

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
Number 37 – October 2018

© Clive D. Field, 2018

OPINION POLLS

Religion in the home nations

As part of a trio of polls concerned with topical political issues, YouGov put a series of religious questions to samples of adults in England (n = 2,741), Wales (n = 2,016), and Scotland (n = 1,502). Interviews were conducted online between 30 May and 6 June 2018, although the findings have only just been released. Majorities in all three home nations did not regard themselves as belonging to any particular religion, and among the minorities who did, most individuals were non-practising in terms of attendance at religious services. Topline results are shown below:

- Regard self as belonging to a particular religion [asked of whole sample]: 36% in England (60% not), 32% in Wales (64% not), and 32% in Scotland (64% not)
- Active in local church or other religious institution [asked of whole sample]: 6% in England, 7% in Wales, and 7% in Scotland
- Attend religious services monthly or more [asked only of those belonging to a particular religion]: 22% in England (78% almost never or a few times a year), 27% in Wales (74% almost never or a few times a year), and 31% in Scotland (68% almost never or a few times a year)

Full data tables, with breaks by standard demographics, are available as follows:

England

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/8gzxmxtckl/FOE_England_June2018_Results_w.pdf

Wales

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/ux4c6rw4bx/FOE_Wales_June18_Results_w.pdf

Scotland

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/sur4dbksy5/Bond_180925_ResultsWithCode.pdf

Religion and death

Between 7 May and 25 June 2018, YouGov conducted a very large-scale (among 30,000 adults aged 16 and over) online survey of UK attitudes towards death, dying, and bereavement, on behalf of Co-operative Funeralcare. Full data tables have yet to be made available, but Co-operative Funeralcare have issued a press release highlighting differences between the main religious groups in answering some of the questions. Asked at what age they first thought about

their own death, there was a range from 19 for Muslims to 30 for Christians; and, in the aggregate, people of faith thought about it later than the self-identifying non-religious. When it came to discussing their own mortality, 51% of Hindus and 49% of Muslims felt uncomfortable; by contrast, 75% of humanists felt comfortable. Overall, religious persons were more geared up than non-religious people about what they would like for their own funeral, Jews (36%) being most prepared. Moreover, 18% of Jews already had a funeral plan in place, twice as many as any other religious group. Most respondents had not saved anything towards funeral costs, including 75% of the religious and 84% of non-religious. This sounds an immensely rich dataset and it remains to be seen how widely Co-operative Funeralcare are prepared to share it for secondary research, once they have extracted any commercially sensitive findings and exhausted the potential of the remainder for their own requirements. Meanwhile, the press release can be found at:

<https://www.co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/beyond-belief-dead-religious-brits-are-most-uncomfortable-discussing-death>

Mocking religion

Almost three-fifths (58%) of Britons think mocking religion is unacceptable, sub-divided between 18% who want the practice to be penalized legally (peaking at 24% of over-65s) and 40% who do not. Just over one-quarter (28%) judge it acceptable to mock religion, the proportion being greatest among men (41%, compared with 15% of women), Liberal Democrat voters (37%), and residents of Scotland (36%). The final 14% of the sample of 3,172 adults, interviewed by YouGov's app on 29 October 2018, did not know what to think. Detailed results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/29761d54-db60-11e8-b99f-9dda81f2fa35>

State of theology

The UK is a mission field. So concludes Florida-based Ligonier Ministries from their analysis of the answers given by 2,133 UK adults to 34 evangelically-worded theological and other statements in an online survey undertaken by ComRes on their behalf on 27-29 April 2018. Unsurprisingly, respondents struggled to engage with much of the questionnaire, the proportion of 'don't knows' exceeding 30% for 16 of the statements. Nevertheless, the sample sent very clear messages on a number of matters, with majorities *disagreeing* that 'even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation' (76%), 'sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin' (74%), 'abortion is a sin' (67%), 'it is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour' (67%), 'the Bible is 100% accurate in all that it teaches' (64%), 'the Bible is the highest authority for what I believe' (64%), 'the Bible has the authority to tell us what we must do' (63%), 'Christians should be silent on issues of politics' (57%), 'God will always reward true faith with material blessings in this life' (56%), 'only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Saviour receive God's free gift of eternal salvation' (54%), 'Hell is a real place where certain people will be punished forever' (53%), 'the Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible' (53%), 'Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin' (53%), 'there will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived' (51%), and 'Jesus Christ is the only person who never sinned' (50%). There were also majorities *agreeing* that 'religious belief is a matter of personal opinion, it is not about objective truth' (69%), 'everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature' (61%), 'the Bible, like all sacred writings, contains

helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true' (53%), and 'the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behaviour doesn't apply today' (52%). Ligonier Ministries have created a data explorer tool whereby the full results can be analysed by age, gender, home nation, education, income, marital status, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and attendance at religious services. Comparative findings are also available for samples of 520 practising UK Christians (interviewed by ComRes on 1-24 May 2018) and 3,002 US adults (interviewed by LifeWay Research). The data explorer can be accessed at:

<https://thestateoftheology.com/uk>

Additionally, full data tables for the two UK samples are available from ComRes at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/ligonier-state-of-theology/>

There was coverage of the survey in the *Church of England Newspaper* for 19 October 2018 (p. 3), focusing upon the replies given by UK evangelical Christians (and the alleged 'key gaps' in their theological understanding), but without mentioning that there were only 119 of them in the sample of UK churchgoers.

Visiting churches

Almost half of Britons (49%) have visited a church or chapel for one reason or another during the past year, according to an online survey by ComRes of 2,037 adults for the National Churches Trust (NCT) on 14-16 September 2018. The proportion was highest among the AB social group (56%), residents of South-West England and Wales (56%), public sector employees (58%), and Christians (59%). Least likely to have visited were Scots (36%), West Midlanders (38%), and religious nones (38%). The commonest reasons for visiting were rites of passage and tourism. Respondents were also asked about which of eight possible improvements would encourage them to visit churches in future, as a leisure activity or tourist attraction. Data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/National-Churches-Trust-ComRes-Data-Tables-September-2018-v2.pdf>

In parallel, through analysis of data on its own tourism website, the NCT has rated more than 2,000 English churches in terms of interiors, stained glass, churchyards, atmosphere, wildlife, national history, monuments, social history, and visitor facilities. This has enabled it to identify the country's 'five-star churches' at:

<https://www.explorechurches.org/five-star-churches-2018>

Islamophobia

Britons remain ambivalent in their attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, according to the latest research by ComRes, who interviewed 2,021 adults online on 15-16 October 2018 on behalf of MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development). On the one hand, there was significant recognition of the negativity which British Muslims face, with 58% agreeing that Islamophobia is a real problem, 48% that there is more discrimination against Muslims in Britain than against people of any other faith, 48% that prejudice against Islam makes it difficult to be a Muslim in Britain, and 47% that Britain is becoming less tolerant of Muslims. At the same time, as

individuals, respondents entertained various apprehensions which might be viewed as Islamophobic. For example, 22% said they would be concerned if a Muslim family moved in next door, 24% judged the Koran justifies the use of violence against non-Muslims, 30% foresaw circumstances under which they would stop their child visiting a mosque, 31% believed that Islam promotes terrorism, 38% would be worried if a member of their family married a Muslim, 43% would be concerned if a mosque was built in their neighbourhood, and 43% concurred that Western liberal society can never be compatible with Islam. More than three-fifths (62%) of the sample estimated that Muslims constituted 10% or more of the UK population. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MEND-Islamophobia-Poll-October-2018-1.pdf>

Jeremy Corbyn and anti-Semitism

As this edition of *Counting Religion in Britain* was being finalized, news reached BRIN of the early findings from the latest annual survey of attitudes towards Israel and the Middle East conducted by Populus for BICOM (British Israel Communications and Research Centre), 2,035 adults being interviewed online on 5-7 October 2018. In the light of the rows during the summer about perceived anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, BICOM added a couple of questions about the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn. One statement read: ‘Whatever Jeremy Corbyn claims, his actions and past history point to him being antisemitic’, with which 38% of Britons agreed; 25% preferred the alternative proposition that ‘Jeremy Corbyn is a committed campaigner against racism of all kinds including antisemitism’, while 37% were neutral or undecided. The other question concerned Corbyn’s role in the Middle East peace process, 19% thinking he had worked hard to deliver peace between Israel and the Palestinians, against 35% judging he was only interested in talking to organizations considered to be terrorists by the West. At this stage, just the BICOM press release is in the public domain at:

