

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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## OPINION POLLS

### Trust in the Church: latest data from the Charity Awareness Monitor

From time to time, BRIN has featured the results of the indicator of trust in public bodies and institutions (including the Church) that has been a component of nfpSynergy's Charity Awareness Monitor (CAM) since 2003. Each wave's data are collected through online interviews with 1,000 Britons aged 16 and over. Through the kindness of nfpSynergy, BRIN is now able to share with its readers the hitherto unpublished findings about trust in the Church from the most recent waves of CAM. They are given below (Table 1). It will be seen that approaching three-fifths of adults do not trust the Church much or only very little, around one-third trust it a great deal or quite a lot, and just under one person in ten is unsure.

**Table 1 Extent of trust in the Church, Great Britain, 2018–20 (percentages across)**

Year/Month	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not much	Very little	Not sure
2018, Apr	8	25	26	30	8
2018, Jul	7	24	26	34	7
2018, Oct	9	27	27	27	9
2019, Jan	7	23	28	32	8
2019, Apr	7	23	30	31	9
2019, Jul	8	23	30	29	8
2019, Oct	11	25	28	25	9
2020, Jan	9	24	24	31	10

### Belief in horoscopes and star signs: new data from Opinium Research

Comparatively little survey research seems to be undertaken into alternative beliefs these days, so it was good to unearth a solitary question buried in a conspiracy theories module of one of Opinium Research's polls on the coronavirus pandemic. Fieldwork was conducted on 7–9 April 2020, with 2,005 UK adults being interviewed online. Respondents were asked whether it was true or false that horoscopes and star signs can be used to predict accurately what kind of day a person would have. Overall, 77% considered the proposition to be false, while only 13% judged it true, with 11% unsure what to think. Historically, women have been particularly avid believers in horoscopes, but the gender gap now seems to have disappeared (in this study, at least). However, there are age cohort differences, notably the disproportionate number (28%) of under-35s who held Opinium's statement to be true. The proportion was also relatively high in London (22%), but that probably reflects the younger than average profile of the capital's population. The data can be found in the worksheet for Q18.A.5 of the dataset at:

<https://www.opinium.co.uk/public-opinion-on-coronavirus-7th-april/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

**Coronavirus chronicles: is the pandemic leading to a religious revival?**

It has long been debated whether national or global crises cause people to turn to some form of faith or belief. For example, in 2016, Steve Bruce and David Voas wrote an article in *Journal of Religion in Europe*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 26–43 on ‘Do Social Crises Cause Religious Revivals? What British Church Adherence Rates Show’. They found no evidence of any such correlation in respect of several twentieth-century crises, but rather a continuous process of secularization.

At one time, any positive effect of crises on religiosity could have been assessed in terms of increased numbers attending religious services. But since, in the current Covid-19 pandemic, places of worship are closed, even for private prayer, this method is obviously not possible. Undeterred, Sebastian Shehadi and Miriam Partington, two freelance journalists, have written a piece for the *New Statesman* on 27 April 2020 on ‘How Coronavirus is leading to a Religious Revival’. Their search for evidence to substantiate the claim in their title has mainly led them to cyberspace, and there are various references to downloads of religious apps and booming ‘congregations’ for online services, interwoven with quotes from interviews, including one with Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, who speaks of an ‘historic spiritual moment’. Altogether, the piece is unpersuasive. Hopefully, some agency will commission substantive and representative research into how the pandemic is affecting the religious beliefs and attitudes of Britons. Meanwhile, the *New Statesman* article is at:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2020/04/how-coronavirus-leading-religious-revival>

**Coronavirus chronicles: travails of the religious press**

As one might expect, BRIN, being run by a team of academics rather than journalists, relies quite heavily on the UK’s religious press as a source of information. That press, once a power in the land, has been in financial difficulties for some time, mainly because its subscriber base has been shrinking through cancellation (after price hikes), death, and disaffiliation, and print advertising has been declining rapidly as advertisers move to more cost-effective online platforms. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these longstanding problems, including through the enforced closure of places of worship where single and multiple newspaper copies were often sold, and threatens to tip individual titles over the edge.

