

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Attitudes to Christians and Christianity

In connection with the recent publication of Krish Kandiah's *Fatheism: Why Christians and Atheists Have More in Common than You Think* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2018), Home for Good and Hodder Faith commissioned ComRes to undertake an online survey of attitudes to Christians and Christianity among 4,087 adult Britons on 2-6 March 2018. The core of the poll comprised ten statements to which respondents were invited to indicate agreement or disagreement. Topline results are as follows, revealing a very large number choosing the neither agree nor disagree option (perhaps reflecting a lack of engagement with, or knowledge of, the subject matter):

- 'I believe that Christians are a negative force in society' – agree 10%, disagree 51%, neither 39%
- 'When I meet somebody new, I assume that they hold no religious beliefs unless they tell me otherwise' – agree 39%, disagree 17%, neither 44%
- 'When I know that someone is a Christian, I find it harder to talk to them' – agree 9%, disagree 65%, neither 27%
- 'I would be more likely to trust a person with no religious beliefs than a Christian' – agree 12%, disagree 45%, neither 43%
- 'I would be cautious about leaving my children in the care of a Christian' – agree 7%, disagree 62%, neither 31%
- 'I would have more fun socialising with a Christian than an atheist' – agree 7%, disagree 37%, neither 56%
- 'I think that being an atheist or non-religious is more normal than being a Christian' – agree 28%, disagree 26%, neither 46%
- 'Overall, I have had a positive experience of Christians and Christianity' – agree 44%, disagree 15%, neither 41%
- 'I feel comfortable discussing my religious beliefs with people at work' – agree 46%, disagree 16%, neither 39%
- 'Christians are more tolerant than other people' – agree 19%, disagree 32%, neither 49%

Full data tables, including breaks by standard demographics and frequency of church attendance (but not by religious affiliation), can be found at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/home-for-good-and-hodder-faith-fatheism-survey/>

Religion and violence

ComRes was commissioned by Theos to run another set of attitude statements, this time exploring the relationship between religion and violence, among an online sample of 2,042 Britons on 6-7 June 2018. Topline results were as follows:

- ‘Religions are inherently violent’ – agree 32%, disagree 55%, don’t know 13%
- ‘The teachings of religion are essentially peaceful’ – agree 61%, disagree 27%, don’t know 12%
- ‘Most religious violence is really about things like politics, socio-economic issues, or Western foreign policy’ – agree 64%, disagree 21%, don’t know 15%
- ‘It is religious extremists, not religions themselves, that are violent’ – agree 81%, disagree 12%, don’t know 7%
- ‘Most of the wars in world history have been caused by religions’ – agree 70%, disagree 21%, don’t know 9%
- ‘On balance, religions are much more peaceful today than violent’ – agree 40%, disagree 44%, don’t know 16%
- ‘The world would be a more peaceful place if no one was religious’ – agree 47%, disagree 38%, don’t know 16%
- ‘The world would be a more peaceful place if no one believed in God’ – agree 35%, disagree 45%, don’t know 19%

Opinion on the subject was thus divided, and dependent on question-wording. Higher levels of negativity would doubtless have been on display had the topic of Islam and violence been explicitly raised. Data tables, including breaks by religious affiliation, can be found at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/theos-religion-and-violence-survey/>

The poll findings are touched upon in Nick Spencer’s foreword to a new Theos report by Robin Gill on *Killing in the Name of God: Addressing Religiously Inspired Violence*, which was published on 16 July 2018 and can be downloaded from:

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Killing-in-the-Name-of-God.pdf>

Pride in the Church

Asked which of 13 British institutions they had pride in, just 33% of 1,693 adults interviewed online by YouGov on 28-29 June 2018 said they were very (8%) or fairly (25%) proud of the Church of England/Church in Wales/Church of Scotland, only the House of Commons (28%) and House of Lords (21%) being ranked lower. The institutions in which most pride was taken were the fire brigade (91%), National Health Service (87%), and armed forces (83%). Half the sample claimed they were not very (24%) or not at all (26%) proud of the ‘national’ Churches, including three-fifths of Scots. Full data tables are accessible via the link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2018/07/04/nhs-british-institution-brits-are-second-most-prou/>

Religious affiliation

Representative samples of adult Britons drawn from an online panel are regularly asked by Populus ‘which of the following religious groups do you consider yourself to be a member of?’

An aggregation of the responses to this question for 27,000 individuals across 13 polls between January and June 2018 revealed that 49.3% self-identified as Christians, 6.1% as non-Christians, 42.9% as of no religion, and 1.7% preferring not to say. Compared with the pooled sample for the period July to December 2017, there were 1.4% fewer Christians and 1.4% more religious nones. Weighted data were extracted from sundry tables on the Populus website.

