

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Boris Johnson and the burka

The debate over the wearing of the burka/full face-veil in public in Britain has reignited following a colourfully-worded column in the *Daily Telegraph* by Conservative politician Boris Johnson. Although the former British Foreign Secretary opposed a ban on the burka, as recently introduced in Denmark, he described the garment as ‘oppressive and ridiculous’ and likened Muslims who wore it to ‘letter boxes’ and ‘bank robbers’. His comments caused a great deal of offence and there have been many calls for him to apologize, among them from the Prime Minister. The possibility of a disciplinary investigation of Johnson by the Conservative Party has also been mooted.

In the first test of the public mood on the subject, Sky Data interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,649 British Sky customers by SMS on 8 August 2018. Asked whether Johnson should apologize for his choice of words, the country was divided, 45% saying he should (peaking at 58% of under-35s) and 48% that he should not (peaking at 58% of over-55s), with the remaining 7% undecided. But a clear majority (60%) thought it was *not* racist to describe women in burkas as looking like letter boxes or bank robbers, with 33% saying it was racist. A similar number (59%, including 69% of over-55s) expressed support for banning burkas in public places, 26% being opposed and 15% undecided. Full data tables are available at:

https://interactive.news.sky.com/BURKAS_TABS_080818.pdf

In another online poll, of 4,673 adult Britons on 8 August 2018, YouGov also discovered the nation was split down the middle about whether Johnson should apologize for the language he had used in his column: 45% thought he should, 44% that he should not, and 11% were unsure. The number opposed to him apologizing was greatest among over-65s (61%), Conservatives (65%), and UKIP voters (91%). Full data tables are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/bbb6679f-9aed-11e8-977e-859e8ee4b8db>

A third survey was undertaken by ComRes for the *Sunday Express* among an online sample of 1,045 adults aged 18 and over on 10 August 2018. They were asked whether they thought Johnson should be disciplined (implicitly by the Conservative Party) for his comments. Two-fifths believed that he should be, including the majority of younger age groups (62% of under-25s and 55% of those aged 25-34) and one-half of Londoners. Among the entire sample, 53% opposed the imposition of discipline on Johnson, peaking at 77% of over-65s, while 7% expressed no opinion or preferred not to say. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Sunday-Express-Boris-and-Brexit-Results-August-2018.pdf>

Deltapoll brought up the rear with an online poll of 1,904 Britons for the *Sun on Sunday* on 14-16 August 2018. Asked about Boris Johnson's comments on the burka, 23% considered them offensive and that he should apologize for them; 28% judged that they were 'over the top' and that he should apologize for that but not for starting a debate on a sensitive issue; 36% said that the remarks were correct and Johnson had nothing to apologize for; and 12% were undecided. The pro-Boris camp was strongest among Conservatives (54%), 'Leave' voters in the 2016 referendum on European Union membership (60%), and over-65s (61%). Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/polls/sunonsunday-augst18>

Religious prejudice in political parties

On behalf of *The Observer*, Opinium Research broadened the agenda to perceptions of religious prejudice in the two main political parties, asking 2,003 members of its UK online panel on 14-17 August 2018 whether the Conservative Party and Labour Party were prejudiced against six groups: British Christians, British Jews, British Muslims, British Hindus, British Sikhs, and atheists. In the case of the Conservative Party, definite or probable prejudice was said to range from 13% (against Christians) to 27% (against Muslims); for the Labour Party, the range was from 11% (against atheists) to 36% (against Jews). The Conservative Party was believed to tolerate Islamophobia by 26% and the Labour Party to tolerate anti-Semitism by 34%. Boris Johnson was regarded as Islamophobic by 26% and Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party leader, as anti-Semitic by 32%. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.opinium.co.uk/political-polling-14th-august-2018/>

BMG Research also asked its own sample, of 1,481 adult Britons interviewed online for *The Independent* on 6-10 August 2018, whether Corbyn was anti-Semitic and found 27% in agreement, with 23% considering the Labour Party itself as institutionally anti-Semitic. Three-fifths judged that allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party had been handled badly. Respondents were additionally given a list of four actions (which had surfaced in debates about Labour and anti-Semitism) and invited to say whether each was anti-Semitic or not. Accusing Jewish people of being more loyal to Israel than their home country was labelled as anti-Semitic by 26%; claiming that Israel's existence as a state is a racist endeavour by 38%; requiring higher standards of behaviour from Israel than other nations by 36%; and comparing contemporary Israeli policies to those of the Nazis by 47%. For all questions in this survey, approximately one-third were recorded as don't know. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/labour-handling-anti-semitism-allegations/>

