

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
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OPINION POLLS

Ozanne Foundation's latest research into religious attitudes to same-sex marriage

A plurality (48%) of 1,171 self-identifying Anglicans in England, interviewed online by YouGov for the Ozanne Foundation on 20–25 February 2020, accepted that same-sex marriage is right, representing an increase on the figures obtained in previous surveys, in 2013 (by the Westminster Faith Debates, 38%) and 2016 (42%). This growing approval of same-sex marriage among Anglicans is being driven by generational change, since majorities of professing Anglicans under 65 years of age already support same-sex marriage, and it is just the over-65 cohort that remains resistant (30% saying it is right and 48% wrong). There is also a majority among Anglican women (53%), twelve points more than for Anglican men. For Anglicans as a whole, 34% still believe same-sex marriage is wrong, while 18% are undecided. In the British population at large, 5,169 members of which were interviewed for the survey, 60% regarded same-sex marriage as right (including 73% of religious nones and 56% of Roman Catholics), 24% as wrong, and 16% were uncertain. A press release and full data tables are available at:

<https://ozanne.foundation/same-sex-marriage-research/>

Religious attendance in England in 2018: Savanta ComRes survey for Jerusalem Trust

Savanta ComRes have just released the results of a telephone survey of 'engagement in collective Christian devotional activity' (apparently meant to be broader than churchgoing), that was undertaken, on behalf of the Jerusalem Trust, among 6,000 adults in England between 23 August and 26 September 2018. The wording of the primary question was not entirely straightforward, intentionally omitting 'church', and evidently causing a certain amount of confusion among non-Christian respondents: 'On average, how often, if at all, would you say you participate in Christian activities or services with other people?' In reply, 79% said never and 12% once a month or more (the commonly accepted definition of regular churchgoing these days), peaking at 17% in London and 22% among self-identifying Christians. A striking feature of the findings was the relative lack of difference between men and women. The 16% who ever participated in Christian activities or other services were then asked four supplementary questions, about the type of activity they usually attended, the kind of setting they met in, the day the activity took place, and the number of years they had been participating. Almost half (45%) stated they had been attending from birth or early childhood, 17% for 20–40 years, 11% for 10–20 years, 10% for 5–10 years, and 15% for less than five years. Data tables are available at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/jerusalem-trust-church-attendance-in-england-september-2018/>

Reading habits: analysis of YouGov Profiles data for World Book Day

In an analysis of YouGov Profiles data, undertaken in connection with World Book Day, 7% of Britons claimed that religion and spirituality books were a favourite genre for their non-fiction reading, dropping to 5% among under-25s and rising to 8% for adults aged 30–55 and women. The most popular non-fiction genres were biography and memoirs (26%), history (20%), food and drink (19%), and science and technology (16%). Two-fifths of panellists indicated they had no favourite non-fiction genre. A blog about the study is available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/arts/articles-reports/2020/03/05/world-book-day-britons-reading-habits>

Is there too much talk about religious prejudice? ICM Unlimited poll for British Future

On 10–13 January 2020, ICM Unlimited undertook an online survey of 2,305 adults on behalf of British Future. The focus of the investigation was immigration, but a clutch of questions was asked about whether particular issues were talked about too much or not. One of the topics was ‘prejudice (e.g. anti-Semitism and Islamophobia)’. Just under one-quarter, 24%, of the sample thought this was talked about too much, including 31% of people aged 45–54. Slightly more, 26%, said that prejudice was too little spoken about, among them 34% of under-25s, while 35% judged exposure of the issue to be about right and 14% were undecided. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.icmunlimited.com/our-work/british-future-immigration-in-the-new-parliament-polling/>

British Muslim attitudes to policing, extremism, and the Prevent programme

Crest Advisory, the specialist crime and justice consultancy, has published an important 121-page report by Jon Clements, Manon Roberts, and Dan Forman, *Listening to British Muslims: Policing, Extremism, and Prevent*. It is based upon mixed methods research funded by a charitable trust, comprising 12 focus groups attended by a total of 86 British Muslims, the results of which informed subsequent online interviewing, by Savanta ComRes in October–November 2019, of representative samples of 1,000 British Muslim adults and 1,000 Britons (serving as a control group). An executive summary appears on pp. 8–11. Detailed findings from the focus groups are outlined on pp. 26–62, while the online polling is showcased on pp. 63–89. Overall, British Muslims thought Britain is a good place to be Muslim. They generally trusted British institutions (including the police) to act fairly towards them, the notable exception being the media, which are perceived negatively. British Muslims were not in denial about the threat posed by Islamist extremism. They had mostly not heard of the government’s Prevent (counter-radicalization) programme, but, when it was explained to them, they were broadly supportive of it. Appendix A (pp. 94–6) provides a checklist (not exhaustive) of existing polls about British Muslim attitudes to extremism, and the online questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix G (pp. 113–21). The report and 598 pages of data tables (actually hosted on the Savanta ComRes website) can be accessed via the news release at:

