Levels

There were 27,032 entries for GCE A Level Religious Studies (RS) in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in the June 2016 examinations, according to the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). This represented an increase of 4.9% on the 2015 total compared with a decrease of 1.7% for all subjects. The number of RS entries has risen steadily since the Millennium, there being only 9,532 in 2001. Seven in ten candidates for RS in 2016 were female, 15 points more than the mean for all subjects. The proportion of RS examinees securing a pass at A* to C grade was 80%, against 78% for all subjects, although there were fewer than average RS successes at A*. Additionally, there were 38,493 entries for GCE AS Level RS, 3.9% less than in 2015, AS Levels generally losing ground. Full tables for both A and AS Level, showing breaks by gender and grade within home nation, are available at:

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2016/a-as-and-aea-results>

Religious Studies GCSE O Levels

The results for GCSE O Level RS were released by the JCQ the week after the A Level data were published. There were 296,010 entries for the full course GCSE in RS in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in June 2016, an increase of 0.1% on 2015 compared with a decrease of 0.7% in entries for all subjects. A much smaller proportion of candidates for GCSE O Level RS were female (54%) than for GCE A Level RS. The cumulative number obtaining a pass between A* and C for the full course GCSE O Level RS was 72%, five points more than the average across all subjects. The short course in GCSE O Level RS (equivalent to half a GCSE) continued its steep decline, with 17% fewer candidates in June 2016 than in June 2015, in line with the progressive disappearance of short courses generally. Full tables are available at:

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/2016>

Scottish marriages

Details of the mode of solemnization of marriages in Scotland in 2015 are contained in *Vital Events Reference Tables*, which has been published recently. Of the 29,691 marriages, 14% were celebrated in the Church of Scotland, 5% in the Roman Catholic Church, and 18% in other places of worship, while 52% were civil and 11% humanist weddings. Until 1968 the majority of Scottish marriages were solemnized in the Church of Scotland. Further information, including some historical trend data, can be found at:

<http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/general-publications/vital-events-reference-tables/2015>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

British Social Attitudes Survey

The long-term decline in religious affiliation may have momentarily bottomed out, according to the latest findings from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey, released by NatCen. Of the 4,328 adult Britons interviewed between 4 July and 2 November 2015, 43% professed to be Christian (17% Anglican, 9% Catholic, and 17% other Christian), 8% non-Christian, and 48% to have no religion. The totals for Christians and nones were, respectively, one point up and one point down on the 2014 figures, the historic BSA peak for no religion being 51% in 2009. However, the proportion of nones in 2015 was much higher (62%) among the under-25s and 58% for those aged 25-34. It will be recalled that BSA uses a 'belonging' form of question which produces significantly lower levels of religious affiliation than other formulations, for example the question asked in the official census of population. NatCen's press release, including topline for religious affiliation back to 1983, is available at:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2016/august/british-social-attitudes-religious-decline-comes-to-a-halt/>

Prior to NatCen's release, the results had been previewed in the *Sunday Telegraph*, which optimistically entitled the report in its print edition 'Christian Faith on Rise despite "Age Time Bomb"'. Notwithstanding, comments which the newspaper had sought from sociologists of religion Linda Woodhead and Abby Day made it clear that the long-term trajectory was still downward. As Day explained, the current plateau is 'the pause at the edge of the cliff', with decline bound to resume as older and more religious generations die off. The longer, online version of the *Sunday Telegraph's* article can be found at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/07/decline-of-religion-in-britain-comes-to-a-halt--major-study-sugg/>

After the NatCen release, the story was inevitably widely reported as a positive development in the Christian print and online media. It was even the lead article on the front page of the *Church of England Newspaper* for 12 August 2016 and the subject of a lengthy editorial in the *Methodist Recorder* for 19 August 2016 (p. 6). However, the reporting was generally reasonably balanced, sticking close to the NatCen script. The *Church Times* (12 August 2016, p. 3), for example, had the foresight to speak to Linda Woodhead, who highlighted that the three-year moving averages indicated the trend was clearly toward diminished religious

affiliation. But the Roman Catholic weekly *The Tablet* (13 August 2016, p. 24) could not resist pointing out that the 1% increase in professing Christians was due to the 1% rise in self-identifying Catholics.

Religious prejudice and discrimination

The incidence of religious prejudice and its relationship to unlawful discrimination and hate crime are explored in chapter 6 (pp. 71-82) of Dominic Abrams, Hannah Swift, and Lynsey Mahmood, *Prejudice and Unlawful Behaviour: Exploring Levers for Change* (Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report 101, ISBN 978-1-84206-677-5). The report, by a team from the Centre for the Study of Group Process at the University of Kent, is based on a review of academic and grey literature published in Britain between 2005 and 2015, and covers both general religious prejudice and particular manifestations (anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and sectarianism in Scotland). It is available to download from:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-101-prejudice-and-unlawful-behaviour.pdf>

Secularization narratives

Although not especially statistical in content, a recent article by Jeremy Morris sheds light on the attraction of secularization narratives to Anglican commentators in the 1950s and 1960s: 'Enemy Within? The Appeal of the Discipline of Sociology to Religious Professionals in Post-War Britain', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, Vol. 9, Nos 2-3, 2016, pp. 177-200. It does not mention the deployment of empirical sociology by other denominations in Britain, notably in the Roman Catholic Church (through the Newman Demographic Survey) and the Methodist Church. The article, which forms part of a special issue on pastoral sociology in Western Europe from 1940 to 1970, can be accessed at:

<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/18748929-00902004>

NEW DATASETS AT UK DATA SERVICE

SN 5050: English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) is conducted by NatCen Social Research on behalf of a consortium of academic bodies and government departments. Launched in 2002, ELSA investigates ageing and quality of life issues among a panel (periodically refreshed) of adults aged 50 and over living in private households in England. The latest (25th) edition of the dataset, released in August 2016, comprises waves 0-7 of the survey. For wave 7, undertaken between June 2014 and May 2015, data were collected on 9,670 individuals by means of face-to-face interview, self-completion questionnaire, and clinical and physical measurements. The self-completion questionnaire for wave 7 featured various questions about religion, covering religious affiliation, membership of church or other religious groups, activity in organized religion, attendance at religious services within the past year, importance of religious faith, importance of religion in daily life, prayer or meditation, and religion as a source of meaning and purpose in life. The catalogue description for the dataset is at:

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=5050&type=Data%20catalogue>

SN 8037: Youth Social Action Survey, 2015

The Youth Social Action Survey is sponsored by the Cabinet Office and aims to determine the proportion of young people involved in social action (to help others or the environment) in the UK. It is planned to repeat the study each year for 2014-20. Fieldwork for this second wave was conducted by Ipsos MORI on 2-19 September 2015 by means of face-to-face interviews with 2,021 10-20 year-olds. The questionnaire included one item about religious affiliation using a 'belonging' form of wording. Topline analysis revealed that young people professing some religion were more likely to have participated in meaningful social action during the previous twelve months than those without (45% versus 39%). The catalogue description for the dataset is at:

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8037&type=Data%20catalogue>