

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 36 – September 2018

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OPINION POLLS – GENERAL

God's gender

Although the singer Ariana Grande, in her recent single, might be confident that *God is a Woman*, self-identifying British Christians seem far less certain. Just 1% of the 1,292 interviewed online by YouGov between 1 and 15 August 2018 believed that God is female, compared with 36% holding that God is male (among them, 41% of women, 46% of under-25s, and 47% of Catholics). A plurality of 41% contended that God has no human gender at all, while 3% thought he had a different human gender identity to male or female, and 19% were undecided. Full data tables are available via the link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2018/09/06/only-1-british-christians-believe-god-female/>

Miracles

On behalf of BBC Local Radio, ComRes conducted a telephone survey of 2,002 adult Britons between 16 and 26 August 2018 on the subject of miracles. With regard to the biblical accounts of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ, a plurality of the sample (46%) said they did not believe He performed miracles in any form; this group included 22% of self-designated Christians and 7% of regular (monthly or more) churchgoers. Just over one-third (37%) were convinced that Jesus had made miraculous things happen but doubted the literalism of some of the biblical descriptions of miracles, while 11% accepted that the miracles occurred word-for-word as portrayed in the Bible, peaking at 44% for weekly or more churchgoers. Three-fifths (62%) claimed to believe that miracles are possible today, albeit the majority did not necessarily link them with God, and 43% admitted that they had prayed for a miracle themselves under certain circumstances, with 53% never having done so. Full data tables are available at:

http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/BBC-Miracles_tables_final_.pdf

Archbishop of Canterbury and politics

A wide-ranging speech by Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, at the Trades Union Congress conference in Manchester on 12 September 2018 immediately reignited a long-standing national debate about the extent to which the Church should engage with politics. The following day, YouGov ran a snap poll, by mobile app, asking whether it was appropriate or inappropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury to express opinions on political issues, to which 3,215 adult Britons responded. Overall, they were split down the middle about the matter, 38% deeming it appropriate for the Archbishop to speak out, with 39% saying inappropriate and 23% undecided. There were some important demographic variations, notably that Conservatives (58%) and over-65s (56%) were disproportionately inclined to think the

Archbishop's actions inappropriate, while Liberal Democrats (56%) and Labour voters (51%) were much more likely to consider them appropriate. Don't knows were especially numerous among under-25s (42%). Full data tables are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/d562e31b-b734-11e8-ab5a-7bd93cf0374e>

Parent power

Parents are deploying a range of tactics in order to get their children into a good school, according to the latest report from the Sutton Trust: Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, *Parent Power, 2018: How Parents Use Financial and Cultural Resources to Boost Their Children's Chances of Success*. Attending church services, to help secure access to a place in a faith school, was the tactic most frequently cited by the 1,017 parents in England, with children aged 5-16 at primary or secondary school, and interviewed online by YouGov on 10-15 August 2018. Almost one-third (31%) mentioned that they personally knew somebody who had resorted to this particular strategy, which was popular across all social classes, potentially because of its minimal financial implications, albeit at its highest among the top two social groups (A and B). The report can be downloaded from:

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Parent-Power-2018.pdf>

Religious education

Religious education (RE) appears to be one of the least liked of school subjects, according to the findings of the YouGov Children's Omnibus, for which 4,289 British pupils aged 6-15 were interviewed online between 2 March and 9 May 2018. More students (44%) said that they did not enjoy RE than enjoyed it (40%). The proportion claiming to enjoy RE a lot, at just 12% (10% of boys and 14% of girls), was the lowest of all 13 subjects included in the survey with the exception of citizenship (which half of all pupils did not study), and far behind the top-rated subjects of computing (enjoyed a lot by 50%) and physical education (by 46%). Full data tables are available at:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/513q4qh5hi/YouGov%20Children's%20Omnibus%20-%20subject%20enjoyment.pdf