<https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/listening-to-british-muslims-policing-extremism-and-prevent>

Who is triskaidekaphobic? YouGov survey on March's Friday the thirteenth

Triskaidekaphobia, the fear of the number 13, has always been an important component of popular superstition, not least when the thirteenth of any month falls on a Friday. So, YouGov was prompted to ask 3,796 Britons on 13 March 2020 whether they were in any way more cautious when it is Friday the thirteenth. One in eleven (9%) of them said that they were, the proportion peaking at 11% among residents of northern England and Labour voters. Least wary, at 7%, were Midlanders and the Welsh, Scots, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and those engaged in non-manual occupations. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 86%, claimed not to be more cautious on Friday the thirteenth, while 5% did not know whether they were or not. Full data tables are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/survey-results/daily/2020/03/13/1c756/3>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus and faith communities

The national health and economic emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic is naturally impacting faith communities. BRIN has noted several quantitative aspects of this which may be of interest to our readers.

Church of England

With public worship now impossible in any physical sense, on account of government restrictions and ecclesiastical decrees, the Church of England has claimed its largest 'congregation' ever for a virtual service from Lambeth Palace, and led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, on 22 March 2020 (Mothering Sunday in the UK and also designated a National Day of Prayer and Action). This is estimated to have been seen or heard by around five million people. The figure includes one million streaming on Facebook and two million tuning in via BBC national and local radio. The Facebook post had a further reach of two million, and nearly 30% of those watching online were under the age of 34. See the news release at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/church-england-attracts-largest-congregation-ever-first-virtual-service>

Jews

The Board of Deputies of British Jews reported that, as at 24 March 2020, 22 UK Jews had died after contracting coronavirus, equivalent to almost 5% of the national death toll as at that point, despite the fact that Jews constitute only 0.5% of the UK population. The Board gathered the information from the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, the Federation of Synagogues, the United Synagogue, the Joint Jewish Burial Society, and Liberal Judaism. Commenting on the statistics in the *Jewish News* for 26 March 2020 (p. 3), Jonathan Boyd, of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, observed that: (a) British Jews are relatively elderly, and thus potentially more at risk of catching the virus; (b) at the same time are relatively healthy, in reflection of their 'wealthier and better educated socio-economic profile'; but (c) are in more danger of catching the virus through 'temptation to convene, for halachic reasons and with Pesach pending'. His article can be read at:

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/why-jews-may-be-at-more-risk-of-virus-and-why-they-may-not/>

Boyd also had a column in the *Jewish Chronicle* for 27 March 2020 (p. 38), warning that ‘Coronavirus could destroy our community’ by undermining, and breaking the habits of, the connectedness that is the very essence of Judaism. ‘My concern is that when this is all over we will see a short-term spike in participation fuelled by the relief of being able to return to normal life, followed by a significant slump.’ The article is available online to subscribers but there is no public domain access at the time of writing.

The Board of Deputies revised the number of Jewish deaths to 34 on 27 March 2020, equivalent to 4.5% of all UK deaths by that date.

Muslims

The *Journal of British Muslim Studies* is devoting its inaugural issue, scheduled for publication in the autumn of 2020, to the impact of coronavirus on the British Muslim community. It has issued a call for papers, with deadlines for abstracts of 1 May and for submissions of 1 September, but has also launched an online survey to gather evidence and inform short- and long-term community efforts and policy. Although the survey will inevitably be completed by a self-selecting, and thus potentially unrepresentative, sample, it will still be interesting to see the quantitative data. The survey instrument is available at:

<https://www.britishmuslimstudies.com>

Humanists

Meanwhile, on 28 March 2020, Humanists UK emailed members of its own network, inviting them to complete a short online questionnaire, available on Google Forms, in order ‘to better understand how our community is affected by the coronavirus epidemic and how humanists are contributing already to the national effort’.

