

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 73 – October 2021

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## OPINION POLLS

### UnHerd's response to Savanta ComRes poll on frequency of churchgoing and prayer

It is comparatively rare for BRIN to return to a previous news post, but it seems legitimate to do so in the case of the online poll conducted by Savanta ComRes on behalf of The Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer (see *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 72, September 2021). We remarked at the time on the seemingly 'aspirational' nature of the replies. Now Freddie Sayers, writing for UnHerd's *The Post* on 30 September 2021, has expressed concerns in a rather more forthright fashion, dismissing the research as 'just a dud poll' and 'totally unrelated to the real world', although its ire seems as much directed against the BBC (whose media release appears to have fuelled speculation about 'religious revival') than against the pollster or the client. More significantly, UnHerd cites YouGov's replication (among 1,669 adults on 27–28 September) of the two core questions on the frequency of churchgoing and prayer. UnHerd juxtaposes, in tabular form, the Savanta ComRes and YouGov answers to both topics, for Britain as a whole and for adults aged 18–24 (a sub-group whose 'religiosity' stood out in the Savanta ComRes survey). The YouGov figures were appreciably less flattering to the religious interest, with 70% of the public apparently never attending church and 70% never praying. These data can be accessed on UnHerd at:

<https://unherd.com/the-post/bbc-news-reports-a-non-existent-religious-revival>

or on YouGov's website at:

[https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/qeszmz895ri/Internal\\_Religion\\_210928\\_W.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/qeszmz895ri/Internal_Religion_210928_W.pdf)

The Savanta ComRes findings likewise incurred negative coverage in a blog by Michael Marshall on *The Skeptic* website on 20 October. He highlighted methodological and interpretative weaknesses on the pollster's part and emphasized the role of Jersey Road PR (which commissioned the survey for The Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer), noting its aim of securing positive mentions in the press for Christian groups. *The Skeptic*'s post is at.

<https://www.skeptic.org.uk/2021/10/are-young-people-turning-god-in-the-pandemic-dont-believe-the-prayer-pr/>

In accordance with convention, BRIN offered Savanta ComRes the opportunity to comment on the divergence between their results and those obtained by YouGov to exactly the same questions. At the time of writing, no statement from Savanta ComRes has been received. In the absence of any obvious explanation, users should perhaps exercise caution in taking the Savanta ComRes data at face value. Meanwhile, BRIN is standing by its own initial judgment that the data seem aspirational.

### **YouGov Death Study: some afterlife beliefs**

Public attitudes and opinions about death have been explored by YouGov in an in-depth online poll of 2,164 UK adults aged 16 and over on 19–23 March 2021 (but only just published). The questions covered nine principal topics: the meaning of life; the perception and impact of death; the fear of dying; one's own death; after one's own death; life after death; social issues and death; the value of life; and living forever and reincarnation. Findings are explored in a series of nine blogs, posted by YouGov's Milan Dinic on 6 October 2021, identifying fourteen main conclusions. With regard to the afterlife, 41% of respondents indicated they would like to live forever (assuming they would stop ageing, keep a body which was in the age they most desired, and retain their mental capabilities); however, 73% of the sample were realistic enough to recognize that it would never be possible for humans to live forever. So, the second-best alternative was to have another life after death (sought by 52%), against 23% preferring to end their existence once they had died. Rather fewer, 33%, said they actually believed in a life after death, disproportionately the practising religious (69%), with 42% disbelieving and 26% undecided. A similar proportion, 31%, believed in heaven or hell, while 54% did not. The series of blogs, linking to full data tables, can be found at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/overview/articles-reports>

### **Trustworthiness of clergy or priests: Ipsos MORI global study of professional rankings**

Just one-third of Britons aged 16–74 consider clergy or priests in this country to be trustworthy, according to the 2021 edition of the Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index, fielded online between 23 April and 7 May. Nevertheless, this is a somewhat higher proportion than was recorded in Great Britain in either 2019 (28%) or 2018 (24%) and also higher than the 28-nation global country average of 25% in 2021. Of the eighteen professions investigated, clergy/priests were ranked eighth in Britain and eleventh in the world in 2021, with doctors topping the list in each case (rated as trustworthy by 72% of Britons, just ahead of scientists on 66% and teachers on 62%). Slightly more than one-fifth (22%) of Britons deemed clergy/priests to be untrustworthy, with the balance of 45% neutral or undecided. Topline results only can be viewed at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/doctors-become-worlds-most-trusted-profession>