Horoscopes

In a recent YouGov poll about conspiracy theories, just 9% of Britons (but 22% of under-35s) claimed it was true that horoscopes and star signs can be used accurately to predict what kind of day a person will have, while 78% considered the statement false and 13% were unsure. Another conspiracy theory, believed in by 19% of adults, was that the Israeli intelligence agency (Mossad) is secretly working to bring down Jeremy Corbyn. No data tables are available in the public domain as yet, and no details of fieldwork dates and sample size, but a blog post about the survey can be found at:

<https://www.opinium.co.uk/three-in-five-brits-believe-in-at-least-one-conspiracy-theory/>

OPINION POLLS – LABOUR PARTY AND ANTI-SEMITISM

12 August-4 September 2018: Survation

It is a sure sign of the damage inflicted by the ongoing controversy surrounding anti-Semitism in the Labour Party that 39% of self-identifying British Jews aged 18 and over claim they would seriously consider emigrating in the event that Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader, ever becomes prime minister, the proportion rising to 51% among those aged 35-54 (perhaps the cohort most likely to do so). The remainder of the sample, which comprised 710 members of Survation's pre-recruited panel of Jews, said they would not consider emigrating (52%) or were undecided (10%). The poll was conducted by telephone on behalf of the *Jewish Chronicle* and the findings published in that newspaper in its edition of 7 September 2018 (p. 6), with the editorial extrapolation that 115,000 British Jews would seriously consider quitting the country under Corbyn's premiership.

The same survey also investigated Jewish perceptions of anti-Semitism in the four main political parties and their leaders, the results for these questions being published in the *Jewish Chronicle* for 14 September 2018 (pp. 1 and 4). Interviewees were asked to rank, on a five-point scale, each party in terms of the level of anti-Semitism among its members and elected representatives, 1 being low and 5 high. The Labour Party received a combined score for 4 and 5 of 86%, significantly greater than 6% for the Conservatives, 11% for the Liberal Democrats, and 46% for UKIP. Corbyn himself was regarded as anti-Semitic by 86% of Jews, whereas only 2% said the same about the Conservative leader (Theresa May), 6% about the Liberal Democrat leader (Vince Cable), and 15% about the UKIP leader (Gerard Batten). Full data tables for these questions, plus the one about emigration, are available at:

<https://www.survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/JC-Combined-Tables.pdf>

31 August-1 September 2018: Survation

The questions about anti-Semitism in the four main political parties and their leaders were additionally put to a cross-section of 1,017 UK adults drawn from Survation's online panel. On the five-point scale, 43% assigned Labour the two worst positions (4 and 5) for anti-Semitism among the party's members and elected representatives, compared with 19% for the Conservatives, 13% for the Liberal Democrats, and 35% for UKIP. Corbyn was viewed as anti-Semitic by 39% of respondents, against 12% for May, 10% for Cable, and 13% for Batten. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Tables-Anti-Semitism-Questions-1.pdf>

When the same sample was asked about Islamophobia and the political parties, the tables were turned somewhat: the two worst positions (4 and 5) for Islamophobia among party members and elected representatives were assigned to UKIP (46%), followed by the Conservatives (24%), Labour (23%), and Liberal Democrats (13%). Corbyn was regarded as Islamophobic by 19% (thus being perceived as both the most anti-Semitic and most Islamophobic of the four leaders), Batten by 15%, May by 13%, and Cable by 9%. The fact that UKIP's leader is seen as so much less Islamophobic than his party may reflect reality but also that he is still very new in the role and thus an unknown quantity with the public. Data tables are at:

<https://www.survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Tables-Islamophobia.pdf>

10-13 September 2018: YouGov

The first of the two YouGov polls on the topic in September was commissioned by Labour against Antisemitism and undertaken online among 5,023 adults, 78% of whom had seen news coverage about accusations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. The party was viewed by 46% as having a problem with anti-Semitism (including by 19% of solid Labour voters and 32% of potential Labour voters). Corbyn was described as anti-Semitic by 33% of the whole sample (and by 10% of solid Labour voters and 16% of potential Labour voters). In handling the charges of anti-Semitism against Labour, a majority considered him incompetent (58%) and lacking in honesty and transparency (52%), while 40% assessed he had been fairly criticized for associating with people accused of Holocaust denial. Data tables are available at:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/aw1uth2tmb/180913_Results_WEB_FINAL.pdf