The *Church Times*, the principal newspaper for the Church of England (formerly Anglo-Catholic in focus but now appealing to a broader readership), has continued to publish weekly in print, although its advertising volume is clearly reduced and there has been a marginal shift in the distribution of content towards online; it also has a special coronavirus subscription offer (on which, it is said, the paper is losing money). However, *The Church of England Newspaper*, founded as *The Record* in 1828 and with an evangelical leaning, has decided to suspend its weekly printed edition, at least for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis, but is still publishing an online edition.

In the Roman Catholic community, *The Catholic Herald*, which was established in 1888 and whose last self-reported circulation was 21,000 copies, has ceased (for good) publication on a weekly basis and will reincarnate as a monthly magazine, with half the aggregate content, albeit it still has a weekly e-newsletter. So far as is known, *The Catholic Times* and *The Catholic*

*Universe*, both published by the Universe Media Group, continue to appear, although the former's website has not been updated since late March. *The Tablet*, launched in 1840, is also still being published, as is the *Scottish Catholic Observer* (which has a coronavirus special subscription offer).

Great uncertainty has surrounded the future of the Jewish press this month. Shock waves went through the entire media industry when it was announced on 8 April 2020 that *The Jewish Chronicle*, the world's oldest continuously published Jewish newspaper (founded in 1841) was to be placed into voluntary liquidation, alongside *The Jewish News*, a free weekly title launched in 1997. The two newspapers, with a combined circulation of 40,000 copies (that of *The Jewish News* being the larger, at 21,000), had already agreed to merge in February, but it was claimed that this step alone could not save them in their current form. Readers were subsequently informed that two competing bids had been submitted to the liquidators for the assets of both titles, one of them put forward by the Kessler Foundation (the then owner of *The Jewish Chronicle*), with a view to launching a new Jewish newspaper.

Against this backdrop, *The Jewish News* published what was said to be its last (1154th), and commemorative souvenir, print edition on 15 April 2020. Then, five days later, it announced that, after all, it would carry on publishing 'until further notice', in weekly printed and electronic formats, as well as through a daily emailed edition and website. It explained that it is 'funded' and that previous talk of going into liquidation had been to accommodate a merger with *The Jewish Chronicle* that is 'not currently happening'. On 22 April, it became clear that it was Leo Noe, the owner of *The Jewish News*, who had taken it out of liquidation.

For its part, *The Jewish Chronicle*, in its edition of 17 April, had also indicated its intention to continue publishing as a printed newspaper but gave no further details. The edition for 24 April revealed the full story: the liquidators had sold the assets and liabilities of *The Jewish Chronicle* to the second and higher bidder, a consortium led by Sir Robbie Gibb (the former head of communications at 10 Downing Street) and which is now the owner of the newspaper. The consortium has given assurances that it intends to spend millions of pounds to secure the future of the title.

### **Coronavirus chronicles: UK Jewish mortality**

The UK's Jewish community continues to be exercised about its seemingly disproportionate mortality from coronavirus relative to the general population. The Board of Deputies of British Jews has been compiling its own record of the number of Jewish coronavirus-related deaths (where Covid-19 was certificated as a cause of death), within care homes and the community as well as in hospitals, and based upon funerals conducted by seven Jewish communal burial societies. The tally of Jewish deaths, as published in the daily edition of *The Jewish News*, is shown in Table 2, below. These figures can be compared with an overall UK mortality from Covid-19 of 26,711 by 30 April, for people who had tested positive for the virus. It would thus appear that the proportion of UK residents who have died of the virus to date and who were Jews is around 1.3%, much reduced from the number at the start of the pandemic but still outstripping the Jewish share of the population.