### **Anti-Semitism in Europe: Ipsos SA survey for the Action and Protection League**

The results of a major multinational survey of anti-Semitism in Europe, embracing attitudes of the general public in 16 nations towards Jews, Israel, and the Holocaust, have been launched recently in connection with the 2021 annual conference of Jewish community leaders organized in Brussels by the European Jewish Association. The survey was commissioned by the Action and Protection League (APL) and conducted by Ipsos SA in December 2019 and January 2020 by means of 1,000 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 18–75 in each country surveyed, including the UK. A presentation about the study, incorporating some UK results that indicate a lower than average level of anti-Semitism, is freely available at:

[https://www.audiatour-online.ch/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/7-Press\\_Conf\\_2021-10-13.pdf](https://www.audiatour-online.ch/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/7-Press_Conf_2021-10-13.pdf)

Additional data may be found on the APL's own website, including multinational and national reports that BRIN has currently been unable to access because they have been reported to Microsoft as being 'unsafe'. For future reference, the APL's website is at:

<https://apleu.org>

Interestingly, the Savanta ComRes monthly political tracker continues to record high perceptions of anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK. In the most recent poll, conducted online among 2,092 adults on 16–17 October 2021, 17% reported anti-Semitism as a big problem and 36% as somewhat of a problem, while only 8% said it was not a problem at all. For more detail, see Table 67 at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/savanta-comres-political-tracker-october-2021/>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: a comeback for Halloween?**

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected the observance of many seasonal festivals in Britain in 2020, Halloween included. YouGov polled on that subject in October 2020 and replicated its survey among an online sample of 1,745 Britons on 14–15 October 2021. The restudy indicated that Halloween had made something of a comeback, at least so far as trick-or-treating was concerned. In 2020, just 1% of adults anticipated taking a child or children trick-or-treating but in 2021 the proportion had risen to 6%, although the overall number saying they would normally do so had reduced from 17% to 13%, coronavirus still holding people back. On the receiving end, so to speak, only 10% in 2020 expected to give treats to trick-or-treating children knocking on their doors, but the figure had doubled (to 21%) in 2021, albeit it was still nine points below the usual proportion. A blog for the 2021 study, with links to the 2021 data tables, as well as to the 2020 blog, can be found at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/10/29/britons-beware-trick-or-treaters-are-back>

In another YouGov poll, among 3,064 Britons on 26 October 2021, as many as 50% claimed they would hand out a treat to trick-or-treating children calling on their home, with 40% refusing to answer the door or pretending not to be in. For full data, see:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/arts/survey-results/daily/2021/10/26/bfc56/1>

Pumpkin-carving at Halloween is also popular, according to a YouGov study of 4,954 adults on 29 October 2021, with half the population saying they had carved a jack-o-lantern from a pumpkin at some stage, one-third of them having done it many times. For full data, see:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/arts/survey-results/daily/2021/10/29/3ae1a/2>

On the other hand, despite its growing appeal, Halloween remains less popular than the traditional autumn celebrations around 5 November. YouGov's investigation of 26 October 2021 found that, asked to choose, 48% preferred Bonfire Night against 21% favouring Halloween, with 31% undecided. For full data, see:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/arts/survey-results/daily/2021/10/26/bfc56/2>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England Statistics for Mission, 2020**

The first published analysis from the Church of England's revamped Statistics for Mission for January to December 2020 is the 29-page report by Ken Eames on *Church at Home, 2020*, focusing on services offered remotely by local churches, whether online (by far the commonest medium), by phone, post, email, or other means, largely in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing closures and restrictions on places of worship. Based upon responses from 82% of Church of England churches, 78% of churches, 80% of parishes, and 91% of benefices offered Church at Home services during the March-July 2020 lockdown, while 69% of churches still did so in October 2020 (by which time in-person services had been restored). Disproportionately, they were churches with large pre-pandemic congregations. Although, many churches did collect 'attendance' figures for Church at Home services, they did so in such methodologically different ways that the Church of England Research and Statistics team has decided (for reasons given on pp. 9–10) 'it is not helpful or meaningful to aggregate them to produce diocesan or national ... totals'. The report is available at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/ChurchAtHome2020.pdf>