18-19 September 2018: YouGov

The second YouGov poll, conducted for *The Times* among 2,509 Britons, extended the debate to Islamophobia. Asked which of the four main political parties were generally anti-Semitic, 28% singled out the Labour Party and 29% UKIP; slightly more, 30%, thought Corbyn was generally anti-Semitic, against just 5% saying the same about Theresa May. Both Corbyn and his party fared much better in the Islamophobia stakes, with 9% considering them generally Islamophobic, the identical proportion for May (albeit her party was judged generally Islamophobic by 17%). Half the electorate viewed UKIP as Islamophobic. Findings were briefly noted in *The Times* for 22 September 2018 (p. 16), with full data tables available at:

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/2130woxm8k/Times_180919_VI_Trackers_w.pdf

19-20 September 2018: ComRes

Another national cross-sectional survey was carried out by ComRes for the *Jewish News* immediately before the 2018 annual Labour Party conference, 2,002 adult Britons being interviewed online. One-half the respondents denied that the Labour Party was doing enough to tackle anti-Semitism within its ranks, with only 19% thinking it was doing sufficient (and no more than 39% even among Labour voters). A similar number (45%) thought that Corbyn was either unwilling or unable to act decisively against anti-Semitism in his party, compared with 27% (albeit a majority, 55%, of Labour voters) who believed he was the target of a concerted smear campaign by his political opponents to try and discredit him over anti-Semitism. Asked what Labour MPs who were uncomfortable with Corbyn's attempts to deal with anti-Semitism in the party should do, 25% of all electors advised they should resign to avoid damaging their reputations, while the plurality (44%) preferred them to stay on and seek to effect change from within the party. For all three questions, don't knows comprised at least one-quarter of the sample. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Jewish-News-Antisemitism-in-the-Labour-Party-September-2018.pdf>

21-22 September 2018: BMG Research

On behalf of Huffington Post UK, BMG Research asked 1,006 members of its online panel whether they judged the Labour Party's anti-Semitism row to have affected public support for Jeremy Corbyn. Almost one-half the electorate (48%) thought support for Corbyn had lessened, and this was especially true of over-55s, suburbanites, and Conservative voters (all on 65%) and retired people (68%). Just under one-quarter (23%) felt public support for Corbyn was unchanged, and 6% sensed that it had improved, BMEs (13%) being among the most optimistic. The remaining 23% of the whole sample did not know what to think. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/huffpost-bmg-labour-conference-polling-results-part-1/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Church in Wales membership

The Church in Wales membership and finances report for 2017 was presented to the meeting of the Church's Governing Body in Lampeter on 13 September 2018. It is based upon an 89% return from ministry areas, mission areas, and parishes. On membership, relative to 2016, there was a negative movement on most performance indicators, substantially so for confirmations (which were 36% less than the year before). The two brighter spots were Easter communicants (up 1%) and average adult church attendance on weekdays only (up 25%). Total parochial income rose and exceeded expenditure in 2017 by 4%. Weekly direct giving per Sunday attender averaged £9.65, 21 pence more than in 2016. The report can be found at:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/cinw/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Membership-and-Finances-2017-E.pdf>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Religion of hospital patients

