

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 69 – June 2021

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## OPINION POLLS

### Religion questions in recent polling by Number Cruncher Politics for British Future

British Future's recent report on *Race and Opportunity in Britain: Finding Common Ground*, written by Sunder Katwala, is primarily based upon two waves of online polling of UK adults aged 18 and over undertaken by Number Cruncher Politics: on 9–17 October 2020 (when 1,000 ethnic minority and 1,088 white people were interviewed) and on 25 January–14 February 2021 (2,000 ethnic minority and 1,501 white respondents). In addition to questions specifically addressing race and ethnicity issues, each wave included some questions of particular religious interest, one topic from each wave being highlighted here.

In October, the sample was asked about the extent of perceived prejudice against various religious groups, summary results being shown in Table 1, below, confirming a wide disparity in perceptions of religious prejudice, with Muslims viewed as being most victimized and atheists as least unfavourably regarded.

**Table 1: Religious groups perceived to experience a lot of prejudice, UK, 2020 (%)**

	All	White respondents	Ethnic minority respondents
Muslims	42	41	52
Hindus	15	14	16
Sikhs	14	14	16
Jews	13	12	18
Christians	8	8	7
Atheists	4	4	4

Source: Number Cruncher Politics/British Future.

In January-February, respondents were asked about the importance of religion or faith in their lives. The distribution of answers appears in Table 2, below, reaffirming that ethnic minorities are disproportionately more religious than white persons.

**Table 2: Ethnic groups for whom religion was important in life, UK, 2021 (%)**

	Very important	Somewhat important	A little important	Not at all important	Don't know
All	17	16	22	41	4
White	14	15	23	44	4
Ethnic minority	39	21	17	17	7
Asian	38	22	20	14	6
Black	47	21	17	12	3
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	49	19	16	9	7
Indian	36	25	24	12	3
Mixed	23	19	19	35	5

Source: Number Cruncher Politics/British Future.

Topline results for each wave are available as follows:

(9-17 October 2020)

<https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Topline-findings.October2020.Number-Cruncher-Politics-for-British-Future.pdf>

(25 January-14 February 2021)

<https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Topline-findings.Feb2021.Number-Cruncher-Politics-for-British-Future.pdf>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: vaccine hesitancy and religious groups – Ipsos MORI polling**

As part of an ESRC-funded project on ‘Covid and after: trust and perceptions’, researchers from King’s College London and the University of Bristol (including BRIN’s Siobhan McAndrew) commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake online interviews with samples of 4,860 UK adults aged 18–75 from 21 November to 22 December 2020 (when the UK’s vaccination rollout was only just beginning) and 4,896 between 1 and 16 April 2021. On each occasion, respondents were asked whether they were certain or likely to get vaccinated against Covid-19 or had already accepted an invitation to do so. Vaccine confidence was found to have increased significantly across all ethnic and religious groups between the two waves. Notwithstanding, it remained relatively low (67%) among Muslims in the April 2021 fieldwork; they were the religious group that consistently expressed most vaccine scepticism, 41% of Muslims believing the AstraZeneca vaccine causes blood clots, 29% that people who have been vaccinated against Covid may find it harder to have children in future, and 19% that coronavirus vaccines contain pork products. Muslims were also the faith community most likely to trust their own religious leadership in matters relating to coronavirus and among the least likely to express a great deal of trust in the NHS in general or to agree strongly that they trusted the NHS professionals who had looked after them over the past few years. King’s College London has issued a slide pack/report on the survey at:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/covid-19-vaccine-take-up-and-trust.pdf>

The University of Bristol has a press release at:

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2021/june/vaccine-take-up.html>

### **YouGov poll of public attitudes to lobbying by faith leaders against assisted dying**

A Religious Alliance for Dignity in Dying has recently been formed, comprising faith bodies, leaders, and followers who support a change in the law in England and Wales to enable terminally ill persons to determine how, when, and where they die. The initiative coincides with a private member’s bill introduced into the House of Lords by Baroness Meacher, and given a first reading there, paving the way in the autumn for the first substantive parliamentary debate on assisted dying since the failure of an earlier bill (proposed by Rob Marris) in the House of Commons in 2015. The latter bill had been strongly opposed by various religious interests, and an online YouGov poll of 5,039 Britons on 11–16 May 2021, sponsored by Dignity in Dying, has provided fresh insights into public attitudes to that intervention. Overall, 62% of the British public considered that religious leaders in 2015 had been wrong to campaign against assisted dying, the proportion reaching 70% among the 2,743 individuals who professed no religion. However, even among the 2,126 respondents who claimed to belong to some faith, 53% still said it had been wrong for religious leaders to lobby against the legalization of assisted dying in 2015, with 22% in favour (including 28% of Roman Catholics).

