# **Counting Religion in Britain**

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 56 – May 2020 © Clive D. Field. 2020

#### **OPINION POLLS**

#### Religion and the Covid-19 pandemic: Savanta ComRes polling for Tearfund

On behalf of Tearfund, Savanta ComRes undertook an online survey of 2,101 UK adults on 24–27 April 2020 in order to investigate public engagement in a range of spiritual activities before and during the Covid-19 lockdown, with special reference to prayer. This is an extensive survey, running to 210 pages of computer tables, and the focus here will be on reporting, at topline level in Table 1 below, the findings for question 4 on claimed religious activities. The periodicity is shown for each activity, the key to the columns being as follows: A. started doing this during lockdown but did not do it before; B. done during lockdown and previously done; C. used to do this but have stopped since lockdown; D. do not usually do this and am not doing it during lockdown. Even taking the claims at face value, it will be seen that the net effect of the Covid-19 lockdown on UK religious behaviour has been minimal thus far, with the number of people starting a spiritual activity during the lockdown often offset by those who have stopped doing it. Explore further with the data tables at:

http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/tearfund-covid-19-prayer-public-omnibus-research/

Tearfund's press release is at:

https://www.tearfund.org/media/press releases/many brits look to faith during lockdown/

Table 1: Spiritual activities before and during the Covid-19 lockdown, Great Britain, 24–27 April 2020 (percentages across)

Activity	A	В	C	D	Lockdown
					net effect
Prayed	5	25	6	59	-1
Watched a religious service (live on TV, on demand, or streamed)	7	12	5	71	+2
Listened to a religious service (on radio or online)	6	11	5	72	+1
Watched or listened to a religious service (combined)	9	18	8	76	+1
Listened to religious music	4	13	5	71	-1
Been in contact with a religious worker	5	10	7	73	-2
Asked someone to say a prayer	5	14	4	71	+1
Meditated or done a mindfulness activity	5	18	8	63	-3
Read a religious text (including the Bible)	5	14	6	70	-1

#### Religion and the Covid-19 pandemic: Savanta ComRes polling for Christian Aid

Since the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in Britain, no more than 6% of its residents claim to have been more likely than usual to have sought some form of guidance from a religious leader, in a virtual or face-to-face way. This figure was outweighed by the 7% who said they had been less likely to do so, while 83% reported their habits in this regard were unchanged. In a follow-

on question, given a list of ten fictional Christian leaders from film or television, Geraldine Granger (from BBC's comedy *The Vicar of Dibley*) was the most trusted character to provide moral or spiritual leadership during a national crisis, albeit with just 18% of the vote. The survey was conducted online by Savanta ComRes on behalf of Christian Aid among 2,032 adult Britons on 22–23 April 2020.

Seemingly disappointed with the poor showing for religious leadership in the foregoing study, Christian Aid commissioned Savanta ComRes to field an extra question the following week, 2,021 adults being interviewed online on 29–30 April 2020. They were asked whether or not they agreed with the statement: 'Faith leaders have a role to play in providing moral guidance and spiritual leadership during times of national crisis such as the Coronavirus crisis.' Unsurprisingly, given the slant of the question wording, 61% agreed with the statement, the number being especially high in London (74%) and among persons affiliating to a religion (75%), but even 47% of religious nones assented. Of the remaining respondents, 24% disagreed and 14% were undecided. Data tables for both polls are available at:

# http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/christian-aid-most-trusted-vicars-public-omnibus-research/

Its appetite for data decidedly whetted, Christian Aid funded Savanta ComRes to undertake a third online survey on 1-3 May 2020, among 2,025 adults in Britain, in order to gauge the claimed level of 'spirituality' during the Covid-19 lockdown (with particular reference to prayer and beliefs) and probable activities once the country has been freed from lockdown. Viewing or listening to spiritual or religious content (online, on television, or on the radio) during the lockdown was reported as much less in this study than in Tearfund's, by 15% of the population against 27%, perhaps raising doubts about the credibility of either figure. Prayer for an end to the Covid-19 crisis was claimed by 26%, as was prayer for people working on the Covid-19 frontline and other key workers; 21% also said they had prayed during lockdown for people living in poverty in the UK or around the world. Changes in the level of beliefs during lockdown are shown in Table 2; it will be seen that small net gains in strength are claimed. Among anticipated changes in habits after lockdown is lifted, the most striking increase is in spending time with family and friends (47%), with spending more time in quiet reflection on 15%, and more charitable giving, volunteering, and community activities on 14%. Very few, 4% each, planned to go to church more often or to view or listen to religious services more often. Data tables are available at:

http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/christian-aid-spirituality-during-lockdown-public-omnibus-research/

Table 2: Changes in the level of spiritual beliefs during the Covid-19 lockdown, Great Britain, 1–3 May 2020 (percentages across)

Belief	More	Same as	Less	Disbelieve	Don't	Lockdown
	strongly	before	strongly		know	net effect
Angels/spirits/supernatural beings	4	43	2	43	9	+2
Life after death	4	46	2	36	12	+2
God	5	43	2	40	10	+3
Miracles	4	39	3	45	9	+1
Power of prayer	5	39	2	44	10	+3

#### Religion and the Covid-19 pandemic: Populus polling on stress indicators

A couple of polls conducted by Populus during the pandemic have shed some light on stress indicators among the principal religious groups. The first concerned smoking (exclusive of ecigarettes) and was undertaken online on 6–7 May 2020 among 2,091 UK adults aged 18 and over. Table 3, below, summarizes smoking behaviour by religious affiliation, extracted from page 36 of the survey documentation. This shows that smokers currently comprise 18% of the population, with similar proportions among Christians and religious nones, albeit non-Christians are higher, on 23%.

Table 3: Incidence of smoking during the Covid-19 lockdown, United Kingdom, 6–7 May 2020 (percentages across)

Affiliation	Never	Former	Current
	smoked	smoker	smoker
Christian	49	34	17
Non-Christian	52	25	23
No religion	53	29	18
All	51	31	18

The second study was commissioned by the Campaign against Living Miserably (CALM), a suicide prevention charity, and conducted among a sample of 2,096 UK adults on 7–10 May 2020. A principal focus of the enquiry was to quantify self-reported levels of anxiety before and during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. Table 4, below, summarizes the degree of anxiety by religious affiliation, extracted from page 44 of the documentation (disregarding the 10% who failed to answer the question about their anxiety). It will be seen that two-thirds of the population are experiencing anxiety during the lockdown, ranging from 62% among Christians to 79% for non-Christians, with a majority of the latter feeling anxious for the first time or more anxious than usual. However, for all groups, the proportion anxious for the first time is outnumbered by those feeling less anxious than usual.

Table 4: Incidence of anxiety during the Covid-19 lockdown, United Kingdom, 7–10 May 2020 (percentages across)

Affiliation	Anxiety for	More anxiety	Same anxiety Less anxi		No anxiety
	first time	than usual	as usual	than usual	before or now
Christian	7	32	12	11	37
Non-Christian	10	41	11	17	21
No religion	6	40	13	10	31
All	7	36	12	11	33

Documentation from both these Populus surveys can be found at:

https://www.populus.co.uk/polls/

# Religion and the Covid-19 pandemic: YouGov polling on funerals in churches

To date, more than 38,000 people in the UK have been confirmed to have died from Covid-19. With places of worship closed as a result of the government lockdown, and gatherings banned, friends and families of the deceased have been denied the opportunity of bidding them a formal farewell through a traditional religious funeral. With lockdown measures now being incrementally lifted, YouGov asked 5,868 members of its panel on 5 May 2020 whether they would support easing the restrictions to permit small-scale funerals in churches. Two-thirds

(67%, peaking at 71% of over-65s and 76% of Conservative voters) said they would do so, with 20% opposed and 12% undecided. Detailed results are available at:

https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/survey-results/daily/2020/05/05/d17f7/3

