

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 21 – June 2017

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## OPINION POLLS

### Religion and the general election

The actual political alignment of the principal religious groups at the general election held on 8 June 2017 was recorded by Lord Ashcroft in a poll of 14,384 electors who had voted by post or in person. Fieldwork was conducted in Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) on 6-9 June through a combination of telephone and online interviews. As the table below indicates, Christians were disproportionately likely to support the Conservatives, largely a function of the older age profile of Christians, while non-Christians and religious nones were inclined to favour Labour. The pro-Labour stance of non-Christians, which was far greater than in 2015, tracked the traditional pro-Labour allegiance of black and minority ethnic communities, albeit it was ten points less than the 2017 BME figure (as a consequence of the strongly pro-Conservative leanings of Jews). The pro-Labour stance of nones reflected their relative youth and Labour's success in 2017 in reaching out to young people generally. The distribution of all votes is naturally affected by the collapse in UKIP support since 2015. A substantial minority of all the faith groups indicated that they had made up their minds about how to vote within a week of polling day: 33% of Christians, 38% of non-Christians, and 34% of nones. Data tables are available at:

<http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GE-post-vote-poll-Full-tables.pdf>

% down	All voters	Christians	Non-Christians	Religious Nones
<i>2017 general election</i>				
Conservative	41.3	51.5	27.7	29.4
Labour	39.1	31.2	56.8	47.6
Liberal Democrat	9.2	8.5	8.6	10.2
UKIP	2.9	3.1	1.2	2.9
Another party	7.4	5.7	5.6	9.9
<i>2015 general election (recalled vote)</i>				
Conservative	37.0	44.9	30.2	26.8
Labour	30.6	26.3	42.6	35.0
Liberal Democrat	9.8	8.4	10.0	11.6
UKIP	12.3	13.8	7.6	11.0
Another party	10.4	6.7	9.7	15.6

Meanwhile, two *pre-election* polls by Opinium Research had investigated the voting intentions and attitudes to political issues of members of the UK's black and ethnic minorities. Online fieldwork was conducted between 2 and 7 May and between 30 May and 1 June with, respectively, 511 and 607 respondents. The answers to all questions were disaggregated by religious affiliation, with the sub-samples of Christians (29% averaged across the two surveys),

Muslims (28%), and religious nones (28%) being sufficiently large to be statistically robust. Full data tables can be accessed via the links in the blog post at:

<http://opinium.co.uk/political-polling-ethnic-minorities-30th-may-2017/>

### Personal religious beliefs of politicians

One casualty of the 2017 general election was Tim Farron. Although re-elected to Parliament, he stood down as leader of the Liberal Democrats immediately afterwards, citing the difficulty of reconciling his Christian beliefs with serving as a political leader, his views on whether or not homosexuality is a sin having become a focus of the initial stages of the election campaign. Asked more generically, in an online poll by YouGov on 15 June 2017, about politicians who found their party's ideology at odds with their personal religious views, 46% of the 5,526 Britons questioned felt that politicians should stay true to their religious convictions compared with 20% wanting them to privilege the party ideology (the remaining 34% were undecided). Conservatives (59%) and over-65s (62%) particularly wanted politicians to put their religion first, whereas 18-24s (26%) and Liberal Democrats (27%) placed above-average emphasis on fidelity to party ideology. Results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/38a3a410-51ad-11e7-81f3-2ab0a50a8b9c>

### Forces for good

Lord Ashcroft's poll covered a range of other political issues, the results for which were disaggregated by the three principal religious groups. The following table shows the proportion of each ranking, on a scale running from 0 to 10, certain trends as a force for ill (0-4), a mixed blessing (5), or a force for good (6-10). The higher the mean score, the more positive the group was towards the trend concerned. Reflecting their relatively elderly profile, Christians emerged as the community with the least progressive views, their conservatism exemplified in their disproportionate enthusiasm for capitalism. The internet was seen as the most positive development by all groups, albeit nones were also especially attracted to the green movement.

Mean scores	All voters	Christians	Non-Christians	Religious Nones
Multiculturalism	5.42	4.92	6.51	5.93
Social liberalism	5.66	5.16	6.29	6.27
Feminism	6.37	6.01	6.39	6.87
Green movement	6.40	5.90	6.87	7.00
Globalization	5.46	5.41	5.82	5.47
Internet	7.03	6.92	7.22	7.17
Capitalism	5.35	5.61	5.21	5.02
Immigration	4.97	4.51	5.88	5.45

### Religious affiliation

The most recent data on religious affiliation derive from an aggregate of five online Populus polls during May 2017 and the online component of Lord Ashcroft's post-vote general election survey (noted above). The question was: 'to which of the following religious groups do you consider yourself to be a member?' Results are tabulated below.