The Labour and anti-Semitism controversy took a new turn when it was revealed that in 2014 Corbyn had taken part in a wreath-laying ceremony in Tunisia for people who had been accused of involvement in the terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. This dimension was explored by YouGov in an online poll of 1,640 Britons on 14-15 August 2018. Although three-quarters of the public were aware of the story, only one-quarter admitted to following it closely. Of those who were aware, 44% assessed that Corbyn had not given an honest account of his attendance at the ceremony and the same number believed that he probably had taken part in laying a wreath on the graves of those responsible for organizing the 1972 attack. The whole affair has tarnished Corbyn's reputation somewhat, 16% of respondents who were aware of the story now thinking worse of him in the light of it, albeit a

plurality of 47% already held a negative opinion of the Labour leader in any case. For a blog on the survey, with links to full data tables, see:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2018/08/16/has-jeremy-corbyn-wreath-laying-controversy-change/>

Deltapoll's survey for the *Sun on Sunday*, noted above (with link), also covered attitudes to anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. One-half the sample felt that the party had a problem with anti-Semitism, 28% agreeing that it was riddled with people holding anti-Semitic views and 22% that there were pockets of anti-Semitism, while 36% judged Jeremy Corbyn to be personally anti-Semitic. One-quarter of respondents believed that anti-Semitism was more common in the Labour Party than in other political parties, but two-fifths were unable to say.

Lifestyle

On behalf of the BBC Asian Network, ComRes has surveyed two samples on lifestyle issues, including in relation to religion. The first sample was of 2,001 British adults, interviewed online on 13-15 July 2018. The second was of 2,026 British Asians, interviewed by telephone during July 2018. Most questions were put to both samples. Full data tables, with breaks by religious affiliation for British Asians (including 1,021 Muslims, 475 Hindus, 189 Sikhs, and 341 others), can be accessed via the links at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/bbc-asian-network-lifestyle-survey-july-2018/>

The omnibus survey of British adults was mainly intended to provide comparisons with the replies of British Asians but is also of intrinsic interest in demonstrating the relatively low significance attached to religion by a cross-section of the population. Given 12 options for helping to define personal identity, and invited to select the two most important to them, just 7% chose religion. Asked how important religion was to them, 72% replied that it was not important against 26% claiming it to be important, and with a majority (52%) stating it was not at all important. Three-quarters of Britons agreed with the proposition that religion is a cause of division and conflict in society. Low saliency of religion was also demonstrated by the fact that 90% of Britons would not be offended if a family member had a relationship with someone of a different faith, while 73% anticipated that neither they nor their family would be offended if a family member married someone of a different religion.

More than one-third (36%) of British Asians selected religion as an important factor in helping define their identity, greater even than nationality (33%) or ethnicity (22%). Almost three in four (73%) indicated that religion was very or fairly important to them personally, including 89% of Muslims, and 86% that it was important to their family (94% among Muslims). However, 48% of British Asians and majorities of Hindus and Sikhs acknowledged that religion is a cause of division and conflict. On social issues, Muslims were more conservative than Hindus or Sikhs, particularly when it came to same-sex relationships, which 48% of Muslims declared not to be morally acceptable, with a further 26% not revealing their hand. But there were no differences between the three religious groups when it came to expressing strong confidence in Britain as a place where they could fulfil their aspirations and ambitions.

Thought for the Day

Thought for the Day is the three-minute 'pause' in *Today*, BBC Radio 4's prime-time flagship morning news and current affairs programme, when invited guests reflect on a topical issue

from a religious standpoint. Reform of the slot, to encompass non-religious voices, has long been an ambition of the National Secular Society (NSS), which has recently released partial results of a poll it commissioned from Censuwide with an online sample of 2,003 UK adults on 18-21 May 2018. Asked whether *Thought for the Day* should still be broadcast by the BBC, 36% of respondents agreed that it should (including 41% of over-55s) and 10% disagreed, but the majority (54%) neither agreed nor disagreed, perhaps indicating indifference or lack of knowledge. Less than one-fifth (18%) considered that *Thought for the Day* should always feature religious content, while 32% disagreed (peaking at 40% in the South-West and among adults aged 45-54) and 50% were undecided. Full data tables have been supplied to BRIN by NSS and the NSS press release can be found at:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/07/public-backs-reform-of-thought-for-the-day-poll-finds>

