

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 58 – July 2020

© Clive D. Field, 2020

OPINION POLLS

Spring 2019 Pew Global Attitudes Project: release of results for religion questions

The Pew Research Center has just released the results of the religion-related questions that were included in the Spring 2019 Pew Global Attitudes Project, the British fieldwork for which was conducted by Gallup, by means of telephone interviews with 1,031 adults aged 18 and over between 4 June and 20 July 2019. Fieldwork also took place in 33 other countries around the world. The topline results for Britain were as follows:

- ‘Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?’: It is not necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, 79%; it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, 20%; don’t know/refused 1%
- ‘Please tell me whether you agree with the following statement: prayer is an important part of my daily life’: completely agree, 17%; mostly agree, 14%; mostly disagree, 19%; completely disagree, 49%; don’t know/refused, 1%
- ‘Please tell me whether you agree with the following statement: God plays an important role in my life’: completely agree, 22%; mostly agree, 18%; mostly disagree, 15%; completely disagree, 44%; don’t know/refused, 1%
- ‘How important is religion in your life?’: very important, 20%; somewhat important, 19%; not too important, 21%; not at all important, 39%; don’t know/refused, 1%

In sum, Britain is a society in which the majority of the population: no longer considers it necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values (79% now, 73% in 2002), no longer regards prayer as important in their daily lives (68%), no longer thinks religion of importance in their lives (60% now, 39% in 2006), and no longer accords God an important role in their lives (59%). Pew’s 38-page global report (by Christine Tamir, Aidan Connaughton, and Ariana Monique Salazar) is available at:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/20/the-global-god-divide/>

Coronavirus chronicles: opening and attending places of worship after lockdown

Interviewed online by Ipsos MORI on 26–29 June 2020, and on the assumption that lockdown restrictions were lifted by the end of July, 21% of 1,078 British adults aged 18–75 said they would feel very or fairly comfortable about attending places of worship in the same way that they did before the Covid-19 pandemic began. One-third indicated they would be not very or not at all comfortable about such attendance, while 43% admitted they did not engage in public worship before the virus struck and 3% were undecided. As is customary with sample surveys, claimed levels of attendance at religious services far exceeded reality. Slides and tables are available at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-comfortable-are-britons-returning-normal-coronavirus-concern-rises-again>

The same theme was picked up in a series of three polls by Opinium Research for *The Observer* during the course of early July, around 2,000 online interviews with UK adults being conducted on each occasion. With restrictions on opening places of worship for services being lifted in England by the government on 4 July 2020, respondents were asked about their plans to visit them after reopening. The topline findings are summarized in Table 1, below, from which it will be seen that just over half the population admitted that they did not ordinarily attend places of worship at all. Most of the remainder were unsure or vague about their intentions to go to religious services, with around one-fifth making their ‘return’ contingent on coronavirus safety. The 4% of people (including 7% of the under-35s) in the third survey who claimed already to have visited after lockdown is fairly close to the pre-lockdown national average for churchgoing. Data tables can be accessed via Opinium’s political polling portal at:

<https://www.opinium.com/political-polling/>

Table 1: Intentions to visit places of worship after their reopening from 4 July 2020 (percentages down)

	1–3 July	9–10 July	15–17 July
I have already visited	NA	3	4
This weekend	3	3	3
As soon as possible after this weekend	10	6	6
Later this year once I am sure it is safe	17	14	14
Only once a vaccine is in place	8	5	7
Don’t know	10	13	12
Not applicable—do not visit places of worship	52	56	54

A third agency, Deltapoll, was less preoccupied with people’s plans to attend places of worship than by whether, at the time of online interview (9–10 July 2020), they thought they should be allowed to reopen for full services or not. A narrow plurality (47%) of the 1,541 Britons judged that they should be permitted to reopen for services, but 45% were opposed and 8% undecided. London, where only 33% of residents were in favour and 58% were against, was a significant exception to the overall pattern. Full data tables are available at:

<http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/polls/latest-voting-intention-10th-july>