<http://www.bicom.org.uk/news/bicom-populus-poll-shows-38-per-cent-believe-corbyn-antisemite/#>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Christians against Poverty

An Independent audit, by LSE Housing and Communities, of the impact of the work of debt counselling charity Christians against Poverty (CAP) and its partnering churches has concluded that its annual benefit to society is worth £31.5 million in return for an annual expenditure of £8.7 million on poverty relief. The research involved 100 interviews with CAP managers, clients, and volunteers, together with quantitative examination and analysis of 12,600 records of people helped by CAP in 2013-16. Written by Anne Power, Bert Provan, Laura Lane, and Eleanor Benton, the 94-page *Never Just a Number: Evaluating the Impact of a Holistic Approach to UK Poverty* is available at:

<https://capuk.org/downloads/general/SROI-Full-FINAL-Low-Res.pdf>

Christians and climate change

Coinciding with the recent Special Report on Global Warming of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the *Church Times* of 12 October 2018 (pp. 3-4) released the findings of its own online survey conducted, between 17 September and 9 October 2018, among a self-selecting sample of 1,175 UK Christians (98% of them monthly or more churchgoers and 55% over 60). Asked to choose the most important issue facing the UK over the next 20 years, 28% selected climate change, which was second only to the National Health Service (29%) and ahead of the economy (18%). Three-quarters of respondents agreed that climate change was a very serious problem, and 60% were extremely or very worried about it. When questioned about the actions they had personally taken or would consider taking to address climate change, 63% claimed to have greatly reduced energy use, with a further 23% willing to contemplate it. The newspaper's coverage of the poll, which is likely disproportionately to have attracted replies from those engaged with the issue (and thus may not be fully representative of all churchgoing Christians), can be found at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/12-october/news/uk/christians-express-alarm-at-climate-change-threat>

Cathedral statistics

The Church of England has published a 42-page report on *Cathedral Statistics, 2017*, recording details of worship and other activities taking place during that calendar year. Usual weekly attendances at the 42 mainland cathedrals were 36,000 (evenly split between Sunday and mid-week services), while congregations at Easter were 52,000 (with 54% taking Holy Communion) and at Christmas 135,000 (with 27% communicating). Cathedral visitors numbered 9,000,000, with 39% paying or donating for entry, together with a further 1,200,000 at Westminster Abbey (99% of whom paid or donated for entry). The report is available at:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/Cathedral%20Statistics%202017_1.pdf

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Hate crime

Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2017/18 has been published by the Home Office as Statistical Bulletin 20/18. The report covers both police-recorded hate crime in 2017/18 and hate crime declared by adults interviewed for the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) in 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18. Among police-recorded hate crime, there were 8,336 cases of religious hate crimes, 40% more than in 2016/17, and equivalent to 9% of all hate crimes; 52% of the perceived targets of religious hate crimes were Muslims and 12% Jews, with 21% of unknown religion. Analysis of CSEW data suggested that the true annual figure for religiously motivated hate crime each year is 39,000 incidents and also revealed Muslims to be eight times more likely than the population at large to be victims of religiously motivated hate crime. The bulletin and associated data tables are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2017-to-2018>

Is Britain fairer?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published its triennial review on *Is Britain Fairer? The State of Equality and Human Rights, 2018*. The question is answered on the basis of official and other statistics covering education, work, living standards, health, justice and personal security, and participation. Where applicable, and possible (many data gaps are noted), statistics in the report are disaggregated by religion, and this is especially so in the chapter on work. However, all the supporting data are separately available as Excel files. There are also parallel reports on *Is Wales Fairer?* and *Is Scotland Fairer?* The whole corpus, a must for anybody interested in religious inequalities, can be accessed at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Churchgoers and Darwinian evolution