### **Results of elections to the Church of England General Synod, 2021**

The quinquennial elections to the Church of England's General Synod (its internal governing body), conducted along single transferable vote lines, have taken place recently, and a preliminary analysis of the results has been published by Peter Ould (an Anglican priest, consulting statistician, and amateur psephologist) on the *Psephizo* website. Turnout was up on the previous election in both the Houses of Laity and Clergy, particularly the latter, primarily on account of efforts by the two main campaigning groups (the Church of England Evangelical Council and Inclusive Church), which recommended slates of candidates. Ould categorized the elected members as 'orthodox' or 'revisionist', according to their positions on the blessing of same-sex unions, one of the most contentious issues dividing the Church of England today. The two categories were fairly evenly balanced in each house, 40% orthodox and 42% revisionist in the House of Clergy, and 37% orthodox and 33% revisionist in the House of Laity, with the views of the remainder unknown. These proportions fall short of the scale of majority required to pass major doctrinal or liturgical change in the Church of England. Ould's blog can be found at:

<https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/what-will-the-new-general-synod-look-like/>

### **Economic and social value of church buildings in the UK**

The National Churches Trust (NCT) has updated its September 2020 report *The House of Good*, quantifying the economic and social value of church buildings to the UK, in the light of two important changes to HM Treasury's Green Book guidance on policy appraisal and evaluation. One change has strengthened HM Treasury's framework for supporting policy interventions to address regional economic disparities (the government's 'levelling up' agenda), while the other affects measurement of the economic benefits of wellbeing. Factoring in these changes, NCT's revised calculation for the economic and social value of church buildings to the UK is now more than four times higher than in 2020, up from £12.4 billion to £55 billion per annum, comprising a market value and replacement cost of £2.4 billion and a non-market (wellbeing)

value of £52.6 billion. Details of the NCT's revaluation can be found in the supplementary report at:

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/futureofchurches>

### **UK Jews and climate change: Institute for Jewish Policy Research panel survey**

In the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)'s latest publication (launched on the eve of the COP26 global conference in Glasgow), *Climate Change: What Do Jews in the UK Think?*, David Graham, Carli Lessof, and Jonathan Boyd report on the results of four questions on climate change fielded as part of the summer 2021 panel survey of 4,152 self-identifying and self-selecting Jews aged 16 and over resident in the UK between 23 July and 1 September. Topline findings are that: 92% of Jews thought the world's climate is changing; 63% attributed this fact mainly or entirely to human activity; and 77% said they were worried about climate change. On a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (a great deal), there was a mean score of 6.6 feeling personal responsibility to reduce climate change. Comparisons are drawn in the report between the attitudes of UK Jews and the general population of the UK, and the Jewish population of Israel (comparative data being taken from the European Social Survey and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy). There is also an analysis of UK Jewish responses by demographic and other sub-groups. The tentative conclusion is that the UK Jewish community is more sympathetic towards, and has greater awareness of, the issues surrounding climate change than adults as a whole. The document is available at:

<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17923>

### **Muslim Census survey about Muslim university student finance**

According to preliminary findings (based on 36,000 responses) from an online survey of a self-selecting (and thus potentially unrepresentative) sample of UK Muslims launched by Muslim Census on 1 October 2021, the UK government's repeated delays in introducing a scheme of Alternative Student Finance (ASF) for Muslims has already directly disadvantaged almost 100,000 students among the ten cohorts since the introduction of the higher £9,000 annual tuition fee. Many Muslims do not take interest-bearing loans for scriptural reasons and are therefore reluctant to avail themselves of conventional student finance arrangements in order to fund their university education. Muslim Census estimates that more than one in ten qualifying Muslim students have missed out entirely on university because of the lack of ASF, while one in six are self-funding their higher education for the same reason. Among Muslim students who have taken up conventional student finance, four in five said they felt conflicted in doing so. Seven in ten of all respondents considered the lack of an ASF to be discriminatory against Muslims. For additional comment, see the blog at:

<https://muslimcensus.co.uk/unequal-access-to-university-education/>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **Religious hate crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales, 2020/21**