	%
Christian	52.3
Muslim	2.1
Hindu	0.6
Jew	0.7
Sikh	0.2
Buddhist	0.6
Other non-Christian	1.6
No religion	40.2
Prefer not to say	1.7
N =	23,477

## Humanism

Marking its relaunch as Humanists UK, the British Humanist Association (BHA) has recently released the second tranche of findings from a survey it commissioned last year, for which 4,085 Britons aged 18 and over were interviewed online by YouGov on 28-29 July 2016. They revealed that 44% professed to belong to no religion, one-half being cradle nones and one-third raised as Anglicans. One-third of the whole sample met the BHA's definition of being a humanist, as reflected in their selection of the humanist answer to three statement options (these answers were: 'science and evidence provide the best way to understand the universe'; 'what is right and wrong depends on the effects on people and the consequences for society and the world'; and 'our empathy and compassion give an understanding of what is right and wrong'). The proportion meeting the definition varied significantly by age, from 46% of under-25s falling to 23% of over-55s. Of those fulfilling the criteria, 72% self-identified as humanists, 8% did not, with 19% uncertain. Interestingly, one-third of the sub-sample holding humanist beliefs actually claimed to belong to some religion, leading the BHA to conclude that 22% of the population are real humanists in (a) being non-religious and (b) subscribing to humanist beliefs. Full data tables can be accessed via the link in the press release at:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2017/06/15/new-poll-shows-one-in-five-are-humanists-and-a-third-hold-humanist-beliefs/>

## God

One-half of adults either believe in God (17%) or some form of god or spirit (33%), according to an app-based survey by YouGov published on 15 June 2017. The plurality (45%) believes there is no kind of god or spirit, only the material world, while 5% venture other replies. Topline results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/15/who-should-be-included-brexite-talks-god-vs-material/>

The same proportion of the population as believe in God or a spirit, 50% of 5,526 Britons interviewed online by YouGov on 15 June 2017, still consider it appropriate that the national anthem includes references to God, just 22% saying it is wrong (with 28% uncertain). The greatest level of support for the divine appearance in the national anthem is recorded among UKIP voters (67%), Conservatives (68%), and over-65s (69%), while Labour voters (33%), Scots (36%), and Scottish Nationalists (46%) are most inclined to think it wrong for God to be invoked in the national anthem. Results, disaggregated by standard demographics, are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/38a3a410-51ad-11e7-81f3-2ab0a50a8b9c>

### **Faith-based schools**

Government plans to abolish the present cap preventing new faith-based schools from recruiting more than half their pupils on religious grounds find little favour with the electorate, according to a Populus poll on behalf of the Accord Coalition, for which 2,033 Britons were interviewed online on 5-7 May 2017. Forced to choose, four-fifths of respondents supported the status quo, including majorities of adherents of the two denominations (Church of England and Roman Catholic Church) which have the most faith schools. Just 20% in both Britain and England agreed that new state-funded faith schools should be allowed to select up to 100% of their pupils on the basis of faith, albeit this option appealed to 33% of Catholics and even higher proportions of the rather small numbers of Muslims and Jews in the sample. Full data tables are available at:

<http://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Religious-Schools-Survey.pdf>

### **Inter-faith relations**

A majority (53%) of young people aged 18-24 sense that religious intolerance in Britain has increased during the past five years, according to an online poll of 1,002 of them undertaken by ICM Unlimited on behalf of Hope Not Hate and the National Union of Teachers between 30 May and 1 June 2017. Just 18% thought religious intolerance was decreasing, with 13% detecting no change and 16% undecided. Asked about relations between particular faith communities, 30% assessed that Christians and Muslims do not get along with each other, compared with 33% saying the same about people of no faith and Muslims, and 19% about people with no faith and people with faith. Data tables are available at:

[https://www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017\\_hopenothate\\_18-24s\\_poll.pdf](https://www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017_hopenothate_18-24s_poll.pdf)