Predictors of the rejection of evolution among 2,232 committed churchgoers surveyed in 2009 and 2015-17 are explored by Andrew Village and Sylvia Baker in 'Rejecting Darwinian Evolution: The Effects of Education, Church Tradition, and Individual Theological Stance among UK Churchgoers', *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 60, No. 3, September 2018, pp. 285-303. Respondents, comprising 'a convenience sample that relied on volunteers who were sufficiently interested in the topic to take part', were drawn from over 200 Protestant churches, mostly in northern England. Among the authors' key conclusions are: 'Frequent church attendance and Bible reading both predicted rejection ... Higher education of any kind may reduce the likelihood of rejection of evolution among many UK churchgoers, but theological conservatives from any tradition will tend to maintain their belief that Darwinian evolution does not explain the origin of species whatever their educational experience.' Access options to the article are outlined at:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-018-0335-8>

Clergy burnout

Clergy burnout is investigated in Andrew Village, John Payne, and Leslie Francis, 'Testing the Balanced Affect Model of Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health: Replication among Anglican Clergy in Wales', *Rural Theology*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2018, pp. 93-100. Their data derive from a postal survey of all clergy serving in parochial ministry in the Church in Wales, of whom 358 (a 54% response rate) completed the Francis Burnout Inventory together with an index of thoughts about leaving the ministry. Access options to the article are outlined at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14704994.2018.1519918>

Methodists and party choice

Clive Field takes a long-term view of Methodist psephology in 'Crosses on the Ballot: The Political Alignments of British Methodists, 1832-2017', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 61, Part 6, October 2018, pp. 239-64. The article surveys what is currently known about the voting behaviour of British Methodists at parliamentary elections in four periods:

1832-67, 1867-1918, 1918-45, and 1945-2017. It draws upon a wide range of qualitative and quantitative primary and secondary evidence, including, for more recent years, data from the British Social Attitudes Surveys and the British Election Study Internet Panel. There are four summative reflections on: the party choice of Methodists; the impact of the Methodist vote; the prominence of religious considerations in determining Methodist voting; and the intrusion of party politics into Methodist life at the grass roots. To access a copy, if you or your institution does not subscribe to the journal, contact c.d.field@bham.ac.uk

Social science and religion

Steve Bruce has followed up his recent book on *Researching Religion* (see the September 2018 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*) with a post on the *Religion and Global Society* blog: “‘We Need Social Science’: In Defence of the Scientific Study of Religion’. In it, he explains the rationale for writing the volume (which he likens to his ‘swansong’), outlines his own ‘conversion’ to quantitative methods from ethnographic ones, and argues that large-scale datasets disprove four common (and optimistic) assertions made about the state of religion in Britain. Read the post at:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2018/10/we-need-social-science-in-defence-of-the-scientific-study-of-religion/>

NEW DATASETS

UK Data Service SN 8390: National Survey for Wales, 2017-2018

The National Survey for Wales (NSW) is conducted by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Welsh Government and three of its sponsored bodies. Between April 2017 and March 2018, 11,381 adults aged 16 and over living in private households in Wales were interviewed face-to-face and by self-completion questionnaire. The NSW now subsumes topics from five predecessor surveys, including local area and environment, NHS and social care, internet and media, children and education, housing, democracy and government, sport and recreation, wellbeing and finances, culture and Welsh language, and population health. Answers for these can be analysed by the single question on religion (‘what is your religion?’) There is also a question on volunteering on behalf of religious and other groups. A catalogue description of the dataset is at:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8390>

Pew Research Center: Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Spring 2017

The 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey was undertaken in 38 countries, including Great Britain (where 1,066 adults aged 18 and over were interviewed via telephone by Kantar Public UK between 6 March and 3 April 2017). The religion information gathered in Britain all related to Islam: the perceived threat posed by Islamic State (ISIS); concern about extremism in the name of Islam; and approval of US President Donald Trump’s plans to introduce tighter restrictions on immigration from some Muslim-majority countries. Unfortunately, two background religion questions asked in most of the nations surveyed, about the frequency of prayer and the importance of religion in the respondent’s life, were not included on the British schedule this time (but have been asked previously). Access to the dataset is available, after registration, at:

<http://www.pewglobal.org>