

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 39 – December 2018

© Clive D. Field, 2018

## OPINION POLLS

### ***The Times* end-of-year religion poll**

*The Times* commissioned YouGov to conduct an end-of-year poll on religious issues, for which 1,660 adult Britons were interviewed online on 14-15 December 2018. Although the detailed computer tabulations of results have not yet been made available on YouGov's website, topline findings were reported in the newspaper in two tranches.

The first set of questions, appearing in *The Times* of 24 December 2018 (p. 6), concerned the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and his interventions in the political arena during the course of the year. Respondents were asked whether they thought it was appropriate or inappropriate for the Archbishop to express opinions on political issues. In line with a long-standing tradition in public opinion to wish to keep religion and politics separate, a plurality of respondents (44%) said it was not appropriate for the Archbishop to speak out, against 35% who judged it appropriate and 21% who were undecided. However, when the sample was shown a list of the Archbishop's actual 'political' utterances during 2018, many admitted to sharing his views. For example, 66% agreed with Welby's assessment that the economic model is broken, 59% that it is wrong to allow online companies to pay negligible amounts of taxation, 53% that the new system of Universal Credit has left many people worse off, and 39% that zero-hours contracts are 'the reincarnation of an ancient evil'.

The second set of questions, reported on 28 December 2018 (p. 7), replicated those which had been asked in eve-of-Christmas surveys in 2016 and 2017. Allowing for sampling error, belief in God held reasonably steady, at 29%, just ahead of belief in some sort of spiritual greater power on 24%, with 33% believing in neither and 14% uncertain. Fewer than in previous years (56%, compared to 63% in 2016 and 61% in 2017) claimed never to attend church (disregarding the rites of passage), but the number going regularly has declined, exemplified in the rise from 20% to 24% in those worshipping once a year or less (which, for all practical purposes, is virtually the same as never). A similar pattern was observed for private prayer; although people who never prayed dropped by four points from 2017, to 50%, there was a decrease in frequent prayer (daily or several times a month) and a corresponding growth, from 10% to 13%, in individuals praying only a few times a year.

### **Eurobarometer: valuing religion**

Standard Eurobarometer Wave 90.3 included a trio of questions asked fairly regularly by the European Commission about values (including religion) deemed of most importance personally and best representing the European Union (EU), and the factors (including religion) creating a feeling of community among EU citizens. The UK fieldwork was conducted by Kantar UK via face-to-face interviews with 1,015 adults aged 15 and over between 9 and 22 November 2018. The survey was also undertaken in the 27 other member states of the EU, five

candidate countries, and the Turkish Cypriot community. In the vast majority of nations, religion was deemed of very limited significance. Asked to pick the three most important values to them personally, from a list of twelve possibles, only 5% of UK respondents selected religion, the EU28 average being 6%. Topline results can be found at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/index#p=1&instruments=STANDARD>

### **Understanding religious festivals**

The majority (58%) of more than 2,000 British adults interviewed online by YouGov agreed that it is important to understand the story of religious festivals which other people celebrate, regardless of whether respondents celebrated them themselves. Even 54% of religious nones agreed with the statement, albeit the figure rose to 62% among those who affiliated to a religion (including 65% of Catholics). The proportion in agreement declined with age, from 64% of persons aged 18-24 to 55% of over-55s. When it came to confidence in being able to retell religious festival stories, 71% of the whole sample declared they were confident in being able to retell the Christmas story (ranging from 56% of 18-24s to 83% of over-55s), but 18% admitted to lacking confidence about retelling the stories of any major festivals, including Christmas. Understanding of non-Christian festivals and holidays was particularly low. The results of the survey, commissioned by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) and the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), have yet to be published in full (this summary is a composite account from several media reports).