Religious correlates of attitudes to gay conversion therapy

A majority (62%) of the British public now considers that so-called gay ‘conversion therapy’ (the process whereby a third party attempts to change someone’s sexual orientation) should be banned, according to an online poll by YouGov of 1,671 adults undertaken on behalf of the Ozanne Foundation on 14–15 July 2020. The proportion is higher among those who do not identify with a religion (68%) than for those who profess some religious affiliation (57%), although the difference will largely be attributable to the younger age profile of the former group. The figure falls slightly lower, to 56%, among Anglicans, Catholics, and Christians as a whole; thereafter, cell sizes are too small to draw any valid conclusions for other denominations and faiths. The 14% who think conversion therapy should not be banned rises to 16% for Christians generally and 18% for Catholics. One-quarter of the population is undecided on the issue. Data tables are available at:

https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/ws6xam57wg/Ozanne_ConversionTherapy_200715.pdf

Religious correlates of attitudes towards climate change and racial inequality

On behalf of Christian Aid, an online poll was conducted by Savanta ComRes on 12–14 June 2020 to gauge public opinion on climate change and racial inequality. The results for all questions were disaggregated by a range of demographics, including religious affiliation, albeit only the breaks for religious nones, all religious, and Christians are based on sufficiently large cell sizes to be statistically robust. Concern about climate change was found to be eight points higher, and about racism and racial inequality three points higher, among all religious and Christians than it was with religious nones. Data tables are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/christian-aid-climate-justice-and-race/>

Perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in the UK

In a repeat of questions asked in its June 2020 political tracker, 50% of the 2,085 UK adults interviewed online by Savanta ComRes on 17–19 July 2020 regarded anti-Semitism as a problem in the country, the proportion being highest among the over-65s (56%), Liberal Democrats (56%), and Labour voters (57%). Just under one-third (31%) of respondents did not regard anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK and 19% did not know whether it was or not. Islamophobia was perceived as a problem by 57% of the population, notably by the under-25s (70%), Liberal Democrats (71%), Remainers at the 2016 EU referendum (71%), and Labour supporters (72%), with 28% saying it was not a problem and 15% undecided. Data tables are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/savanta-comres-political-tracker-july-2020/>

Was the government right to strip Shamima Begum of her British citizenship?

In 2015, Shamima Begum, a Muslim schoolgirl from London, travelled to Syria to join Islamic State and subsequently married one of its fighters. She was deprived of her British citizenship by the government in 2019, thereby preventing her return to the UK, and has been living in detention/refugee camps in the Middle East. On 16 July 2020, the Court of Appeal ruled that she should be allowed to return to the UK to fight the decision to remove her citizenship. This latest twist in her case prompted YouGov to ask an online sample of 1,734 British adults on the same day whether the removal of her citizenship had been right or wrong. A succession of polls has demonstrated that the public has little sympathy for Ms Begum, and this one was no exception: 70% stated that it had been the right decision to remove her citizenship and only 16% the wrong one, with 14% undecided. However, there were marked variations by demographics in the proportion approving the decision. Regionally, this was lowest in London and Scotland (61% each) and highest in northern England (76%). Politically, the range was from 53% among Labour voters to 88% of Conservatives. By age, there was a linear spread from 53% of under-25s to 79% of over-65s. Full results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2020/07/16/37a69/1>

BAME attitudes to minority religions: focaldata study for Hope Not Hate

Comparatively rare insights into the attitudes of the UK's minority ethnic and religious groups towards each other appear to be provided by a recent focaldata survey of 1,001 BAME adults, undertaken on behalf of Hope Not Hate. Neither the market research agency nor the client has

a press release, still less any tables of results, on their respective websites, so, for the moment, BRIN has had to rely on a news report filed for *The Sunday Times* on 26 July 2020. The article suggests that interfaith relations among BAME communities are generally harmonious, but with some exceptions. In particular, 31% of Buddhists, 29% of Hindus, 18% of religious nones, and 17% of Christians held unfavourable views of Muslims, while one in five Muslims viewed Hindus negatively and 18% were negative about Jews. Additionally, 23% of respondents of Pakistani heritage saw Jews and Hindus in a negative light, with 27% of Chinese and 21% of Indians expressing negative opinions about Muslims. The article can be read (by the newspaper's subscribers) at:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/minorities-still-believe-in-tolerant-britain-poll-finds-70m625rt8?>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: new research reports by the Allchurches Trust