There has been quite a lot of media coverage about the issue, focused on determining whether the Jewish death toll has been disproportionately large, and, if so, what the explanations might be. The following articles represent only a small selection:

**Table 2 UK certificated Jewish coronavirus deaths, cumulative, 2020**

Date	Cumulative Jewish deaths	Date	Cumulative Jewish deaths
30 March	44	17 April	256
31 March	55	20 April	296
1 April	69	21 April	312
2 April	85	22 April	326
5 April	115	23 April	335
6 April	121	26 April	346
7 April	152	27 April	352
12 April	209	28 April	356
13 April	215	29 April	358

- In *The Jewish Chronicle* for 3 April 2020 (pp. 2–3), Jonathan Boyd, executive director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, concluded that it was too early to tell whether the Jewish mortality rate was unduly high; however, he did set out some factors that potentially put Jews at greater risk than the rest of the population overall, including their elderly profile, concentration in London, and propensity for physical social interaction. The article, actually posted online on 30 March, is available at: <https://www.thejc.com/comment/analysis/coronavirus-are-jews-disproportionately-dying-after-contracting-covid-19-1.498609>
- In *The Times* for 8 April 2020 (pp. 12–13), journalist Andrew Norfolk had a lengthy article investigating the impact of Covid-19 on faith communities, with particular reference to Jews, Muslims, and Christians; along with others, he speculated that the gathering of Jewish families and friends to celebrate the festival of Purim (sometimes described as the Jewish Mardi Gras) on 9–10 March (in the final days before the government introduced strict social distancing guidelines) may have contributed to the spread of the virus among UK Jews. The article is available to subscribers at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/coronavirus-religious-festivities-may-have-proved-deadly-to-community-rtvsqkffh>
- On 6 April 2020, Professor David Katz, executive chairman of the Jewish Medical Association, blogging on the Religion Media Centre website, gave a carefully balanced presentation of the arguments for and against considering that Jews may be over-represented among coronavirus deaths, but without reaching a definitive conclusion. The post can be found at: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news-comment/are-jews-over-represented-among-coronavirus-deaths/>
- In *The Jewish Chronicle* for 24 April 2020 (p. 3), Simon Rocker estimated that there had been 185 Jewish deaths from coronavirus to 10 April (based on returns to the Board of Deputies of British Jews), by which date 10,335 people had died of Covid-19 in England and Wales. Both figures related to deaths in hospitals, care homes, and in the community. At that point, therefore, Jews still accounted for 1.8% of all deaths, more than three times the proportion of Jews in the national population. Rocker feared the true number of Jewish losses to be even higher since the Board of Deputies data ‘do not include one or two large synagogues as well as other regional communities’.

### **Coronavirus chronicles: UK Muslim infections**

The UK's Jewish population is sufficiently small, and also well served by communal structures, to enable its coronavirus deaths to be measured with some accuracy. This is not possible for other faith groups. However, there have been suggestions, from the UK and USA, that Covid-19 mortality and infection rates have been higher among black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities than among white people, and this disproportionate toll could potentially be affecting followers of non-Christian faiths and some Christian traditions (especially Pentecostal) that are mainly composed of black persons. Public Health England and the National Health Service have recently launched an enquiry to ascertain why BAME citizens should be so impacted by the virus. The Labour Party has initiated its own investigation. The start of Ramadan has likewise exacerbated concerns about the issue.

In the meantime, on 20 April 2020, Trevor Phillips and Richard Webber released 'Some Observations on Covid-19 and Minorities in the UK'. This necessarily preliminary (given the lack of specific data) paper made a brief (but significant) reference to Muslims. Its authors noted that absent from a list of thirteen local authorities with a higher than average Covid-19 prevalence and a larger than average minority population by percentage were virtually all the English local authorities where the dominant minority group is Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslim, only Birmingham being included. Remarkably, Tower Hamlets, the borough with the largest proportion of Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslim residents in the country, had a Covid-19 infection rate well below the London average, despite the fact that it is sandwiched between two Covid-19 hotspots, Newham and Southwark. The 11-page paper can be found at:

<https://webberphillips.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20-04-2020-Observations-on-COVID-19-.pdf>

In parallel, Phillips contributed an opinion piece to *The Times* on 20 April 2020 entitled 'We Need to Solve Ethnic Puzzle of Covid-19', asking in his sub-title 'Could Religion Explain why some Ethnic Minorities Seem to be More Susceptible than Others?' This question was only really answered in the final paragraph of the article, in which he speculated that factors keeping the infection of Muslim communities lower than expected might include their habit of ritual washing before five-times-a-day prayers and their higher levels of economic inactivity, a by-product of which being that they were not regularly using public transport through which transmission of the virus could spread. This article can be accessed by subscribers at:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-need-to-solve-ethnic-puzzle-of-covid-19-gdxw93q0j>