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Religion and belief in UK higher education: Advance HE report on 2017/18 data

Advance HE has published Natasha Codioli McMaster’s 49-page *Research Insight: Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education—Analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Data for 2017/18*, being the first year in which it became mandatory for higher education institutions to make returns of the religion or belief of their more than two million students. The report includes chapters on the basic profile of religion and belief; degree characteristics; degree attainment; and an intersectional analysis (by age, disability and impairment, ethnicity, gender, and social background). It contains breakdowns for each of the faith groups used in the population census, together with the additional category of ‘spiritual’ (with which female students disproportionately identified). Among the 82% of students who disclosed information about their religion or belief, half professed no religion, 33% were Christian, and 9% were Muslim. Muslims were underrepresented among students attending the most academically selective institutions and were also less likely than the norm to be awarded a first or 2:1 degree. The report is available, to members of Advance HE institutions, at:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/research-insight-religion-and-belief-uk-higher-education>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Catholics in Britain: new resources on the project website

Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant continue to add resources to the website of the AHRC-funded *Catholics in Britain* research project. Recent blogs by Clements, both drawing on the British Social Attitudes Surveys and the European Values Studies, are ‘Catholics’ Attitudes towards Social Issues: Same Sex Relations, Abortion, and Euthanasia’, and ‘Catholics’ Attitudes towards Religious Authority in Britain’. Bullivant and Clements have written a four-page report on *Everybody Loves Francis? British Catholics ‘Job Approval’ Ratings of the Pope*. This uses data from the project’s own survey, carried out by Savanta ComRes in October–November 2019 among a nationally representative sample of 1,823 self-identifying Catholics in Britain. Seven in ten of them saw Francis as representing a ‘change of direction’ for the papacy, and 50% regarded him as a change for the better. He was especially seen as doing an excellent or good job in standing up for traditional moral values (60%), spreading the Catholic faith (59%), and promoting good relations with other religions (59%). His lowest approval rating was for addressing the sex abuse scandal (42%). The report can be accessed at:

<https://catholicsinbritain.le.ac.uk/findings/new-report-everybody-loves-francis-british-catholics-job-approval-ratings-of-the-pope/#.Xmv9Rk2tpw>

Clements and Bullivant also have a new post on the *Religion in Public* blog concerning ‘A Generation Gap? Catholics and Social-Moral Issues in Britain’, which presents further findings from the Savanta ComRes survey. It contains four figures, illustrating the spread of Catholic attitudes across four generational groups (from Vatican II to Generation Z) to same-sex rights, euthanasia, reforms of Church teachings, and sinful behaviours. The blog is at:

<https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/03/27/a-generation-gap-catholics-and-social-moral-issues-in-britain/>

Five recent articles from academic journals

- Christopher Keep, ‘Evidence in Matters Extraordinary: Numbers, Narratives, and the Census of Hallucinations’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 4, 2019, pp. 582–607: investigation of the efforts of the then newly founded Society for Psychological Research to use quantitative methods to establish the evidential value of testimonial narratives, with special reference to the Census of Hallucinations (1889–92).
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/744866>
- Amber Curtis and Laura Olson, ‘Identification with Religion: Cross-National Evidence from a Social Psychological Perspective’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2019, pp. 790–812: uses a dataset of nationally representative samples from Germany, Poland, and the UK in 2015 to model five hypotheses relating to religious identification in terms of its importance (independent strength of attachment) and prominence (prioritized relative to other personal identities).
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jssr.12634>

- Leslie Francis, David Lankshear, and Emma Eccles, ‘Assessing Student Attitude toward Christianity in Church in Wales Primary Schools: Does Aided Status Make a Difference?’, *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2020, pp. 56–64: survey of 4,581 eight- to eleven-year-olds attending 87 Church in Wales primary schools in 2015–16, concluding that aided status does make a difference to attitude towards Christianity.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01416200.2017.1373067>
- Leslie Francis, David Lankshear, Emma Eccles, and Ursula McKenna, ‘Sustaining Churchgoing Young Anglicans in England and Wales: Assessing Influence of the Home’, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2020, pp. 34–50: survey of 2,019 nine- to eleven-year-olds attending church primary schools in Wales in 2016–17 and 2,323 thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds attending church secondary schools in England in 2015–16, demonstrating the religious influence of Anglican churchgoing parents.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2019.1607013>
- Jeremy Rodell, ‘Britain’s Religion and Belief Landscape’, *Theology*, Vol. 123, No. 1, 2020, pp. 28–40: provides a necessarily selective overview of the contemporary religious scene (Christianity, Islam, non-religion), a projection of its possible shape in 2040 (26% Christian, 11% non-Christian, 63% no religion), and a reflection from a humanist perspective (the author is the Dialogue Officer for Humanists UK).
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0040571X19883535>

NEW DATASET

UK Data Service, SN 8608: Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2018–2019

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (formerly the British Crime Survey) is a face-to-face victimization survey in which people resident in households in England and Wales are asked about their experiences of a range of crimes during the twelve months prior to interview, as well as about their attitudes to different crime-related issues. The series began in 1981. The 2018–19 survey was conducted by Kantar Public for the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, and Office for National Statistics and achieved 34,163 interviews with adults. In addition to investigating the incidence of religiously-motivated hate crime, respondents were asked to give their religious affiliation, which can function as a background variable for analysing replies to any other part of the questionnaire. A catalogue description of the dataset is available at:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8608>