The Allchurches Trust, which supports UK churches and Christian organizations with projects to care for their heritage and engage with their communities, has recently published two short reports based on the Covid-19 experiences of its grant recipients (since 2016), surveyed electronically via the Qualtrics platform in June 2020. There were 840 respondents in all, of which the 638 from churches are drawn upon in these reports. *Growing Lives* focuses on the impacts of the pandemic on children (aged 0–10) and young people (aged 11–18), one-quarter of churches indicating there had been a decrease in the number of both groups engaging with church during lockdown. *Hope Beyond Research* is concerned with the perceived short- (three months ahead) and long-term (one year on) needs, as a direct result of the pandemic, of the communities served by the churches (loneliness/isolation and adult mental health/wellbeing topping the list of priorities), and plans by the churches to provide support and activities to address those needs, and the benefits from and barriers to the plans; it also illustrates the various communication techniques used by the churches before and during lockdown and the changes anticipated after lockdown. The reports can be found at:

<https://www.allchurches.co.uk/documents/Growing-Lives-Connecting-in-lockdown-research.pdf>

<https://www.allchurches.co.uk/documents/Hope-Beyond-church-survey-results.pdf>

Coronavirus chronicles: Covid-19 survey of Jews in the UK

On 13 July 2020, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) launched a Covid-19 survey of Jews in the UK and is appealing for participants, who must be aged 16 and over and living in the UK, to complete the online questionnaire. The survey seeks to understand how the pandemic has affected Jews in terms of their health and wellbeing, economic and social circumstances, and experience of Jewish life. All participants will also be offered the opportunity to join JPR's new online research panel, whose members will be invited to take up to four short surveys each year on matters of Jewish community interest. The Covid-19 questionnaire is available at:

<https://survey.jprpanel.org.uk/wix/4/p315400529544.aspx?src=7>

Coronavirus chronicles: UK Jewish mortality statistics

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, and who received a Jewish funeral. The data derive from burial boards, regional Jewish communities, and the Jewish Small Communities Network. The burial boards comprise the Adath Yisroel Burial Society, the Federation of Synagogues Burial Society, the Joint Jewish Burial Board, Liberal Judaism, the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi Community, the United Synagogue Burial Society, and the Western Charitable Foundation. From 12 May, cumulative data (from the start of the pandemic) have only been released weekly, this month's figures for deaths being: 502 on 3 July, 504 on 10 July, and 506 on 17 July (with, apparently, none as yet for 24 July). Notwithstanding clear evidence of tailing off, the final figure still equates to 0.9% of the tested or suspected national Covid-19 death toll at around the same date, which is double the proportion of the UK population that is Jewish (0.45%). However, as Stephen Miller, a leading Jewish social scientist, is quoted as saying in the *Jewish Chronicle* for 5 June 2020 (p. 8), such a calculation ignores the fact that some Jews do not opt for a Jewish funeral. Therefore, it is suggested, the comparator should be 0.37% rather than 0.45%.

Meanwhile, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) has published a short response to the recent report from the Office for National Statistics on Covid-19 mortality by religion in England and Wales (featured in June's edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*). This response makes clear that JPR is pursuing its own research, employing the excess deaths method, to better understand the impact of Covid-19 on the UK and overseas Jewish communities. It can be found at:

https://jpr.org.uk/documents/ONS_report.JPR_response.21-06-20.Final.pdf

Community Security Trust's anti-Semitic incidents report, January-June 2020

In its latest review of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, the Community Security Trust has recorded 789 during the first six months of 2020, representing the third highest total for the January-June period, albeit 13% fewer than in the corresponding months of 2019. This reduction, which particularly occurred in March and April, is attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, although lockdown measures also resulted in new manifestations of anti-Semitic hatred, expressed via the hijacking of online events or the spreading of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories linked to the virus. The overwhelming majority (85%) of incidents were categorized as abusive behaviour. For the full 28-page analysis, see:

<https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/07/30/antisemitic-incidents-report-january-june-2020>

Church of England clergy: initial research findings from the Sheldon Community

The Sheldon Community started Project CDM in 2017 in response to significant pastoral concerns around the effects on clergy of the Church of England's Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) 2003. Early in 2019, a contract was signed with Aston University to undertake independent research into the lived experience of CDM. An online survey was distributed to Church of England clergy in November and December 2019 and completed by 5,628 (about one-third) of them, including 291 facing CDMs. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated curtailment of the contract with Aston University, a preliminary analysis of the

data has been prepared, and is said to constitute ‘a devastating critique of the structure and operation of CDM’; it can be found at:

<https://www.sheldonhub.org/resources/topics/cdm>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Number of state-funded faith schools and their students in England, 2000–20

The relative size of the state-funded faith school sector in England appears to have contracted somewhat during the course of the past quinquennium, according to statistics extracted from the Department for Education’s *Schools, Pupils, and their Characteristics*, the January 2020 edition of which was published a few weeks ago. Figures at quinquennial intervals after the millennium can be seen in Table 2 and illustrate the gains made by the sector during the first decade of the new century, under Labour administrations keen to promote faith schools as a dimension of the government’s inclusiveness and diversity agenda. The decline since 2015, which has been more marked among secondary than primary faith schools, has occurred despite continuing growth in the non-Christian and other faith category. The series can be explored further at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers>

Table 2: Religious character of state-funded (maintained) schools, England, 2000–20 (percentages across)

Year	N =	No religious character	Church of England	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Non-Christian/ other	All faith schools
<i>Primary–schools</i>							
2000	18,158	64.9	24.9	9.6	0.4	0.1	35.0
2005	17,642	64.3	25.3	9.7	0.4	0.2	35.6
2010	16,971	63.4	26.0	9.9	0.5	0.2	36.6
2015	16,766	63.0	26.2	9.9	0.6	0.3	37.0
2020	16,784	63.1	26.1	9.8	0.6	0.4	36.9
<i>Primary–students</i>							
2000	4,278,125	71.8	18.1	9.6	0.3	0.2	28.2
2005	4,130,795	71.1	18.6	9.7	0.3	0.2	28.8
2010	4,093,720	70.5	18.9	9.9	0.4	0.3	29.5
2015	4,510,308	71.2	18.5	9.4	0.5	0.4	28.8
2020	4,714,772	71.6	18.4	9.0	0.5	0.5	28.4
<i>Secondary–schools</i>							
2000	3,550	83.6	5.4	10.0	0.8	0.2	16.4
2005	3,385	82.5	5.9	10.4	0.9	0.3	17.5
2010	3,333	81.5	6.2	9.9	1.8	0.5	18.4
2015	3,381	81.1	6.2	9.5	2.3	0.9	18.9
2020	3,456	81.9	6.1	9.2	1.7	1.2	18.2
<i>Secondary–students</i>							
2000	3,181,813	84.7	4.7	9.7	0.7	0.2	15.3
2005	3,315,745	84.2	5.1	9.7	0.8	0.2	15.8
2010	3,252,140	82.6	5.6	9.7	1.8	0.3	17.4
2015	3,184,728	81.5	6.0	9.7	2.3	0.5	18.5
2020	3,409,277	82.0	6.0	9.4	1.9	0.7	18.0

Note: There appear to be no published data on the distribution, by the religious character of schools, of the student headcount for 2005, which has accordingly been estimated from adjacent data points.