Professor Peter Selby is Consultant Physician at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust but also a non-stipendiary clergyman in the Church of England. As part of his recent ministerial training, he analysed the religious affiliation of all adult patients treated at the Trust during the past five years. Of the 263,288 patients aged 18 and over, 26.1% chose not to record their religion, either because they had none or for reasons of confidentiality, reducing the number of viable cases to 194,538. Of these, 65.5% self-identified as Christian, 18.1% as non-Christian, and 15.1% as of no religion, the last figure significantly below the proportion found in most national cross-sections of the British population (such as the British Social Attitudes Surveys), surprisingly so, given the greater number of under-35s among the patients. Part of the explanation for the divergence may lie in the concentration of BME communities in the area served by the Trust. Professor Selby hopes to extend the study to all other NHS trusts by requesting data under the Freedom of Information Act. The story was originally covered by the *Church Times* for 14 September 2018 (p. 9) at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/14-september/news/uk/nhs-religious-data-suggests-higher-religious-affiliation>

It was subsequently run by *The Times* on 17 September 2018 (p. 3) under the (predictable) headline ‘Sick Britons Find Religion in God’s Waiting Room’, which can be read by the newspaper’s subscribers at:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sick-britons-find-religion-in-god-s-waiting-room-jsxwv9tff>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Researching Religion

Steve Bruce’s *Researching Religion: Why We Need Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, x + 245pp., ISBN: 9780198786580, £25, hardback) is an important contribution to theory and method in the study of religion and, according to the blurb, ‘an informative, concise reference for students trying to unpick quantitative religious research. It shows how to gather valuable research and avoid pitfalls.’ The ten chapters explore, in turn, the principles of social research and value of social science; questions of definition, measurement, bias, and ethics in investigating religion; and case studies of conversion, social theory and religion, rationality/irrationality and religion, and the link between danger and religiosity. The author’s arguments are underpinned by numerous examples drawn from his own published research and that of others; they are both historical and contemporary, many deriving from the British context, albeit there appear to be no fresh statistical data. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/researching-religion-9780198786580?cc=gb&lang=en&>

London desecularization

London has historically been viewed as in the vanguard of British secularization, but recent decades have seen this process steadied and, to an extent, reversed on the back of immigration from overseas and the growth of black majority churches. These developments are explored in a fascinating collection of 17 research-led and often quantitatively rich essays on *The Desecularisation of the City: London’s Churches, 1980 to the Present*, edited by David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper (London: Routledge, 2019 [*sic*], xvii + 366pp., ISBN: 9780815348177, £115, hardback). The full contents, comprising a mixture of metropolitan overviews and local or denominational case studies, are as follows:

Section One: The Desecularisation of the City

1 The Desecularisation of the City: London’s Churches, 1980 to the Present – David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper

Section Two: Changes in London’s Churches, 1980 to the Present

2 The Demography of Religion in London since 1980 – Eric Kaufmann

3 The 2012 London Church Census – Peter Brierley

4 Walking down the Old Kent Road: New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark – Andrew Rogers

5 New Churches in Newham – Colin Marchant

- 6 Using Geotagged Twitter Data to Uncover Hidden Church Populations – Anthony-Paul Cooper
- 7 Growth and Decline in London Methodism, 1980 to the Present – Alan Piggot
- Section Three: Ethnicity and London’s Churches**
- 8 Mission Out of Africa: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in London – Babatunde Adedibu
- 9 Brazilian Churches in London – Daniel Clark
- 10 Capital-Wide Missions and the Rise of London’s Black-Led Churches – Hugh Osgood
- 11 Demographics and the Russian Orthodox Church in London – Robert Collins
- Section Four: Denominational Shifts**
- 12 London’s New Churches: The Example of the Newfrontiers Network – Sam Jeffery and William Kay
- 13 The Diocese of London and the Anglican Church in London, 1980 to the Present – Bob Jackson
- 14 Anglican Church Planting in East London, c. 2005-15 – Tim Thorlby
- 15 Visibly Different: Continuity and Change at Westminster Cathedral – Marion Bowman, Simon Coleman, John Jenkins, and Tiina Sepp
- Section Five: The Wider Historical and Sociological Contexts**
- 16 Church Decline and Growth in London: Taking the Long View – John Wolffe
- 17 London’s Churches: Sociological Perspectives – Grace Davie