#### Religion and the Covid-19 pandemic: Savanta ComRes polling on church reopenings

Places of worship have been closed as part of the lockdown imposed by the UK government and devolved administrations. In England, the current plan is for them to reopen in July, but 49% of the UK public would support them reopening sooner than this (subject to maintaining social distancing), according to an online survey of 2,085 adults on 22–25 May 2020 by Savanta ComRes on behalf of the National Churches Trust. The main purpose of the study was to determine the relative importance attached to seven roles that churches and chapels could play following their reopening, the top three choices of respondents being taken into account. On this basis, 'providing a place where those who died as a result of the coronavirus can be remembered' headed the list, on 46%. This was closely followed by 'providing a place for quiet reflection or private prayer' (44%), 'holding occasions, e.g. weddings, funerals, baptisms' (42%), 'providing community support services' (39%), 'holding religious services and worship' (33%), 'providing a place where people can come together and rebuild local communities' (29%), and 'being open for tourists and visitors to discover history and heritage' (13%). Detailed tables, including breaks by religious affiliation and church attendance as well as by standard demographics, can be found at:

http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/national-churches-trust-public-omnibus-research/

#### Willingness to discuss religious/spiritual beliefs: Savanta ComRes poll for Hospice UK

In a poll commissioned by Hospice UK for Dying Matters Awareness Week, Savanta ComRes interviewed a sample of 2,039 Britons online on 22–23 January 2020. One of the questions concerned the degree of comfort respondents would feel when talking to a close friend or family member who wanted to discuss a range of topics, one of them being the friend or family member's religious or spiritual beliefs. Just 19% said they would feel uncomfortable doing so, and no more than 26% in any demographic sub-group, with 73% declaring themselves comfortable, peaking at 80% of under-25s. Another question concerned the people who might prove most likely to listen if the interviewee wished to have a serious conversation about some aspect of death or grief. A faith leader was judged as the most likely person to listen by only 4% of the sample, and by no more than 15% even when second and third choices were factored in. By a very wide margin, a close family member or long-term friend were considered to be likeliest to lend the most attentive ear for such a conversation. Data tables are available at:

http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/hospice-uk-dying-matters-awareness-week-polling/

#### Talking Toddlers: Savanta ComRes poll on young children, their parents, and Church

On behalf of HOPE Together, the Church of England, and the Evangelical Alliance, Savanta ComRes has undertaken polling for the Talking Toddlers project, interviewing 1,182 parents (disproportionately the mothers) of children aged 0–4 online between 6 and 28 February 2020, including boosted samples of active Christian parents, fringe parents, and unreached parents. In the main sample, weighted to be nationally representative, 60% of parents professed to belong to a religion (42% Christian and 18% non-Christian) and 58% considered themselves

to be a spiritual person, but as many as 74% reported that their child had attended some kind of church-based activity for the under-fives during the previous twelve months, of whom 12% were practising Christians and 62% not. Of the 25% of parents whose child had not been to a church-led activity, 35% indicated they would welcome an invitation for themselves and their child. A small majority of all parents also agreed that it was important that their child explored religious beliefs (55%) and had a basic knowledge of Bible stories (53%), but less significance was attached to helping them to pray (46%) and participation in Christian worship (37%). The formal report on Talking Toddlers will not be published until 26 June, but four sets of data tables (for the main sample and three boosted samples) were released by Savanta ComRes on 18 May 2020 and are available at:

https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/hope-together-the-church-of-england-and-the-evangelical-alliance-talking-toddlers-research/

#### **FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES**

#### Coronavirus chronicles: news from the religious press

The *Church Times* is inviting its readers to complete an online questionnaire, 'Coronavirus, Church, and You', devised by Andrew Village and Leslie Francis of York St John University (who were responsible for the newspaper's last major readership survey in 2013), to assess responses to the Covid-19 crisis among UK churchgoers. The self-selecting and anonymous sample of clergy and laity who decide to participate will find themselves being asked about their own experience and reaction to the outbreak, as well as their opinions about how the Church locally and nationally has responded to it. Some interim results were published in the issues of the *Church Times* for 15 May 2020 (p. 3), 22 May 2020 (p. 2), and 29 May 2020 (p. 3), seemingly as an encouragement to more readers to take the survey. At the time of writing, responses have been obtained from 1,417 clergy and 1,790 laity, both groups being critical of the government's handling of the crisis. The questionnaire can be completed at:

#### https://yorksj.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_cAYhUS8YSvn0ir3

A parallel online survey of adult churchgoers across the whole island of Ireland has been launched by the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education at Dublin City University, and in partnership with York St John University. Further information about this study is available at:

 $\underline{https://www.dcu.ie/materdei-centre-for-catholic-education/news/2020/May/Coronavirus-Church-You-Survey.shtm}$ 

The Catholic Times, a weekly newspaper for Catholics in Britain and Ireland that was founded in 1860 as the Northern Press, has ceased publication as a separate title. The move is obviously partly a reflection of the generic financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the religious and secular press. But it also reflects the restructuring that has followed the recent sale of Gabriel Communications, in which the Catholic bishops of England and Wales held a controlling 82% stake, to a consortium of directors and senior managers. These changes have included the decision to merge the Catholic Times with the Catholic Universe from 1 May 2020, within which the Catholic Times will henceforth appear as a supplement. However, the long-term future of the Catholic Universe itself must remain uncertain, since its own circulation

has slumped, reportedly to around 45,000, half of the figure five years ago and one-sixth of the peak of 300,000 copies in the 1960s.

#### Coronavirus chronicles: Stephen Bullivant's book on Catholicism and the pandemic

Last year, Oxford University Press published Stephen Bullivant's acclaimed scholarly investigation into *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II.* Now the same author has hastily written (between 30 March and 10 April 2020) an e-book on *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire, 2020, ISBN: 978–1–943243–63–1, ix + 93 pp., free PDF download). This pastorally focused book explores some of the spiritual challenges and implications of the pandemic for Catholics in the USA and UK, not least the likely impact on Mass attendance after the crisis is over (discussed in chapter 2, pp. 14–29). Bullivant anticipates that congregations will be smaller when places of worship reopen because: a) the virus will have killed many people, disproportionately elderly, who are the backbone of churchgoing; b) the number of immigrants, who have helped offset some of the religious decline at home, will slow down; and c) the habit of Mass-going, once broken by the pandemic and lockdown, will often be difficult to re-establish. At the same time, he acknowledges that Covid-19 has had a few positive side-effects for the Catholic Church, not least in its online presence. The volume can be downloaded from:

# https://www.wordonfire.org/covid/

Bullivant also has an essentially Anglicized version of chapter 2 published as 'After the Storm' in *The Tablet*, 16 May 2020, pp. 4–5. This article is available to the magazine's subscribers, or those registering for access, at:

https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/18063/churches-after-the-storm

# Coronavirus chronicles: UK Jewish mortality still disproportionately high

The Board of Deputies of British Jews has continued to collate statistics of UK Jews who have died from Covid-19, in hospital or in other settings, as recorded on their death certificates. Prior to 12 May, the number of deaths was mostly published daily and based upon funerals conducted by seven Jewish communal burial societies. From 12 May, data have only been released weekly (on Tuesdays) but now include funerals reported by the Western Charitable Foundation and 20 regional communities, in partnership with the Jewish Small Communities Network. This month's figures are given in Table 5, the latest suggesting that Jewish deaths from Covid-19 perhaps account for 1.3% of all UK deaths, still disproportionately higher than the Jewish share of the national population (0.5%), albeit much less so than at the outset of the pandemic.