### **Attitudes to Islam**

In an eight-nation study for *Handelsblatt*, undertaken online by YouGov between 21 May and 6 June 2017, a plurality (47%) of the 1,974 Britons interviewed detected a fundamental clash between Islam and the values of their society. This was much the same proportion as in the United States (45%) and France (48%), albeit it fell short of the majorities recorded in Germany (53%), Sweden (56%), Denmark (59%), Norway (59%), and Finland (60%). Just under one-quarter (23%) of Britons perceived Islam as generally compatible with British values, while 15% agreed with neither option and 16% did not know what to think. Topline results are available on p. 23 of the data tables at:

[http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/1eqs14w9mx/Handelsblatt\\_Results\\_Topline\\_May2017\\_tracked\\_W.pdf](http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/1eqs14w9mx/Handelsblatt_Results_Topline_May2017_tracked_W.pdf)

Simultaneously, in YouGov's app-based survey published on 21 June 2017, a majority of Britons acknowledged that British society was very (5%) or somewhat (54%) Islamophobic. A minority considered that it was not really (31%) or not at all (8%) Islamophobic. Topline results only are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/21/islamophobia-uk-brexit-talks-divorce-bill-and-futu/>

### **Islamist terrorism**

In the wake of the deadly Islamist attacks in Manchester on 22 May and London on 3 June 2017, 52% of Britons thought most British Muslim leaders could be doing a lot more to stop British Muslims being radicalized and to combat terrorism. The proportion was especially high among over-65s and Conservatives (66% each) and UKIP voters (76%). Just under one-third (29%) of the 2,130 adults interviewed online by YouGov for *The Times* on 5-7 June 2017 believed the Muslim leadership was doing all it reasonably could while 19% were unable to express an opinion. In a supplementary question, 7% of respondents claimed to have had difficult or embarrassing conversations with Muslim friends or colleagues in recent years on the subject of extremism or terrorism, and this was especially likely to have been the case in London (12%). Full data tables are available at:

[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/d8zsb99eyd/TimesResults\\_FINAL%20CALL\\_GB\\_June2017\\_W.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/d8zsb99eyd/TimesResults_FINAL%20CALL_GB_June2017_W.pdf)

In a separate app-based poll by YouGov published on 6 June 2017, 75% of adults agreed that, in the light of recent terror attacks, Britain should be less tolerant of the rights of radical Islamists to express themselves. The topline result only is available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/06/terrorism-and-general-election/>

In the early hours of 19 June 2017, a van deliberately ploughed into worshippers who had just attended Ramadan prayers outside the Finsbury Park mosque in London, killing one person and injuring nine others. Eyewitness reports suggested that the van's driver had vowed to kill Muslims. The authorities at the mosque criticized the media for initially failing to report the incident as terror-related. Quizzed online later the same day, 59% of 4,305 respondents to a YouGov app-based poll agreed that the attack outside the mosque could properly be described as an act of terrorism, with 23% dissenting and 18% uncertain. Results, with breaks by demographics, are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/75c6bfe0-54db-11e7-862a-1eb0da735179>

### **Jewish opinions**

In the May 2017 issue of *Counting Religion in Britain*, we reported on the initial results from a telephone poll of 515 self-identifying British Jews undertaken by Survation for the *Jewish Chronicle* on 21-26 May 2017. In its edition of 9 June 2017 (pp. 1-2), the newspaper headlined the findings from two additional questions. The first concerned the extent to which respondents were optimistic or pessimistic about the future of Jews in the UK; a plurality (47%) felt very or quite optimistic while 23% were pessimistic and 26% neutral on the subject. In the second question, the sample was asked whether they sensed that Israel was heading in the right or wrong direction under the leadership of its Prime Minister, Benjamin ('Bibi') Netanyahu; another plurality (41%) perceived the direction to be right against 33% saying it was wrong and 26% undecided. No data tables are in the public domain, as yet, but the newspaper's coverage can be read at:

<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-jewish-chronicle/20170609/281500751225361>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Methodist statistics for mission**

Methodist membership in Britain has declined by 3.5% year-on-year during the decade to 31 October 2016, now standing at 188,398, according to the Methodist Church's latest triennial Statistics for Mission report. Net losses over the triennium were split between recruitment losses (55%) and retention losses (45%). Average weekly (Sunday and weekday) attendances at services are 202,100, only 14% of whom are by young people, with an estimated 500,000 individuals present at non-service activities. The 22-page report is available at:

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2625881/conf-2017-42-Statistics-for-Mission.pdf>