### **Christmas carols**

Three-fifths of British adults, interviewed online by YouGov for Yahoo, claimed to enjoy singing or listening to carols over the Christmas period. One-fifth (21%) did not, the proportion being notably greater among men (30%) than women (14%). A blog about the favourite aspects of Christmas poll can be found at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2018/12/24/britains-favourite-things-about-christmas-family-f>

### **Religious education in schools**

A second tranche of findings from an online ComRes poll among 2,031 Britons for Theos on 26-28 October 2018 has been released, this time relating to five statements about religious education (RE) in schools. Toplines were as follows:

- ‘RE should be compulsory for all children in school’: agree 45%, disagree 28%, neither 26%
- ‘RE is not as important as English, Maths, and Science’: agree 62%, disagree 17%, neither 21%
- ‘It is important that children learn about the different religions and beliefs in Britain’: agree 66%, disagree 11%, neither 23%
- ‘Better RE in schools would help avoid prejudices towards religious people’: agree 54%, disagree 18%, neither 28%
- ‘Schools are increasingly restricted in what they can say about religion’: agree 59%, disagree 7%, neither 34%

Breaks by standard demographics, but not including religious affiliation, are available in the tables at:

<https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/theos-re-in-schools-research/>

### **Racial bias**

On behalf of *The Guardian*, ICM Unlimited surveyed online 1,000 black, Asian, and ethnic minority (BAME) adults aged 18 and over on 17-22 October 2018, to ascertain the extent of their everyday experiences of unconscious bias. ‘What is your religion?’ was one of the demographic variables, the distribution of replies being: 31% Christian, 26% Muslim, 12% Hindu, 10% other religions, 17% no religion, and 3% don’t know or prefer not to say. The answers to all the questions about experience of 13 types of unconscious bias were disaggregated by four religious groups: Christian, Muslim, all other religions, and no religion. Respondents were additionally invited to say whether they attributed these negative experiences to their religion or to another factor, and Muslims were more likely to cite religion than BAME people of other faiths. The dataset can be downloaded from:

<https://www.icmunlimited.com/polls/>

### **Perils of perception, 2018**

One of the questions asked in the latest Ipsos MORI Perils of Perception study, conducted from 28 September to 16 October 2018 in 37 countries, was: ‘out of every 100 people in [country], about how many do you think are Muslim?’ In Great Britain, where 1,000 adults aged 16-64 were interviewed online, the average guess was 17%, which Ipsos MORI reckoned to be 13% above reality. Britain was not alone, for the number of Muslims was overestimated in every nation surveyed apart from Turkey, the widest gaps between perception and reality being 24% in South Africa and 22% in Belgium. Topline figures are available at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/perils-perception-2018>

### **Islam and British society**

A plurality (48%) of Britons continues to think there is a fundamental clash between Islam and the values of British society, according to the latest YouGov@Cambridge tracker, conducted online with 1,682 adults on 8-9 November 2018. The proportion was highest among over-50s (58%), Conservatives (63%), and people who voted ‘leave’ in the 2016 referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union (69%). One-quarter of respondents believed that Islam is generally compatible with British values, while 27% were undecided (including between the two options). Full data tables are available at:

[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/rb5g6aigov/YGC%20Tracker%20GB%20Nov%202018.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/rb5g6aigov/YGC%20Tracker%20GB%20Nov%202018.pdf)

### **Sexual violence**

On behalf of the End Violence against Women Coalition, YouGov surveyed an online sample of 3,922 Britons on 19 September 2018 about their attitudes to rape and the aftercare of victims

of rape. Replies were analysed by a range of variables, including by religious affiliation (no religion, Christian, other religion, and prefer not to say). Data tables are available at:

[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/9cqgcebr68/EVAW\\_ResuIts\\_180919\\_ClientPRTTable.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/9cqgcebr68/EVAW_ResuIts_180919_ClientPRTTable.pdf)

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Faith schools and school choice**

Continuing its campaign against faith schools, the National Secular Society has published *The Choice Delusion: How Faith Schools Restrict Primary School Choice in England*. It highlights how the existence of faith schools limits primary school choice for parents who do not want a faith-based education for their children, or do not share the faith of a particular school in their area. The evidence derives from (a) analysis of potential primary school choices available for 520 randomly selected English postcodes (both urban and rural) and (b) enumeration of families denied their first preference for a non-faith primary or secondary school and assigned a faith school instead. The report is available at:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/the-choice-delusion-how-faith-schools-restrict-primary-school-choice-in-england.pdf>

### **Barna's Pastor Poll**

As part of its increased penetration of the UK religious research market, Barna Global is aiming to develop a representative Pastor Poll, which will survey church leaders from across the UK twice a year on issues such as their beliefs, emotional and spiritual health, and how they can be better equipped to lead their churches. Barna is currently inviting pastors to join this new online panel. Several denominations, including the Baptist Union and Church of Scotland, are encouraging their ministers to do so.