Table 5: UK certificated Jewish coronavirus deaths, cumulative, 30 April–22 May 2020

Date	<b>Cumulative Jewish</b>		Date	<b>Cumulative Jewish</b>
	deaths			deaths
	(previous method)			(new method)
30 April	361		11 May	440
3 May	366		18 May	458
4 May	370		22 May	478
6 May	372			
10 May	384			

#### Coronavirus chronicles: have Muslims also been disproportionately impacted?

There has been much discussion during the pandemic about its perceived disproportionate impact upon BAME communities, and Public Health England is leading a review that may help to determine the extent to which this is the case. Since British Muslims are overwhelmingly from BAME backgrounds, it might seem reasonable to argue that they, too, may have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. In its submission to this review, the Muslim Council of Britain has set out such evidence as is available on the matter, including initial estimates (to 12 May 2020) of observed deaths from Covid-19 of Muslims by ethnicity in English hospitals. The submission can be read at:

 $\underline{https://mcb.org.uk/wp\text{-}content/uploads/2020/05/MCB\text{-}Submission\text{-}to\text{-}PHE\text{-}Review\text{-}BAME\text{-}deaths.pdf}$ 

# Coronavirus chronicles: Sikh Network's Covid-19 impact study of the Sikh community

Following publication of the government's Covid-19 recovery plan on 11 May 2020, the Sikh Network conducted an online survey of a self-selecting sample of Sikhs, along the lines of the *British Sikh Report* (annual since 2013), to determine the impact of Covid-19 on the Sikh community and its opinions on the government's management of the pandemic. There were 1,553 responses, which are summarized in the six-page document *Covid-19 Coronavirus: Impact on the UK Sikh Community—Survey Report, 2020.* Significant criticism is voiced of the government, with more than nine in ten of the Sikhs who replied complaining that it had not acted quickly enough to tackle the crisis, had not done enough on testing, had failed to consult on the closure and reopening of gurdwaras, and had done far too little to support tens of thousands of British Sikhs stranded in Punjab. Concern at the disproportionate number of Sikh deaths from Covid-19 was also expressed by 96%, while respondents working in the NHS and the care sector raised sundry issues that were specific to them. The report is available at:

https://www.thesikhnetwork.com/publication/british-sikhs-covid-19-survey/

# OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### Parliamentary approval of The Census Order (England and Wales) 2020

The Census Order (England and Wales) 2020 (UK Statutory Instruments 2020 No. 532) received Parliamentary approval on 20 May 2020. This legislation authorizes the taking of the next population census on 21 March 2021, pursuant to the Census Act 1920. An Explanatory Memorandum to the Order, prepared by the Statistics Board, provides a helpful summary. Religion will be included in the 2021 census along essentially the same lines as in 2001 and 2011. According to paragraph 7.7, a large number of requests were received for new response option tick-boxes, which did not meet the threshold for inclusion in the census following due process of engagement, research, and testing. Among the unsuccessful requests were the additions of a 'Sikh' tick-box in the ethnic group question and one for 'Jain' in the religion question. The Statutory Instrument and the Explanatory Memorandum are both available at:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/532/contents/made

#### **ACADEMIC STUDIES**

### Religion and party choice in the British general elections of 2010, 2015, 2017, and 2019

Through the kindness of Ben Clements, BRIN is able to reproduce below his analysis of the pattern of voting by religious affiliation in the last four British general elections, derived from the British Election Study 2014–2023 Combined Waves 1–19 Internet Panel. The data are based upon 32,177 respondents who participated in wave 19 of the study, conducted online by YouGov between 13 and 23 December 2019, immediately after the general election that year (in which outright majorities of Anglicans, Methodists, and Jews voted Conservative and an outright majority of Muslims voted Labour). The full table follows:

Table 6: Patterns of voting by religious affiliation in the British general elections of 2010, 2015, 2017, and 2019 (percentages across)