### **Christians against Poverty**

Christians against Poverty (CAP)'s *Client Report* for 2016 draws upon the charity's client databases and 1,217 responses to its annual debt help survey, undertaken by post and online between September and November 2016. Low income is the most frequently-cited cause of debt, followed by relationship breakdown and mental ill-health. The mean annual household income of CAP's new clients in 2016 was £14,700, a real-terms decrease on the 2015 figure, compared with the national average of £26,300. The overwhelming majority (89%) of clients had income below the national average and 63% were living below the poverty line. By the time they had sought CAP's help, they had amassed outstanding debt balances equivalent to 97% of their annual income. The report can be downloaded from:

[https://capuk.org/fileserver/downloads/policy\\_and\\_government/client\\_report.pdf](https://capuk.org/fileserver/downloads/policy_and_government/client_report.pdf)

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **Armed forces diversity statistics**

The proportion of UK service personnel professing no religion is continuing to grow steadily and, as at 1 April 2017, the proportion stood at just under one-quarter for both the regular forces and the reserves. In the case of regular forces, the figure was highest for the Royal Navy (30%) and lowest for the Army (21%). Further information is available in the Ministry of Defence's latest biannual diversity statistics report at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2017>

### **Religiously aggravated offending in Scotland**

The number of charges relating to religious prejudice brought in Scotland in 2016-17 under the two relevant statutes was 719, representing an increase of 12% on the 642 in 2015-16. Roman Catholicism was the religion most often the subject of reported abuse, with 384 charges in 2016-17, 28% more than the year before, albeit not as high as in previous years. Charges related to Protestantism amounted to 165, to Islam 113, and to Judaism 23. Glasgow had the biggest concentration of charges (30%). The majority (91%) of all charges involved male accused. Full details are contained in the 24-page report by Rebecca Foster and Katherine Myant, *Religiously Aggravated Offending in Scotland, 2016-17*, which can be downloaded from:

<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/religiously-aggravated-offending-scotland-2016-2017/>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **British Social Attitudes Survey**

NatCen Social Research has published the report on British Social Attitudes Survey, 34, which took place between July and November 2016. Interviews were achieved with 2,942 adults aged 18 and over, with some questions put to the full sample and others to part (one-third or two-thirds) samples. The standard questions on religious affiliation and attendance at religious services were included, the former revealing that 53% of respondents professed to belong to no religion, with 15% being Anglicans, 9% Roman Catholics, 17% other Christians, and 6% non-Christians. Other questions on religion do not appear to have been asked. Media coverage of the report has focused disproportionately on the chapter by Kirby Swales and Eleanor Attar Taylor (pp. 85-126) dealing with moral issues, notably on the continued growth in social liberalism with regard to pre-marital sex, same-sex relationships, abortion, and pornography (attitudes to euthanasia remain largely unchanged). This greater liberalism has been increasingly embraced by Christians, notably in terms of same-sex relationships, although across all the topics examined people with a religion were still less likely to hold liberal views than those with no religion (to a significant extent, this probably tracks the social conservatism of older people, who are disproportionately religious). These differences would doubtless be accentuated if only practising religious were considered; however, as the dataset from the survey has not yet been made available, this level of analysis cannot be undertaken at present. The remaining chapters concern tax and benefit manipulation, the role of government, civil liberties, Brexit, and immigration but have no religious content. The published report can be found at:

[http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39196/bsa34\\_full-report\\_fin.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39196/bsa34_full-report_fin.pdf)

### **European Social Survey**

Since its inauguration in 2002, the European Social Survey (ESS) has proved a useful source of data on a limited range of religious topics across the twenty or so countries (including the United Kingdom) covered in each wave. Some of its potential in this regard is illustrated in three of the sixteen chapters in *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence from the European Social Survey*, edited by Michael Breen (London: Routledge, 2017, xxv + 314 pp., ISBN: 978-1-138-22666-1, hardback, £110). One, by Ryan Cragun (pp. 17-35), is a case study of secularization in Ireland while the other two chapters focus on analyses at aggregate level of Round 6 of ESS (2012): Anna Kulkova, 'Religiosity and Political Participation across Europe' (pp. 36-57) and Caillin Reynolds, 'Religion and Values in the ESS: Individual and Societal Effects' (pp. 58-73). Few UK-specific statistics are cited. The book's webpage is at:

<https://www.routledge.com/Values-and-Identities-in-Europe-Evidence-from-the-European-Social-Survey/Breen/p/book/9781138226661>