Headline results from the survey were published in the *Sunday Times* for 6 June 2021 (main section, p. 12), while full data tables can be found at:

[https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/fwdhd16asf/YouGov%20-%20Faith%20polling%20-DID\\_Results\\_May2021%20-%20Final.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/fwdhd16asf/YouGov%20-%20Faith%20polling%20-DID_Results_May2021%20-%20Final.pdf)

### **Attitudes towards the recent conflict between Israel and Palestinians**

True to form, the recent renewal of armed conflict between Israel and Hamas has inevitably had implications for Jews living in the UK, including a spike in anti-Semitic incidents, as logged by the Community Security Trust (with more incidents in May 2021 than during any other month since records began). The unease prompted the Jewish Leadership Council to commission a nineteen-question survey of public attitudes to the issue, undertaken online by Deltapoll on 21–24 May 2021 among a sample of 2,097 adults in Britain. The majority of the public favoured keeping clear water between the UK and Israel/Palestine, 55% considering the UK had little to do with the situation between Israel and Palestine, and 67% not wanting British political parties to take sides in the conflict beyond supporting a full peace settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians. Equally, 64% did not think British Jews should be asked to justify the actions of the Israeli government, while 63% denied that British Muslims should be asked to justify the actions of Hamas. At the same time, 55% believed Israel had a right to defend itself if its civilian areas were targeted with rockets. The incident in north London involving a convoy of cars driven through Jewish areas carrying Palestinian flags and proclaiming anti-Jewish slogans over loudspeakers was widely condemned: 76% wanted the perpetrators brought to justice, 64% judged the police should have intervened immediately to stop the incident, 59% felt angry and embarrassed about the episode, and 52% even agreed that it had made them worried that future atrocities against Jewish people were still possible. Data tables for the poll are available at:

<https://deltapoll.co.uk/polls/israel-and-anti-semitism>

Meanwhile, a five-nation YouGov/Eurotrack poll, conducted after the conflict between Israel and Hamas had broken out, revealed sharp drops in the public's favourability towards Israel compared with the previous month's survey. In Britain, where 1,622 adults were interviewed online on 24–25 May 2021, favourable views of Israel were entertained by just 19% of the population, eleven points fewer than on 21–22 April, while unfavourability had increased from 44% to 60%. For more information, see the blog, incorporating a link to the data table, at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2021/06/04/eurotrack-israels-favourability-falls-following-ga>

### **Survation survey of political party identification and voting among British Muslims**

In keeping with post-war tradition, the vast majority (72%) of 504 British Muslims interviewed by Survation over the phone between 20 May and 4 June 2021 on behalf of the Labour Muslim Network still identified with the Labour Party. Moreover, at the various elections that took place in early May 2021, 77% of British Muslims claimed to have voted Labour, albeit this was a lower proportion than the 86% who had supported Labour at the 2019 general election. Compared with twelve months previously, 37% of Muslims also viewed the Labour Party more unfavourably, while only 22% regarded Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, in a favourable light (just two points more than said the same about Boris Johnson, the Conservative prime minister). A blog and data tables from the survey can be found at:

<https://www.survation.com/british-muslims-retain-strong-link-to-labour-but-leadership-ratings-lag-those-of-the-party/>

### **Is it being political for football fans to sing songs about the Pope or ISIS?**

In case you had not noticed, it is the Euros season, and the latest Opinium poll for *The Observer*, undertaken online on 10–11 June 2021 among 2,002 UK adults, contained a module of football-related questions, including several about football and politics. Two asked whether it was political for fans to sing songs about the Pope and ISIS, respectively. A clear majority (59% versus 23%) thought that it was political to sing about ISIS, but a plurality (43% against 36%) did *not* judge it political for fans to sing about the Pope. Data tables can be found at:

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

### **Alternative beliefs: do aliens exist and have they visited the earth?**

Exactly half the population, including 58% of men and 63% of under-25s, believe that aliens exist, according to an online survey by YouGov of 4,839 adults in Britain on 21 May 2021. The proportion is comparable with other recent surveys. Just over two-fifths of this number, or 22% of the overall sample, were convinced that aliens had actually visited the earth, peaking at 26% among people aged 50–65 and manual (C2DE) workers and at 28% with those who had voted for the UK to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. Just under one-third (29%) of all respondents did not believe that aliens existed, reaching 39% among over-65s, while 22% did not know what to think. The full data can be found at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/science/survey-results/daily/2021/05/21/eeb3b/1>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Coronavirus chronicles: Good Faith Partnership’s vision for Covid-19 recovery**

The Good Faith Partnership, which is committed to making connections and building relationships in order to solve the world’s problems, has published a 17-page report entitled *Stepping Up and Stepping Out: Towards a Future Social Covenant between Faith Communities and Government in Covid-19 Recovery and beyond*. It ‘highlights the social impact of faith communities in their assistance to vulnerable communities during the pandemic, explores the current state of collaboration between faith communities and government, and makes recommendations on how the government can aid and accelerate the positive impact of faith communities on society going forward.’ The evidence base, gathered between January and April 2021, comprised a quantitative survey of ‘all faith communities’ (summarized on pp. 6–7 and 15) and executive interviews with senior faith leaders, grass-roots activists, and inter-faith professionals. The number of respondents to the quantitative survey was only 250, and it remains unclear precisely how they were recruited and how representative they were of the faith universe. Certainly, Christian informants were in the minority (31%) and Jewish ones vastly oversampled (26%). It is possible that the scale of faith-based social capital is overstated. The report is available at:

<https://goodfaith.org.uk/case-studies/stepping-up-and-stepping-out-towards-a-future-social-covenant-between-faith-communities-and-government-in-covid-19-recovery-and-beyond>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

**Coronavirus chronicles: vaccine hesitancy and religious groups – ONS data**

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has continued its investigations into the socio-demographic aspects of the take-up of vaccines against Covid-19. On this occasion, the study population consisted of people who were aged 70 years and over, alive on 9 May 2021, resident in England, and enumerated at the 2011 census (the source of information about religious affiliation). The proportion of these individuals who were double vaccinated (having received their first dose by 15 March and their second by 9 May) was 89.5% overall, and slightly more among Christians and Jews, but it fell to 78.6% for Buddhists and 67.1% for Muslims. The full analysis is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-and-vaccination-rates-in-people-aged-70-years-and-over-by-socio-demographic-characteristic-england-8-december-2020-to-9-may-2021>

**Faith schools and their pupils in England, January 2021**

Data files have been released for the latest annual survey of *Schools, Pupils, and their Characteristics* in England. They cover all schools, both maintained and independent, as at January 2021. A new analytical tool enables users to create customized tables, specifying a range of variables, for each academic year back to 2015/16. A simplified view of faith and non-faith school provision for 2020/21 has been generated and is shown in Table 3, below. Contrary to many perceptions, the faith school sector is not currently growing in England; the proportion of pupils attending maintained or other schools with no religious character is gradually increasing, from 75.4% in 2015/16. The files can be explored at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2021>

**Table 3: Religious character of all schools, England, 2021**

School affiliation	Schools	Headcount	Headcount %
No religious character	17,140	6,761,437	75.9
Church of England	4,737	1,162,825	13.0
Roman Catholic	2,042	773,884	8.7
Other Christian	319	150,623	1.7
Non-Christian	175	63,118	0.7
Total	24,413	8,911,887	100.0

Source: National Statistics.

**Religious profession in the armed forces as at 1 April 2021**

The Ministry of Defence has published the latest edition of *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics*, including the religious affiliation of both regular and reserve forces. Among the regulars, the proportion in the three services combined who professed no religion has risen sharply, from 14.7% on 1 April 2012 to 34.1% on 1 April 2021 (with 39.1% in the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, 37.0% in the Royal Air Force, and 30.9% in the Army). In the reserves, the increase has been less pronounced, from 17.7% on 1 October 2012 to 27.6% on 1 April 2021. A bulletin and data tables are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2021>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

**Values as the new religion: Linda Woodhead's Edward Cadbury Lectures, 2021**

Linda Woodhead has recently delivered (online) the 2021 series of Edward Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham, on the theme of 'Values are the New Religion'. In them, she charted, with reference to the UK and USA, the decoupling of values from religion that has taken place in recent decades, accounting for the loss of moral authority by the Churches and religious decline more generally. In particular, Woodhead contended, there has been an intergenerational transition from a Christian agape 'give your life' ethic to an individualized 'live your life' ethic, which she considers to be the default ethic of our time, notably among young people. She illustrated this argument with reference to personal values, corporate values (in schools and organizations), economic and political values, and cultural (values) wars. She concluded by commending 'values pluralism' as an approach, the core elements of which she sketched out. As appropriate, some reference was made to the empirical (often quantitative) research Woodhead has undertaken over the years, including through national sample surveys in Britain, but more of these data should (hopefully) feature in the expanded version of the lectures that she intends to publish as a book in due course. In the meantime, recordings of the four lectures (incorporating the slides and Q&A sessions) can be heard at:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/events/cadburylectures/2021>

**Coronavirus chronicles: University of York's 'Churches, Covid-19, and Communities'**

In February this year, we noted in *Counting Religion in Britain* that the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture (CSCC) at the University of York had already undertaken one online survey and had recently launched another into 'Churches, Covid-19, and Communities', in partnership with several religion and heritage bodies, and with Dee Dyas and Kate Giles as principal investigators. The fruits of that labour have now been published in a 145-page report, incorporating an executive summary on pp. 7–16, key recommendations on pp. 96–101, a description of methodology on pp. 103–6, and questionnaires on pp. 137–45. There were over 5,500 (mainly self-selecting) respondents in England between September and December 2020 and in February and March 2021, categorized as church leaders, church members, and general public (non-members). The data are potentially unrepresentative of these target populations and, although some statistics are quoted, the evidence is mostly (and wisely) treated as of more qualitative than quantitative significance. The body of the report focuses on churches and their communities in relation to the provision of social care (pp. 19–51), well-being, place-making, and heritage (pp. 52–80), and support for people suffering grief and loss (pp. 81–95). Appended are a valuable digest of relevant surveys and reports from other organizations (pp. 108–27), and a paper by John Jenkins which takes a long view of the English Church and epidemic disease (pp. 132–6). *Churches, Covid-19, and Communities: Experiences, Needs, and Supporting Recovery* can be found at:

<https://churchesandcovid.org/report>