### **Jewish brain drain**

Highly educated Jews (especially those with postgraduate qualifications) are, on average, less actively engaged in organized Jewish life than other members of the community, according to the latest report from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR): Stephen Miller, *Academic Achievement and Engagement in Jewish Life: First Signs of a Brain Drain?* The evidence derives from four sample surveys of British Jews conducted over the past 23 years, three by JPR (in 1995, 2010, and 2013) and one by City University (in 2015). Educational achievement was correlated with measures of religious beliefs and practices, ethnic behaviours and attitudes, Jewish identity, and perceptions of Israel (the most highly qualified Jews being more dovish in their views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and more critical of the Israeli government). The report is available at:

<https://jpr.org.uk/publication?id=16753>

## European Union survey of anti-Semitism

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has published *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism: Second Survey on Discrimination and Hate Crime against Jews in the EU* (2018), together with the associated questionnaire, the first survey having been conducted in 2012 and published in 2013. Online data collection for the second study, in May-June 2018, was the responsibility of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and Ipsos MORI and it took place in 13 European countries, including Great Britain, where there were 4,731 responses from self-identifying Jews, whether defined by religion or some other attribute. The sample was entirely self-selecting, the survey being of the open, opt-in type, publicized on the FRA website and via Jewish organizations, Jewish media outlets, and social networks. Given the subject matter was Jewish experiences and perceptions of hate crime, discrimination, and anti-Semitism, it is possible that the study disproportionately attracted responses from individuals with direct experience of these phenomena. In Britain, 75% of the Jews who replied considered anti-Semitism to be a very or fairly big problem in the country, with 58% assessing it had increased a lot over the past five years, during which period 34% claimed to have been subjected to at least one of six forms of anti-Semitic harassment. About one in six (17%) felt they had been discriminated against on the basis of their religion or belief in the past year, albeit this was the joint lowest figure than in any other European country apart from Hungary. The main FRA report and questionnaire can be found at:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/2nd-survey-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews>

JPR has also put out a short paper of reflections on the survey, which is available at:

[http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2018.Reflections\\_on\\_the\\_FRA\\_antisemitism\\_survey.pdf](http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2018.Reflections_on_the_FRA_antisemitism_survey.pdf)

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### Census of population, England and Wales, 2021

Government has published its White Paper on arrangements for the 2021 census of population in England and Wales (different provisions will be made for Scotland and Northern Ireland). Census day will be Sunday, 21 March 2021 and the aspiration is that 75% of household schedules will be completed and filed online. The White Paper sets out the independent UK Statistics Authority's recommendations for the content of the census. In terms of religion (p. 58, paragraphs 3.139-3.142), the same question will be asked as in 2001 and 2011, although some small adjustments in the presentation of response options are under consideration. With regard to the question on ethnic group (pp. 48-52, paragraphs 3.87-3.114), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has examined the case for Sikhs (paragraphs 3.101-3.109) and Jews (paragraphs 3.110-3.114) to be able to self-describe their ethnicity as Sikh and Jew, respectively, quite separately from their answers to the religion question. However, following field research and stakeholder consultation, ONS has ruled out the inclusion of specific response options for Sikh and Jew under ethnic group. For both religion and ethnicity questions, hope is being placed upon improvements which are expected to derive from new 'search-as-you-type' functionality, which will assist respondents better to define their identity. The White Paper, *Help Shape Our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales* (Cm 9745), can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **Marriage law: religious elements in civil marriage**