### Anglican church growth

In 'Intentionality, Numerical Growth, and the Rural Church' (*Rural Theology*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017, pp. 2-11), David Voas revisits a survey he conducted in 2013 as part of the Church of England's Church Growth Research Programme. This found no strong connection between numerical growth and worship style or theological tradition, the crucial factor being that congregations engage in reflection and make intentional choices about their future direction. The quantitative and qualitative evidence for that conclusion is summarized in this article and implications explored for rural churches, which are often conservative in character. To the extent that congregations are inward-looking, follow inherited practice, and resist change, Voas contends, it may be difficult for them to avoid stagnation or decline. Thus, the revitalization of tradition is a challenge for rural clergy and parishioners. Access options to the article are outlined at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14704994.2017.1298265>

### Jewish vote

In two recent posts on his blog, University of Leicester academic Daniel Allington applies regression analysis to the results of the 2017 general election for the twenty British constituencies with the highest Jewish population at the 2011 census. He concludes that:

- Many Jewish voters *very probably* turned away from the Labour Party between 2015 and 2017 (in the light of perceived anti-Semitism within the Party)
- There is no indication that these lost voters switched to the Conservative Party in 2017
- These voters seem *rather more likely* to have voted for the Liberal Democrats

The posts can be found at:

<http://www.danielallington.net/2017/06/electoral-cost-left-wing-antisemitism/>

<http://www.danielallington.net/2017/06/jewish-voters-labour-conservative-liberal-democrat/>

### Roman Catholicism in the 1970s and 1980s

In a letter to *The Tablet* (10 June 2017, p. 17), sociologist of religion Mike Hornsby-Smith expressed concern about the long-term future of the archive of his quantitative and qualitative research into English Roman Catholicism in the 1970s and 1980s. This had led to countless published outputs, including two substantial books: *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in Social Structure since the Second World War* (1987) and *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England: Customary Catholicism and Transformations of Religious Authority* (1991). The archive had been deposited in the library of Heythrop College, part of the University of London. However, arising from financial challenges and following the failure of partnership discussions with, successively, St Mary's University Twickenham and the University of Roehampton, the Jesuits in Britain have decided to close the College at the end of the 2017/18 academic year and have already sold the College buildings to a property developer. None of the College's academic departments is relocating to another higher education institution and no firm plans are yet in place to secure the future of the College's extensive and important library and archive, other than, in the short term, to pack it up and move it offsite somewhere. Hornsby-Smith has also



deposited his own personal diaries, of a Catholic layman from the 1950s to the present, at the library.

### **Living by Numbers**

The vital contribution which ideas of number, magnitude, and frequency make in shaping our everyday lives is rehearsed in Steven Connor, *Living by Numbers: In Defence of Quantity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016, 296 pp., ISBN: 9781780236469, £15, hardback). The book's webpage is at:

<http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk/display.asp?ISBN=9781780236469&nat=false&stem=true&sf1=keyword&st1=Living%2Bby%2Bnumbers&m=2&dc=13>

## NEW DATASETS AT UK DATA SERVICE

### **SN 8165: Active People Survey, 2015-2016**

The Active People Survey, inaugurated in 2005-06, is commissioned by Sport England to gauge participation in sport and active recreation. Wave 10, conducted by TNS BMRB between 1 October 2015 and 30 September 2016, achieved 164,458 telephone interviews with adults aged 14 and over throughout England. The demographic questions asked of a random 50% of respondents included two on religion: 'what is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?' and 'do you consider that you are actively practising your religion?' A catalogue description of the dataset is at:

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8165&type=Data%20catalogue>

### **SN 8188: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2015**

The 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey was undertaken by ScotCen Social Research, on behalf of the Scottish Government and other public sector funders, between July 2015 and January 2016. Face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires were achieved with 1,288 adults aged 18 and over in Scotland. The survey instrument included a special module on discrimination and positive action, which had last been run in 2010, and which explored, among other things, opinions of religious groups in respect of long-term relationships, employment, and religious dress. Particular attention was paid to attitudes towards Muslims. Additionally, there were the standard background variables on religious affiliation and religion of upbringing and, for those with a religion, frequency of attendance at religious services or meetings other than for the rites of passage. A catalogue description of the dataset is at:

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8188&type=Data%20catalogue>

A report on the discrimination module – *Scottish Social Attitudes, 2015: Attitudes to Discrimination and Positive Action* – was published by the Scottish Government in September 2016. This is separately available at:

<http://www.ssa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38903/attitudes-to-discrimination-and-positive-action-2015.pdf>