	Con	Lab	Lib	Other		Con	Lab	Lib	Other
			Dem	party				Dem	party
2010					2015				
Anglican	47	27	21	4	Anglican	45	31	8	16
Roman Catholic	34	39	20	7	Roman Catholic	30	40	8	22
Church of Scotland	26	39	12	23	Church of Scotland	23	28	8	41
Methodist	37	29	26	7	Methodist	39	32	15	14
Baptist	39	30	21	10	Baptist	30	38	13	19
Other Christian	27	36	27	10	Other Christian	32	43	7	17
Jewish	49	23	28	1	Jewish	47	29	8	15
Muslim	11	57	27	5	Muslim	19	66	4	11
Other religion	35	42	17	7	Other religion	35	48	7	11
No religion	31	30	31	9	No religion	30	36	12	23
2017					2019				
Anglican	58	27	8	7	Anglican	64	21	9	6
Roman Catholic	40	42	7	11	Roman Catholic	43	35	10	12
Church of Scotland	39	25	7	29	Church of Scotland	41	15	13	31
Methodist	47	36	10	8	Methodist	54	23	12	11
Baptist	45	37	8	11	Baptist	44	30	12	15
Other Christian	38	42	10	10	Other Christian	41	35	14	11
Jewish	63	26	7	3	Jewish	56	15	23	6
Muslim	11	85	3	2	Muslim	9	80	10	2
Other religion	33	48	10	9	Other religion	40	40	7	13
No religion	32	47	10	12	No religion	36	39	13	12

#### Coronavirus conspiracy theories: the alleged roles of Jews, Muslims, and globalists

Among the newly accepted articles for the journal *Psychological Medicine* is Daniel Freeman, Felicity Waite, Laina Rosebrock, Ariane Petit, Chiara Causier, Anna East, Lucy Jenner, Ashley-Louise Teale, Lydia Carr, Sophie Mulhall, Emily Bold, and Sinéad Lambe, 'Coronavirus Conspiracy Beliefs, Mistrust, and Compliance with Government Guidelines in England'. It derives from an online survey, conducted via the Lucid marketplace, of a non-probability sample of 2,501 adults in England on 4–11 May 2020, with quotas set for age, gender, region, and income. Endorsement of conspiracy theories surrounding coronavirus was found to some extent among half the population, including for three religion-related statements: 'Jews have created the virus to collapse the economy for financial gain' (agree a little/moderately 12%, agree a lot/completely 7%, disagree 81%); 'Muslims are spreading the virus as an attack on Western values' (agree a little/moderately 13%, agree a lot/completely

7%, disagree 80%); and 'coronavirus is a plot by globalists to destroy religion by banning gatherings' (agree a little/moderately 14%, agree a lot/completely 8%, disagree 78%). A majority (55%) of participants also claimed to have a stronger religious faith as a result of the pandemic, and 46% to have a better understanding of spiritual matters. The unedited manuscript is freely available to download at:

https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/9D6401B1E58F146C738971C197407461/S0033291720001890a.pdf/coronavirus\_conspiracy\_beliefs\_mistrust\_and\_compliance\_with\_government\_guidelines\_in\_england.pdf

Stephen Pollard, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, has launched a robust attack on the survey's methodology in his 'Bunkum Conspiracy Poll is Lesson for All' in his newspaper's edition of 29 May 2020 (p. 6), also available at:

https://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/bunkum-conspiracy-poll-is-lesson-for-all-oxford-university-newsweek-1.500119?highlight=bunkum

#### **NEW DATASET**

#### UK Data Service, SN 8628: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2016

The 2016 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey was undertaken by ScotCen Social Research between July and December 2016, primarily on behalf of the Scottish Government and NHS Health Scotland. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 1,237 adults aged 16 and over resident in Scotland (representing a 50% response), the vast majority of whom also returned a self-completion questionnaire. The principal modules covered attitudes to government, obesity, health inequalities, and Europe and voting. Background variables included religious affiliation (current and by upbringing) and attendance at religious services. A fuller survey description and documentation can be found at:

https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8628

Through the kindness of Ben Clements, BRIN is able to include the following analysis of some of the religion data from the survey:

Table 7: Frequency of attendance at religious services by current religious affiliation, Christians, Scotland, 2016 (percentages down)

Worship	Church of	Roman	Other	All
frequency	Scotland	Catholic	Christian	adults
Monthly or more	24	42	41	14
Less often	25	24	18	13
Never	51	34	41	73