Criticizing Christianity

One-quarter (27%) of 5,525 adult Britons interviewed by YouGov via app on 14 August 2018 felt it to be more acceptable to criticize Christianity (and Christians) than other religions in the UK, UKIP voters (35%), men (34%), and under-25s (33%) being especially likely to say so. By contrast, just 7% deemed it less acceptable, and the plurality (49%) suggested that it was neither more nor less acceptable to criticize Christianity than other religions. The remainder of the respondents (17%) were undecided. Data tables are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/79ae70be-9fa7-11e8-8abf-cd74e8917bdd>

Volunteering

Regular worshippers volunteer twice as often as those who are not regular worshippers, but the proportion has dropped for both groups between 2012 and 2017, according to a recent report by nfpSynergy on *Volunteering Trend Data*. In 2012, 40% of regular worshippers and 19% of other Britons claimed to have given time as a volunteer during the previous three months, either to a charity or other organization or in their local community. In 2017, the figures were 37% and 15%, respectively. Data derive from the Charity Awareness Monitor, for which 2,000 adults aged 16 and over were interviewed in each year. The report can be downloaded (after registration) from:

<https://nfpsynergy.net/press-release/volunteering-trend-data>

Uniformed organizations

On behalf of the Youth United Foundation, a charitable consortium of 11 uniformed organizations, ComRes has recently completed a report on *Social Integration: The Role of Uniformed Youth Groups*. The quantitative evidence base was an online survey of 2,015 young people aged 11-18, comprising 569 members and 1,426 non-members of uniformed organizations, between 21 November and 19 December 2017. One of the principal findings was that uniformed youth were significantly more likely than non-uniformed youth to mix with people who were different from them, including persons of a different religion, and to regard it as important so to do. They were also more likely to participate regularly in social action. The report, which includes a profile of uniformed and non-uniformed youth by religion (Christian, non-Christian, unsure, and atheist) and a breakdown by religion of reasons for joining or not joining a uniformed youth group, can be found at:

<http://yuf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FULL-REPORT-COMJ6149-Social-Integration-Youth-Groups-Report-0106-WEB.pdf>

Young people and immigration

The Ipsos MORI Young People in Scotland Survey, 2017, for which 1,781 state secondary school pupils were interviewed online between September and November, included a module on attitudes to immigration, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government. The responses were disaggregated by religious affiliation, albeit only three categories were deemed statistically viable: no religion (professed by 57% of the sample), Christian (24%), and non-Christian (4%). In general, there were few differences of opinion between religious nones and Christians, but non-Christians tended to have outlier views, possibly a function of small cell size (only 101 cases). On the specific matter of whether Scotland would lose its identity if more Muslims came to live there, 28% of all young people agreed and 42% disagreed. A report on the module is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00539137.pdf>

Scottish religion

Religion appears to be losing its hold over once God-fearing Scotland, according to a poll by Survation for the Humanist Society Scotland (HSS), for which 1,002 Scottish adults were interviewed online on 5-10 July 2018. Although 61% of respondents said they had been raised in some religion, the majority (59%, including 69% of under-45s) currently described themselves as not religious, with 37% being Christian (almost three-fifths of whom were Church of Scotland and one-fifth Catholic) and 4% non-Christian. Seven in ten never or hardly ever prayed outside religious services and three-quarters had never or hardly ever attended such services during the past year, apart from for rites of passage. Less than one-third (31%) believed in God while 49% did not; 34% believed and 51% disbelieved in life after death; 33% believed and 56% disbelieved in heaven; 20% believed and 68% disbelieved in hell; 21% believed and 67% disbelieved in divine miracles; 21% believed and 63% disbelieved in reincarnation; 19% believed and 68% disbelieved in supernatural powers of deceased ancestors; 29% believed and 60% disbelieved in angels; 25% believed and 65% disbelieved in demons or evil spirits; and 18% believed and 71% disbelieved in a judgement day. Full data tables are available at:

<https://survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Tables-Humanist-Society-Scotland.pdf>

HSS has issued a 12-page report on the poll: Fraser Sutherland, *Beliefs in Scotland, 2018: A Study of Religion and Belief in Scotland*, available to download at:

<https://www.humanism.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Beliefs-in-Scotland-e2018.pdf>