According to Home Office data, there were 129,767 hate crimes recorded by police forces throughout England and Wales in 2020/21, of which 6,377 were logged as religion-related. The

latter figure represented a decrease of 17.9% on the 2019/20 level and 21.9% on 2018/19. The perceived religious allegiances of the victims of religion hate crimes in 2020/21 were 43% Muslim, 21% Jewish, 19% other religions, 3% no religion, and 15% unknown. The majority of religious hate crimes comprised public order offences (45%) and stalking and harassment (28%). A statistical bulletin and data are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021>

### **Offender management statistics as at 30 September 2021**

The Ministry of Justice's latest quarterly review of offender management statistics incorporates, at Table 1.5, details of the prison population of England and Wales as at 30 September 2021 by religion and sex. Of the 78,756 male and female inmates, 14.0% registered their religious affiliation as Anglican, 16.6% as Catholic, 14.3% as other Christian, 17.5% as Muslim, 5.9% as other non-Christian, 31.3% as none, with 0.4% unrecorded. The overall proportion of Christians in the prison population has fallen from 97.8% in 1972 to 44.9% today, a half-century during which the number of prisoners has almost trebled. Further information is available in a statistical bulletin and data tables at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2021>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **Recent articles in academic journals**

- Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, 'Introducing The Index of Balanced Affect Change (TIBACH): A Study among Church of England Clergy and Laity', *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Vol. 24, No. 8, 2021, pp. 770–9; discusses the development, and tests the construct validity, of the new index with reference to the wellbeing of a self-selecting sample of 4,449 Church of England clergy (29%) and laity (71%) who answered the 'Coronavirus, Church, and You' questionnaire in May–July 2020 (during the first Covid-19 lockdown):  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.1923679>
- Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and John Payne, 'Introducing the Francis Owl-Lark Indices (FOLI): Assessing the Implications of Diurnal Activity Patterns for Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health', *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Vol. 24, No. 8, 2021, pp. 780–95; drawing on data from 338 clergy in the Church in Wales, 484 ministers in the Church of Scotland, and 422 Salvation Army officers serving in the UK, the study reports the development of a 10-item instrument to measure preference for morning or evening activity;  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.1871595>
- Greg Smith, 'The Ordinary Theology of British Evangelicals: The Bebbington Quadrilateral and beyond', *Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 7, 2021, pp. 31–54; draws upon panel data from the Evangelical Alliance's 21st Century Evangelicals Research Programme in the 2010s to determine the extent to which the 'ordinary theology' of grass-roots evangelicals in Britain today is still shaped by the historical model

summarized in David Bebbington's famous quadrilateral (Biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism):

[https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theologyandministry/Volume7/TheoMin7\\_31-54\\_SmithG\\_BritishEvangelicals.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theologyandministry/Volume7/TheoMin7_31-54_SmithG_BritishEvangelicals.pdf)

- Michael Hirst, 'Being Good Neighbours: Placing Methodist Manses for Ministry', *Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 7, 2021, pp. 55–74; investigation of the location of Methodist manses in England, concluding they 'are often not well placed for ministers to engage with socially marginalized communities experiencing poverty and deprivation. Most manses are located in less deprived, more affluent, and relatively exclusive neighbourhoods, socially and physically distanced from deprived households and neighbourhoods':  
[https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theologyandministry/Volume7/TheoMin7\\_55-74\\_HirstM\\_MethodistManses.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theologyandministry/Volume7/TheoMin7_55-74_HirstM_MethodistManses.pdf)
- Denise Bonnette, 'Church Redundancy: Changing Anglican Community and Belonging in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, c.1950–1995', *Family and Community History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, July 2021, pp. 120–46; using a combination of central and parochial Church of England records, the author investigates the circumstances that led to church redundancy (including the part played by declining church attendance) and the emotions and feelings towards it of the local Anglican and parish communities:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14631180.2021.1944517>
- Ian Jones, 'Secularisation in 1960s Britain: Triumph of Rationalism or Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?', *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2021, pp. 553–63; reflections upon the scholarly debate surrounding the 1960s as the secularization decade in Britain, in the light of recent books by Callum Brown and Sam Brewitt-Taylor, but without regard to statistical evidence:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2021.1880748>

*Reminder: most articles in academic journals are still not open access and a personal or institutional subscription, or one-time payment, may be required to read or download them.*