Godparents

One-half of adults have no godparents, presumably because they have not been baptised, according to an online poll by YouGov of 4,886 Britons on 13 July 2018. The proportion was highest in Scotland (56%) and among Scottish National Party voters (62%). An additional 17% of respondents did not know whether they had any godparents or not, including 21% of both men and over-65s. Data tables are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/8701aa4a-867c-11e8-80e4-c9623beb00b4>

Human rights

Freedom of thought and religion is provided for in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a recent Ipsos Global Advisor survey, conducted among online samples of adults in 28 countries between 25 May and 8 June 2018, 56% of 1,000 Britons aged 16-64 correctly identified this particular right as being covered in the Declaration. However, when asked to prioritize the four or five which were most important to protect from a list of 28 possible human rights, just 20% of Britons selected freedom of thought and religion, five points fewer than the multinational mean, with freedom from discrimination the top priority in Britain (on 33%). Given a list of 16 groups needing most protection with regard to their human rights, religious minorities were ranked twelfth in importance in Britain (on 21%). Topline results only are available at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/britons-split-whether-human-rights-abuse-uk-problem>

Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party

The controversy surrounding anti-Semitism in the Labour Party has flared up yet again. In a further test of public opinion, the *Jewish News* and Jewish Leadership Council commissioned ComRes to poll an online sample of 2,036 Britons on 20-22 July 2018. This revealed that 34% of the entire electorate and even 16% of Labour voters believe the party has a serious problem with anti-Semitism; and that similar proportions, respectively 31% and 13%, considered the former Labour minister Margaret Hodge had been right to call party leader Jeremy Corbyn anti-Semitic. Almost half (48%) of all adults and 29% of Labour voters agreed with the proposition that Corbyn is letting the Labour Party down by failing to tackle anti-Semitism in its midst. More generally, 32% judged anti-Semitism to be on the rise in the UK, while 25% disagreed and 43% were undecided. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/jewish-news-the-labour-party-and-anti-semitism/>

Coverage of the survey in the *Jewish News* can be read at:

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/exclusive-third-of-labour-voters-say-corbyn-letting-down-party-on-anti-semitism/>

Islamism

One-quarter of 1,668 Britons questioned by YouGov for the *Sunday Times* on 19-20 July 2018 said that they would be very (13%) or fairly (11%) likely to vote for a new political party on the far right which was committed to opposing Islamism and immigration and supporting Brexit. The proportion rose to 38% with Conservatives and 44% among those who had voted 'leave' in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. Almost three-fifths of the entire sample declared they would be unlikely to vote for a new party with this sort of agenda and 18% were undecided. Full data tables are at:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/vxuhlu27eg/SundayTimesResults_180720_for_web.pdf

Islamic State

The British government recently became embroiled in controversy when it became known that it was willing to waive its longstanding opposition to the use of capital punishment by foreign governments in the cases of Alexandra Kotey and Shafee el-Sheikh. They are two alleged members of an Islamic State (ISIS) cell which carried out the torture and murder of western hostages in the former ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Originally from Britain, they have been stripped of their British citizenship and are due to face trial in the United States, where the death penalty is still in operation. In an online YouGov poll of 7,177 adult Britons on 24 July 2018, 62% of respondents agreed that the British government had been right to make an exception to its policy and to allow the pair to be prosecuted in a jurisdiction where the death penalty could be imposed. The proportion peaked at 82% among Conservatives and 89% of UKIP voters. Only 20% of the whole sample opposed the government's course of action, while 18% were undecided. Full results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/9db2aa33-8f1f-11e8-b93a-d77d9dded8f6/question/00cfbd71-8f20-11e8-bcee-bbcd6aeece1e0/social>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Methodist Statistics for Mission

The Methodist Church has an unbroken record of annual statistical returns stretching back to 1766. The series, known officially as Statistics for Mission and unofficially as the October count, has been a real boon to church historians and statisticians as well as the envy of many other denominations. However, the arrangements are now set to change. For the Methodist Conference, meeting in Nottingham between 28 June and 5 July 2018, accepted Memorial M13 from the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District Synod to the effect that the burden of data collection should be reduced significantly ('only minimal data should be collected' in future, Conference determined, comprising membership numbers and average attendance) and the effort freed up as a result redirected towards missional activity. Methodist Council has been instructed by Conference to operationalize this new policy, which will transitionally mean much lighter reporting by Methodist circuits and districts in the connexional years 2018/19 and 2019/20. For the text of the memorial and the Conference's reply, go to:

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8217/conf-2018-memorials-to-the-conference.pdf>