Campaign to recognize Sikhs as an ethnic group in the 2021 census of population

In the April 2020 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*, we reported on the then latest developments in the campaign by the Sikh Federation (UK) to persuade the UK and Scottish governments to provide for a Sikh ethnicity tick-box in the household schedules for the 2021 census of population (now postponed to 2022 in Scotland on account of the Covid-19 pandemic). The current situation is outlined in a report by *The Times of India* on 29 June 2020. In Scotland, the Sikh Federation has apparently withdrawn its threat to take legal action against the Scottish government in the Court of Session following assurances given by Scottish ministers that they would incorporate a prompt for Sikhs in the ‘other’ category of the question on ethnicity, and also require public bodies in Scotland to monitor Sikhs as an ethnic as well as a religious group in the future. In England and Wales, however, the situation remains unresolved, the Federation having submitted an application on 11 June 2020 for a second judicial review against the Cabinet Office (over the lack of a Sikh tick-box in the proposed census ethnicity question in England and Wales), and seeking to quash the Census (England and Wales) Order 2020. The outcome of this further legal challenge is still awaited. *The Times of India*’s coverage can be read at:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/uk-sikhs-fighting-for-ethnic-tick-box-in-census-claim-victory-in-scotland/articleshow/76679670.cms>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Science and religion: conflict or coexistence?

The definitive research output from what appears to be the largest and most international empirical study to date of the interface between science and religion has recently been published: Elaine Howard Ecklund, David Johnson, Brandon Vaidyanathan, Kirstin Matthews, Steven Lewis, Robert Thomson, and Di Di, *Secularity and Science: What Scientists around the World Really Think about Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, viii + 344 pp., ISBN: 978-0-190-92675-5, £19.99, hardback). Funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation, the project has surveyed over 20,000 biologists and physicists and conducted in depth interviews with 600 of them. The core of the book comprises seven chapters presenting national case studies of the USA, UK, France, Italy, Turkey, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan, with a full description of methodology and detailed tables appearing in the four appendices.

The UK chapter (pp. 54–78) brings out the impact that the New Atheism and religious diversity (especially the growth of Islam and Muslim students) are having on the scientific workplace, yet it also shows how UK scientists, whether religious or non-religious, are often more moderate, more willing to collaborate, and more open to religion than might be imagined from the secularizing climate in which they live and the dominant narrative of conflict between science and religion. They seem ‘remarkably friendly to the value of religion—or at least *certain* religions—in society’, with a majority thinking there are basic truths in many religions, and more atheist scientists who identify with a religion than in any other nation investigated. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/secularity-and-science-9780190926755?cc=gb&lang=en&#>

Islam and Muslims on UK university campuses

Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges is a report from a research project funded by the AHRC and ESRC in 2015–18 and hosted at SOAS. Written by Mathew Guest, Alison Scott-Baumann, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Shuruq Naguib, Aisha Phoenix, Yenn Lee, and Tarek Al-Baghal, it is based on findings from a national quota sample of 2,022 students across 132 UK universities in June-July 2017 and interviews and focus groups conducted with 253 staff and students at six higher education institutions during 2016–17. The authors argue that the government’s counterterrorism Prevent strategy has reinforced negative stereotypes of Muslims and encouraged ‘a culture of mutual suspicion and surveillance’ on university campuses, and they recommend that universities take an active role in building peaceful relations on campus and beyond through active challenge of prejudice and empowering Muslim and all marginal voices. The 68-page report, which is a ‘trailer’ to a monograph to be published by Oxford University Press later in the summer (Alison Scott-Baumann, Mathew Guest, Shuruq Naguib, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, and Aisha Phoenix, *Islam on Campus: Contested Identities and the Cultures of Higher Education in Britain*), can be found at:

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/representingislamincampus/publications/file148310.pdf>

NEW DATASET

UK Data Service, SN 8657: Annual Population Survey, Three-Year Pooled Dataset, January 2017-December 2019

The Annual Population Survey is compiled by the Office for National Statistics in partnership with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. It incorporates a sub-set of key variables from the several Labour Force Surveys and is designed to be sufficiently robust and large-scale to produce reliable estimates at local authority level. This accuracy is further enhanced for relatively non-dynamic variables by pooling data from consecutive years. The merged January 2017-December 2019 dataset is based on 515,758 face-to-face and telephone interviews with adults and young persons living away from the parental home during term-time. A question on religious affiliation is included: ‘what is your religion?’ in Britain and ‘what is your religious denomination?’ in Northern Ireland. A catalogue description of the dataset is available at:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8657>