Dating apps and religion

On behalf of the BBC's *Newsbeat* programme, YouGov conducted an online poll among 2,066 16- to 34-year-olds in the UK between 3 and 10 April 2018 to ascertain their views on dating apps/websites. Interviewees were asked about the importance of nine attributes when deciding whether or not to meet up with somebody they had met through a dating app/website. One of the attributes was the religion of the prospective friend, which 11% said would be very important to their decision, 25% fairly important, 35% not very important, 21% not at all important, with 8% undecided or preferring not to say. Full data tables can be found at:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/mv1fnnhj8v/YG-Archive-030318-BBCNewsbeat.pdf

Asian elephants

On 22-24 June 2018, Populus conducted an online survey into the attitudes of 2,065 adult Britons towards the role played by Asian elephants in tourism in India and South-East Asia. One of the questions concerned the taking of elephants from the wild for use in temples in connection with religious services or festivals. The overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents thought this practice was not justified, with only 6% approving it. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.populus.co.uk/polls/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Church of England ministry

The Church of England has published two new annual reports on its ministry. The 2018 report on vocations highlights: growth in the overall number of recommended candidates; growth in the number of young candidates (under 32 years); and growth in the number of female candidates, who are now in the majority. The 56-page *Ministry Statistics, 2017* presents a wealth of information in 23 figures and 25 tables. Of the 20,040 active ordained clergy in the Church of England, 39% are stipendiary (92% of whom are full-time and 28% women), 15% are self-supporting, 36% (mostly retired) have permission to officiate, 5% are chaplains, and 5% fill other roles. The reports can be accessed via the news release at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/growing-numbers-young-people-train-priests>

Humanists UK

Humanists UK, formerly the British Humanist Association (BHA), announced on 8 August 2018 that it had reached a new milestone in its history: 70,000 members and supporters across the UK and crown dependencies. The BHA was formed in 1963 as a common front for the Rationalist Press Association and the Ethical Union but grew very slowly in its early years, having only 3,000 members in 1970.

Islamophobic incidents

Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for Victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice is the title of Tell MAMA's annual report for 2017. It documents 1,201 verified incidents of anti-Muslim hatred in the UK during the year, seven in ten of them taking place offline, at street level, and the remainder online, generally on Twitter or Facebook. Most victims were women but most perpetrators were men. The report is available at:

<https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Tell-MAMA-Report-2017.pdf>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

England and Wales census of population, 2021

In the July 2018 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*, we reported on proposals to enable Sikhs to be recorded as an ethnic as well as a religious group in the 2021 census of population of England and Wales. There is a similar proposal for Jews to be considered in the same way, by adding a 'Jewish' tick-box to the response options for the question on ethnicity. However, senior Jewish community figures, including from the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, are understood to have expressed doubts about the wisdom of doing so, fearing it would impact negatively on comparability with data obtained from the 2001 and 2011 censuses in respect of the question on religion. By contrast, Jewish leaders in Scotland (where the census is arranged by the National Records of Scotland) are inclined to favour the proposal, in order to capture thousands of 'missing Jews'. The issue has been covered by the *Jewish News* at:

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/exclusive-ethnicity-option-on-next-census-could-show-400000-jews-in-uk/>

Scotland census of population, 2021

The National Records of Scotland have initiated a consultation, which remains live until 7 September 2018, about proposed changes in the way in which outputs will be created from the religion question in the census, specifically disaggregation by denominations. For more information, and a link to the SurveyMonkey website for the provision of feedback, go to:

<http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/religion-data-and-outputs-survey>

Religious Studies GCE A Levels

Following years of steady advance, Religious Studies (RS) is now losing ground as a subject in the wake of the ongoing reforms of GCE A Level examinations and of secondary education more generally. According to the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), there were 20,527 entries for GCE A Level RS in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in the June 2018 examinations, representing a decline of 21.3% on the 2017 total, compared with a decrease of 2.0% for all subjects and of 3.5% in the population of 18-year-olds. RS candidates were predominantly female, at 71.6%, the mean for all subjects being 55.0%. The proportion of RS examinees securing a pass at A* to C grade was 78.8%, against 77.0% for all subjects, although there were fewer than average RS successes at A*. Additionally, there were 8,454 entries for GCE AS Level RS, 55.6% less than in 2017. Full provisional tables for both A and AS Level, showing breaks by gender and grade within home nation, are available, together with an important note and press release outlining changes affecting comparability of results year-on-year, at:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2018>