Anti-Semitic incidents

The Community Security Trust recorded 727 anti-Semitic incidents across the UK during the first half of 2018, the second highest total for a January-June period since statistics were first kept, albeit 8% fewer than between January and June 2017. With only two exceptions, the monthly total of incidents has exceeded 100 in every month since April 2016. The 16-page report on *Antisemitic Incidents, January-June 2018* can be downloaded from:

<https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/e/5/Incidents%20Report%20January-June%202018.pdf>

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

LGBT people

The Government has published the results of its national LGBT survey, completed online in July-September 2017, and associated action plan. The survey attracted responses from a self-selecting sample of 108,100 adults aged 16 and over living in the UK who self-identified as having a minority sexual orientation or gender identity or as intersex, the largest groups being gay or lesbian (61%) and bisexual (26%). Religion or belief was one of the background characteristics investigated, 69% of interviewees claiming to have none, with 18% professing to be Christians. Further information, including a 304-page research report with some religious breaks (for example, in respect of having undergone or been offered sexual ‘conversion’ therapy), is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report>

Prisoners

A further breakdown by religion and sex of the prison population of England and Wales has been published by the Ministry of Justice. The proportion of prisoners professing no religion is currently 30.7% overall, compared with 30.8% twelve months previously, and with no significant gender difference. Full details are available in table 1.5 of the return of the prison population for 30 June 2018 at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2018>

Ethnic Sikhs

According to a report in *The Times* for 23 July 2018 (p. 17), the campaign to have Sikhs recognized as an ethnic as well as a religious group in the 2021 census of England and Wales has moved a step closer to success, following an overwhelmingly positive response to the idea in a postal survey of gurdwaras organized by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Sikhs. This expression of support is felt likely to satisfy the requirement of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for evidence of the ‘public acceptability’ of the proposal, the last major hurdle to be cleared before ONS is able to make a formal recommendation to effect the change.

However, the newspaper's report prompted several letters to the editor of *The Times* from Sikhs objecting to the recognition of Sikhs as an ethnic group (24 July 2018, p. 24, 25 July 2018, p. 24). One of the letters, from Lord Singh of Wimbledon, observed that most Sikhs in the UK today are British-born and native English-speakers and thus would not meet the criteria for ethnic Sikhs. Another alleged that British gurdwaras are largely controlled by Sikh separatists, who initiated the campaign in the first place. In reply (27 July 2018, p. 24), Jagtar Singh, Secretary General of the Sikh Council UK, reiterated that there was widespread endorsement of the idea among Sikhs, adding that 83,000 of them had written in their ethnicity as Sikh under the 'other' category at the 2011 census.

ONS is also considering offering Jews the opportunity to record themselves as an ethnic group in the 2021 census.

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Secularization and economic change

Economic growth can be ruled out as a cause of secularization, a new study suggests. Rather, rises in secularization and, more particularly, tolerance for individual rights have been identified as predictors of economic growth (as measured by GDP) in the twentieth century by Damian Ruck, Alexander Bentley, and Daniel Lawson in 'Religious Change Preceded Economic Change in the 20th Century', *Science Advances*, Vol. 4, No. 7, 18 July 2018, eaar8680. Data derive from a birth cohort analysis of the post-1990 waves of the World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys for 109 nations, including Great Britain. The article, and associated resources, can be freely downloaded at:

<http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/7/eaar8680>

Ruck has also blogged about the research on *The Conversation* at:

<https://theconversation.com/religious-decline-was-the-key-to-economic-development-in-the-20th-century-100279>

British Social Attitudes Survey, 2017

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) has published *British Social Attitudes, 35, 2018 Edition*, based on face-to-face interviews with a probability sample of 3,988 adults aged 18 and over between July and November 2017. The report itself, comprising a series of chapters of expert analysis of public opinion on various social and political issues, contains nothing of explicitly religious interest but clarifies that the survey included religion as one of its standard background variables. It can be read at:

<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-35/key-findings.aspx>

The questionnaire is available at:

<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39277/bsa-35-questionnaire.pdf>

PEOPLE NEWS

Fiona Tweedie

Revd Dr Fiona Tweedie, part-time Mission Statistics Coordinator for the Church of Scotland since 2014, has now assumed an additional part-time role as Research Associate at the Church Army Research Unit in Sheffield. Her undergraduate degree was in computer science and statistics, and, prior to becoming the Church of Scotland's first Ordained Local Minister in 2011, she was a lecturer in statistics at the University of Glasgow (1996-2001) and University of Edinburgh (2001-05).

David John Bartholomew

The October 2017 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain* noted the death of Professor Bartholomew earlier that month. Celia Swan and Martin Knott have now contributed a fuller-length obituary in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A*, Vol. 181, No. 3, June 2018, pp. 907-9. Access options are outlined at:

<https://rss.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rssa.12368>