### **Churchgoing in Wales: a recent estimate by Mark Griffiths**

There has been no proper census of weekly churchgoing in Wales since 1995, but estimates have been published from time to time. The latest is by Mark Griffiths of the Church in Wales, writing in the April 2020 edition (No. 68, p. 1) of *FutureFirst*, the bimonthly newsletter of Brierley Consultancy. Griffiths suggests there are 150,000 churchgoers in the Principality, of whom 45,000 are Anglican, 23,000 Roman Catholic, 10,000 Baptist, 9,200 Messy Church, and 63,000 others. As the most recent official population estimate for Wales is 3,139,000, Griffiths' data imply a weekly churchgoing rate of 4.8% in 2020, which compares with 22.0% in 1961, 14.6% in 1982, 8.7% in 1995, and 6.7% in 2007.

### **Anglican church growth in the catholic tradition in northern England**

An action-oriented report into the potential for, and obstacles to, church growth in Anglo-Catholic churches in northern England has been prepared by John Tomlinson: *Time to Sow in the North: Report on Growth in Churches of the Catholic Tradition in the Province of York* (Nottingham: St John's College, 2020, 35 pp.) The underpinning fieldwork was conducted across eight dioceses during the summer and autumn of 2019 and involved interviews with 23 priests and congregational surveys completed by 374 worshippers at the main Sunday Mass in seven parishes. The samples of respondents were not scientifically drawn. A quantitative analysis of the congregational surveys for all parishes combined appears on pp. 24–9, including data on basic demographics as well as on aspects of faith journeys. The report is available at:

<https://stjohns-nottm.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Time-to-Sow-in-the-North-v3.pdf>

### **Retired Anglican clergy: qualitative and quantitative insights**

In 1976, the Church of England legislated for clergy retirement at the age of seventy. There are now as many retired but active clergy (with permission to officiate) as there are stipendiary ministers. The former's experiences are drawn upon in *A New Lease of Life? Anglican Clergy Reflect on Retirement*, edited by Tony Neal and Leslie Francis (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2020, v + 188 pp., ISBN: 978–1–78959–085–2, £19.99, paperback). The bulk of the book, chapters 2–15, comprises reflections by fourteen retired Anglican clergy from across the spectrum of Church traditions. These qualitative insights are supplemented by a quantitative perspective in chapter 1 (pp. 9–20), written by Francis, on 'Profiling Religiously Engaged Retired Clergy', which provides a demographic and attitudinal snapshot of the 784 religiously engaged retired clergy over the age of fifty-nine and living in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, who completed the *Church Times* questionnaire in 2013. The book's webpage is at:

<https://www.sacristy.co.uk/books/ministry-resources/retired-clergy>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **Religious and civil marriages in England and Wales, 2017**

There were 242,842 marriages in England and Wales in 2017, a decrease of 2.8% from 2016, according to a statistical bulletin from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 14 April 2020. Marriage rates for opposite-sex couples in 2017 were the lowest on record, with 21.2 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and 19.5 per 1,000 unmarried women. Only 23.0% of the 235,910 opposite-sex weddings were solemnized with religious rites, nine points fewer than in 2010 (see Table 3, below, for recent trends), and another historic low. Hardly any (0.6%) of the 6,932 same-sex couples were married in a religious ceremony. The overwhelming majority of opposite-sex couples cohabited before getting married, including 81.3% of those choosing religious weddings. The ONS report and dataset can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/marriages-in-england-and-wales-2017>