Current law prohibits the use of religious elements in civil marriage ceremonies, in order to ensure their separation from those conducted according to religious rites. However, a forthcoming article ('Neither Sacred Nor Profane: The Permitted Content of Civil Marriage Ceremonies') by Stephanie Pywell and Rebecca Probert in *Child and Family Law Quarterly* suggests that registrars may be applying the official guidelines unevenly, because they cannot be expected to be expert in the marriage customs of all religions. In practice, since they are most familiar with the traditional marriage vows and rituals of the Church of England, registrars are instinctively more likely to spot and disallow their inclusion in a civil marriage ceremony than in the case of other faith-based requests by couples. A preliminary announcement about the article is at:

[https://www.familylaw.co.uk/news\\_and\\_comment/religious-vows-rituals-readings-and-music-should-be-allowed-in-civil-marriage-study-shows](https://www.familylaw.co.uk/news_and_comment/religious-vows-rituals-readings-and-music-should-be-allowed-in-civil-marriage-study-shows)

### **Religious education teachers**

The results of a quantitative and qualitative online survey of 465 practising religious education (RE) teachers in 2017 are reported by David Smith, Graeme Nixon, and Jo Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion: An Empirical Study of UK Religious Education Teachers' Essentialist Religious Discourse', *Religions*, Vol. 9, No. 11, Article 361, 2018, 19pp. A plurality of 45% of respondents identified as theist, 31% as agnostic, 18% as atheist, and 5% as other. Asked whether religion is dangerous, 37% replied not at all, against 28% who agreed slightly, 24% somewhat, 8% moderately, and 4% absolutely. Only 6% said religion should not be taught in a positive way in RE, 60% agreeing absolutely that it should be and 34% agreeing to a lesser extent. The article is published on an open access basis at:

<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/11/361>

### **Anglican self-identity**

Andrew Village has used data from a self-selecting sample of 9,339 clerical and lay readers of the *Church Times* in 2001 and 2013 to establish correlations between, on the one hand, positioning on a seven-point semantic differential scale of liberalism-conservatism and, on the other, beliefs and attitudes related to doctrine, moral issues, and church practices. Four main conclusions emerged from the analysis. His 'What Does the Liberal-Conservative Scale Measure? A Study among Clergy and Laity in the Church of England' is published in *Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 31, No. 2, November 2018, pp. 194-216. Access options to the article are outlined at:

[https://brill.com/abstract/journals/jet/31/2/article-p194\\_3.xml](https://brill.com/abstract/journals/jet/31/2/article-p194_3.xml)

### **Anglican clerical burnout**

The sense of feeling supported by professional advisers has been found to reduce the levels of self-reported stress among Anglican clergy, after controlling for personal, psychological, environmental, and theological or ecclesial factors. The source data were generated by the Church Growth Research Programme in 2013 among 1,268 full-time stipendiary Church of England clergy aged 68 or under. Results are reported by Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and David Voas in 'Stress Levels among Anglican Clergy: The Beneficial Effects of Feeling Supported', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 31, No. 2, November 2018, pp. 265-87. Access options to the article are outlined at:

[https://brill.com/abstract/journals/jet/31/2/article-p265\\_6.xml](https://brill.com/abstract/journals/jet/31/2/article-p265_6.xml)

### **Violence against Anglican clergy**

One in ten members of the Church of England clergy has been the victim of violent behaviour in the last two years, a survey conducted by Royal Holloway University of London, and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, has found. The same proportion reported that they were experiencing more anti-Christian hate crime than two years ago. Over two-thirds had suffered verbal abuse during the same period, most commonly for declining to give money to somebody. The sample comprised 546 clergy from South-East England, excluding London. The study's results have featured in several press reports, notably in the *Daily Telegraph* for 29 December 2018 at:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/28/one-ten-members-clergy-victims-violence-anti-christian-hate/>

## PEOPLE NEWS

### **Ben Clements: research grant to survey Catholics**

University of Leicester academic and BRIN project team member Ben Clements is principal investigator for a new research project into 'Roman Catholics in Britain: Faith, Society, and Politics', which is to be funded to the tune of £170,228 by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council between January 2019 and June 2020. Stephen Bullivant of St Mary's University, Twickenham is co-investigator. Research data will be gathered via a large-scale and nationally representative sample of British Catholics. Further information is available at:

<https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FS003258%2F1>