Inevitably, there is scope for debating the inferences drawn by individual contributors and the summative implications of the data for the future of Christianity in London and in the British Isles more generally. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://www.routledge.com/The-Desecularisation-of-the-City-Londons-Churches-1980-to-the-Present/Goodhew-Cooper/p/book/9780815348177>

Scottish secularization

In “‘We Still Wanted that Sense of Occasion’: Traditions and Meaning-Making in Scottish Humanist Marriage Ceremonies’ (*Scottish Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3, August 2018, pp. 273-93), Isabella Kasselstrand reports on semi-structured interviews with 17 Scottish married couples in 2012. However, the opening pages of the article usefully reprise some of the quantitative evidence relating to secularization in Scotland and signpost relevant contributions to the academic literature. Access options are outlined at:

<https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/scot.2018.0244>

Perils of Perception

Bobby Duffy, incoming Director of the Policy Institute at King’s College London, has published his first book: *The Perils of Perception: Why We’re Wrong about Nearly Everything* (London: Atlantic Books, 2018, [6] + 298pp., ISBN: 9781786494566, £12.99, hardback). Based upon four years of data (2014-17) from Ipsos, the volume explores the often substantial gulf between perceptions and reality among global publics (including in Britain) when it comes to knowledge of a range of facts and issues. The findings are framed and interpreted against the background of recent thinking and research in social psychology and decision science. Religion makes a brief appearance in the work (pp. 110-16) in the shape of results for two

questions about Muslims: ‘Out of every 100 people in your country, about how many are Muslim?’ and ‘What percentage of the population in your country will be Muslim in four years’ time?’ In most nations, there was a significant gap, in the direction of too high, between the average guess and reality, in Britain’s case by, respectively, +11 and +16 points. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://atlantic-books.co.uk/book/the-perils-of-perception/>

British Social Attitudes Survey, 2017

NatCen’s first detailed analysis of the religious questions in the 2017 British Social Attitudes Survey indicates that the number of Britons describing themselves as belonging to the Church of England has halved in the previous 15 years, falling from 31% in 2002 to 14% now. The sharpest decline in Anglican allegiance has been among 45- to 54-year olds, but even the figure for over-65s has reduced from 51% in 2002 to 30% today. Although the proportion of Roman Catholics has remained relatively stable over time (8% in 2017), a majority of professing Catholics (58%) as well as of Anglicans (78%) attends church less than once a month. A majority of all adults (52%) has no religion, rising to 70% among under-25s (just 2% of whom are Anglican). For further information, see the NatCen press release at:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2018/september/church-of-england-numbers-at-record-low/>

Faith schools

Opponents of faith schools have been quick to seize upon new research at UCL Institute for Education which appears to demonstrate that ‘religious background is more important than a faith school education for academic success’. The findings are published in full as Alice Sullivan, Samantha Parsons, Francis Green, Richard Wiggins, George Ploubidis, and Timmy Huynh, ‘Educational Attainment in the Short and Long Term: Was there an Advantage to Attending Faith, Private, and Selective Schools for Pupils in the 1980s?’, *Oxford Review of Education*, online first edition, 2018. The evidence base comprises longitudinal data for 10,188 members of the 1970 British Cohort Study, who were resident in England and Wales in 1986. The authors examine academic outcomes in compulsory schooling and further education, and the highest qualification gained by age 42, in relation to type of secondary school attended. A unique feature of their analysis is that it controls for religion of upbringing, as well as other pupil and school characteristics. The article is freely available, on an open access basis, at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03054985.2018.1481378?needAccess=true>

There is also a press release and summary of the faith school aspects of the paper at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news-events/news-pub/sept-18/religious-background-more-important-faith-school-education-academic-success>

Anglicans and Brexit

In their post (‘How Anglicans Tipped the Brexit Vote’) on the LSE’s Brexit blog, Greg Smith and Linda Woodhead summarize their recent article in *Religion, State, and Society*, which featured in the August 2018 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*. The post can be found at:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/09/20/how-anglicans-tipped-the-brexit-vote/>