**Table 3 Mode of solemnization of marriages between opposite-sex couples, England and Wales, 2010–17**

Year	Civil	Religious	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Non-Christian	Total
2010	165,680	78,128	57,607	8,622	9,032	2,867	243,808
2011	174,681	74,452	54,463	8,390	8,844	2,755	249,133
2012	184,167	79,473	58,797	8,664	9,027	2,985	263,640
2013	172,254	68,600	50,226	7,550	8,035	2,789	240,854
2014	179,344	68,028	49,717	7,598	7,895	2,818	247,372
2015	176,406	62,614	45,901	7,001	6,937	2,775	239,020
2016	182,766	60,008	44,392	6,513	6,616	2,487	242,774
2017	181,607	54,303	40,051	5,841	6,103	2,308	235,910

### Religion of prisoners in England and Wales, 31 March 2020

The Ministry of Justice has published the annual return of the religious affiliation of prisoners in England and Wales as at 31 March 2020. Of 83,000 inmates, 15.7% are Anglicans, 17.1% Catholics, 14.0% other Christians, 16.3% Muslims, 6.1% other non-Christians, and 30.6% religious nones. For convenience, the last decade’s data are summarized below (Table 4). The Excel spreadsheet for the last five quarterly returns, with the religion data in Table 1.5 (disaggregated by gender), can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2019>

**Table 4 Self-assigned religious affiliation, prisoners, England and Wales, 2011–19**

Year	Total	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Muslim	Other non-Christian	Non-recognized	None	Unrecorded
2011	85,400	19,877	14,806	7,551	10,661	4,255	16	26,303	1,931
2012	87,531	19,354	15,521	8,873	11,439	4,358	14	26,156	1,816
2013	83,769	17,821	15,292	9,252	11,331	4,446	8	24,480	1,139
2014	85,265	17,063	15,493	10,208	11,932	4,604	28	25,214	723
2015	85,664	16,435	15,394	10,247	12,328	4,862	16	26,233	149
2016	85,441	15,483	15,173	11,284	12,506	4,545	9	26,349	92
2017	85,513	14,865	14,918	11,447	13,076	4,756	10	26,307	134
2018	83,263	13,971	14,334	11,534	12,847	4,725	10	25,711	131
2019	82,634	13,480	14,160	11,875	13,008	4,926	7	25,034	144
2020	82,990	13,009	14,162	11,629	13,563	5,097	8	25,398	124

### Sikhs, ethnicity, and the 2021 census of population

Notwithstanding its reversal in the High Court at the end of last year (reported in *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 51, December 2019), the Sikh Federation (UK) is continuing to apply pressure to both the UK and Scottish governments to include Sikh as a tick-box option for the ethnicity question in the next census of population (on 21 March 2021), in both England and Wales and Scotland. In January, its lawyers lodged an appeal in the Court of Appeal against the High Court judgment in respect of England and Wales, while in February the Federation contacted a large number of MPs on the subject, in addition to UK ministers, in a bid to secure support for Sikhs as a separate ethnic, as well as religious, group. In Scotland, the Federation has been threatening, since the New Year, to take the Scottish government to the Court of Session on the grounds of discrimination unless the Federation’s census demands are met, and in late April its lawyers sent a pre-action letter to Scottish ministers, requiring a response within

fourteen days, following their failure to provide for a Sikh ethnicity tick-box in the Census (Scotland) Order 2020. It should be noted that the Sikh community remains divided on this matter, and the Federation's voice is by no means the only Sikh input to the debate about a Sikh ethnic group in the census. For example, there is also a Network of Sikh Organisations, which issued a press release on 5 March 2020 that took issue with the account given in the Federation's own press release on 19 February 2020 about this vexed topic.

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **Roman Catholics in Britain and weekly Mass attendance**

In his latest blog for the *Catholics in Britain* website, Ben Clements examines 'Catholics in Britain and Weekly Mass Attendance', drawing upon a nationally representative sample of self-identifying British Catholic adults interviewed online by Savanta ComRes in October-November 2019. Of these, 31% claimed to attend Mass on at least a weekly basis, only slightly more than the 28% who never attended apart from special occasions. The weekly attendance rate was appreciably higher among Millennials and Generation Z members in the sample than it was with the two older age cohorts. The blog can be found at:

<https://catholicsinbritain.le.ac.uk/findings/catholics-in-britain-and-weekly-mass-attendance/#.XqsGKEBFxpx>