Religious Studies GCSE

GCSE Level RS is also in decline, according to results released by the JCQ the week after the A Level data were published. There were 253,618 entries for the full course GCSE in RS in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in June 2018, a decrease of 10.1% on June 2017, compared with an increase of 0.2% in entries for all subjects (notwithstanding a fall of 2.7% in the 16-year-old population). A much smaller proportion of candidates for GCSE RS was female (54.1%) than for GCE A Level RS. The cumulative number obtaining a pass between A* and C for the full course GCSE RS was 72.0%, five points more than the average across all subjects. The short course in GCSE RS (traditionally equivalent to half a GCSE) is in freefall, with 34.4% fewer candidates in June 2018 than in June 2017, in line with the progressive disappearance of short courses generally. Full tables, again with an important note and press release outlining changes in the examination system affecting year-on-year comparability, are available at:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/2018>

School admissions

The vexed issue of the inclusivity of church schools is likely to be reopened following publication of a new research report commissioned by the Department for Education and covering admissions to secondary schools in England: Matthew Weldon, *Secondary School Choice and Selection: Insights from New National Preferences Data*. In the case of church schools, which determine their own admissions policies (within government parameters), it highlighted that children from black families are significantly less likely to be admitted to a church school to which they apply than those from a similar white family living nearby; and that children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pupil Premium-eligible) are significantly less likely to be admitted into a church school than a non-Pupil Premium child living nearby. The report is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732881/Secondary_school_choice_and_selection.pdf

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Populism and the Church of England

Self-identification as Church of England was an important independent predictor of voting 'Leave' in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, according to Greg Smith and Linda Woodhead, 'Religion and Brexit: Populism and the Church of England', *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2018, pp. 206-23. This finding, which held good even when controlling for age and region, principally derived from an exit poll commissioned by Woodhead from YouGov in June 2016 but was supplemented by analyses from an earlier (and thus pre-referendum) YouGov study, in June 2013, also commissioned by Woodhead. Comparisons are drawn with the results of Smith's Spring 2016 survey of an opportunity sample of self-defined UK evangelicals, who inclined to a 'Remain' position, had a more internationalist outlook, and were decidedly not in the populist mould of US evangelicals who proved such strong supporters of Donald Trump at the 2016 US presidential election. Possible

explanations for this pattern and UK-US differences are advanced, and reasons are given why Brexit-backing Anglicans do not qualify to be described as populist. Access options to the article are outlined at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09637494.2018.1483861>

Church of Scotland statistics

The extent and nature of the often strained relationship between religious statistics on the one hand and religious mission and planning on the other are explored by Allan Vint in his ‘Statistics, Planning, and the Mission of the Church of Scotland: A Critical Examination of Quantitative Data as a Resource for National, Regional, and Local Engagement’ (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018, 309pp., including 28 tables and 25 graphs). The introductory chapters consider the rationale and background to the collection and deployment of church statistics from historical, theological, and ecclesiological/missiological standpoints. The core original research is concentrated in chapters 5-9 and in the 14 supporting appendices, commencing with a presentation of the findings of three online surveys which the author conducted among local leaders and ministers of the Kirk, in 2013, 2015, and 2017. There then follow three case studies of the Church of Scotland’s recent engagement with statistics, one for each of its three tiers of governance: national (the General Assembly and its councils and committee); regional (Presbytery of Glasgow); and local (Kilsyth Anderson Church). The conclusion is that ‘there is currently a significant deficit in fully appropriating and deploying statistical data for church planning and mission’ in the Church of Scotland, and 28 recommendations are made for improvement. The thesis can be downloaded from:

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/9113/1/2017VintPhD.pdf>

Muslims in politics

The challenges which political parties face in seeking to incorporate ethnic and religious minorities are exemplified in Rafaela Dancygier’s *Dilemmas of Inclusion: Muslims in European Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017, xiv + 242pp., ISBN: 9780691172606, £24, paperback). She emphasizes the trade-offs which may arise when parties reach out to newer groups who are disliked by a set of existing voters and demonstrates how their short-term inclusion strategies can undercut their ideological coherence and electoral performance in the long run. Her research employs mixed methods but the core source is a database of the background of over 80,000 local politicians in the most populous municipalities of Austria, Belgium, England (68 municipalities), and Germany during the ‘long noughties’ (elected politicians in all four countries together with unsuccessful candidates in Belgium and England). Muslim (and other religious minority) politicians were identified through an onomastic approach, by their first and last names, additionally using the Onomap software program in the case of the English sample. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://press.princeton.edu/titles/11189.html>