

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 76 – January 2022 © Clive D. Field, 2022

OPINION POLLS

Exploring spirituality and alternative beliefs with YouGov

YouGov commenced the New Year by releasing a blog and data tables from an online survey it had conducted into aspects of spirituality, among 1,653 Britons on 2–3 September 2021. The opening questions asked respondents to assess the extent to which they were (a) spiritual and/or (b) religious. The majority replied that they were not religious (77%) and not spiritual (66%), although somewhat more regarded themselves as spiritual (29%) than religious (19%), seemingly offering some limited proof of the existence of the SBNR phenomenon in Britain. Women were far more likely to say they were very or fairly spiritual than men (35% versus 22%) but the differential was reduced in the case of the self-rated religious (21% versus 17%).

The remainder of the survey invited interviewees to say whether they judged each of nine statements relating to alternative beliefs to be true or false: The proportion replying definitely or probably true was: emission of negative and positive energy by humans (46%); existence of good and bad karma (44%); potential for spirituality and science to be combined for healing purposes (39%); potential for energy points (chakras) across the body to impact wellbeing (34%); possession of a spiritual gift by some people (26%); healing properties of essential oils (25%); healing properties of crystals (19%); impact of an individual's star sign on personality and compatibility (15%); and the efficacy of tarot cards (11%). For both blog and data, see:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2022/01/11/positive-vibrations-chakras-and-star-signs-what-sp>

Islamophobia in contemporary Britain: University of Birmingham and YouGov study

Two distinct forms of Islamophobia, anti-religious and anti-ethnic, coexist but mutually reinforce each other in Britain, according to the authors of a new report published by the University of Birmingham: Stephen Jones and Amy Unsworth, *The Dinner Table Prejudice: Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain*. They draw upon the findings of an online survey by YouGov among 1,667 adults aged 18 and over on 20–21 July 2021, which was funded by the British Academy, the report combining sociological context, methodological observations, and selective presentation of the data in tables and figures. The document's executive summary (pp. 7–8) headlines eight key findings, which are reproduced verbatim:

- Muslims are the UK's second 'least liked' group, after gypsy and Irish travellers
- More than one in four people, and more than half of Conservative and Leave voters, hold conspiratorial theories about Sharia 'no-go areas'
- Support for prohibiting all Muslim migration to the UK is 4–6% higher for Muslims than it is for other ethnic and religious groups

- The British public is almost three times more likely to view Islam as inherently literalistic than other religions
- British people are more confident in making judgements about Islam than other non-Christian religions but are much more likely to make incorrect assumptions about it
- Islamophobia is *not* associated with Anglican identity, belief in God, or practicing a religion
- Hostility towards religion in general is significantly associated with prejudice towards Islamic belief
- People from middle and upper class occupational groups are more likely to hold prejudiced views of Islamic beliefs than people from working class occupational groups

Full computer tabulations from the survey are not yet in the public domain. The report can be accessed at:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/ptr/90172-univ73-islamophobia-in-the-uk-report-final.pdf>

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

The latest Savanta ComRes monthly political tracker, fielded on 14–16 January 2022 among a sample of 2,166 UK adults, included the customary questions about perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in UK society, a rather different approach to YouGov’s poll for the University of Birmingham which had been trying to measure the extent to which respondents themselves were anti-Semitic or Islamophobic. Half the Savanta ComRes panellists regarded anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK (15% a big problem and 35% somewhat a problem) and rather more (57%) took the same view of Islamophobia (21% a big problem and 35% somewhat a problem). The proportion thinking Islamophobia to be a big problem was particularly large among the under-25s (40%). Full data tables are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/savanta-comres-political-trackers-january-2022/>

Perceived threat posed by Islamic State in Britain

Islamic State (ISIS) may be less in the news these days, but it is still perceived as posing as big a threat as ever in Britain, according to an online survey by YouGov of 1,695 adults on 17–18 January 2022, also undertaken in six continental European countries and the United States. Asked to assess the level of threat posed by ISIS in this country on a scale from 0 (not a threat at all) to 10 (a serious threat), 35% of British respondents assigned a rating of 10, the same proportion as in a poll in March 2019, and comparable with other nations in the study apart from France, which was an outlier on 54% in 2022 (53% in 2019). Two-thirds of people in Britain scored the threat from ISIS between 7 and 10 in 2022. Topline data are available at:

<https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/k23mapufn7/YouGov%20EuroTrack%20%2B%20US%20-%20Ukraine.pdf>

Attitudes to Sunday trading legislation in England and Wales: YouGov tracker

In YouGov’s first religion-related tracker of 2022, 49% of the 1,811 Britons interviewed online on 8–10 January felt that shops in England and Wales should be allowed to open for as long as

they want on Sundays, the proportion peaking at 72% in Scotland (where Sunday trading is, in practice, already deregulated). A further 29% were content with the statutory status quo, which limits large shops to opening for a maximum of six hours on Sundays, while 14% of all adults (and 20% of over-50s) did not consider that shops should be allowed to open at all on Sundays, with 7% undecided. Full data tables are available at:

https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/ug1pnatj5j/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation6_sr_13.pdf

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England Living Ministry panel survey wave 3 report

The Church of England's National Ministry Team has published a 100-page quantitative report from wave 3 of the Living Ministry research project, which was launched in 2017 and is tracking the development of Church of England clergy ordained deacon in 2006, 2011, and 2015 and ordinands commencing ministerial training in 2016. *Clergy Wellbeing in a Time of Covid: Autonomy, Accountability, and Support—Living Ministry Panel Survey, Wave 3*, by Louise McFerran and Liz Graveling, is based on findings from an online survey of 521 clergy in March 2021. The questionnaire was designed to measure changes in clergy wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic and to explore how clergy experience autonomy, accountability, and support. Comparing the situation before and during the pandemic, 44% of clergy reported their relational wellbeing to be worse and 42% their mental wellbeing, while only 9% recorded a deterioration in financial wellbeing (and 30% an improvement). The full report is available via the link at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry/ministry-development/living-ministry/living-ministry-research>

Coronavirus chronicles: update on Jewish mortality

The Board of Deputies of British Jews has continued to monitor the number of UK Jews who have died from Covid-19, whether in hospitals or other settings, and who subsequently received a Jewish burial. The latest figures of deaths to be released were: 954 on 26 November and 3 December, 955 on 10 December, 957 on 17 December, and 964 on 31 December 2021, and 967 on 7 January, 978 on 14 January, and 988 on 21 January 2022. In all, there were 310 coronavirus-related deaths during the course of 2021 that resulted in a Jewish burial, compared with 654 in 2020.

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Coronavirus chronicles: vaccination rates by religion to 31 December 2021

The Office for National Statistics has published a further statistical bulletin covering Covid vaccination uptake by religion: *Coronavirus and Vaccination Rates in People Aged 18 Years and over by Socio-Demographic Characteristic and Occupation, England, 8 December 2020 to 31 December 2021*. The population includes those enumerated in the 2011 census, registered with a GP in 2019, resident in England, and alive on 31 December 2021. The key findings in

relation to religion were: ‘Third vaccination coverage was highest among those identifying as Jewish (70.5%), Hindu (70.0%), and Christian (66.9%). Those identifying as Muslim had the lowest proportion of people who had received three vaccinations (40.2%). Similarly, among those who had received two vaccinations by 30 September 2021, those identifying as Muslim had the lowest coverage for third vaccinations (53.6%).’ The bulletin is available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/coronavirusandvaccinationratesinpeopleaged18yearsandoverbysociodemographiccharacteristicandoccupationengland/8december2020to31december2021>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Recent articles in academic journals: ‘Coronavirus, Church, and You’ survey

Articles are beginning to flow thick and fast from the ‘Coronavirus, Church, and You’ survey, conducted online in May-July 2020 among a self-selecting convenience sample of 7,000 disproportionately Anglican clergy and churchgoing laity. Here are some of the articles that have appeared recently:

- Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and Christopher Alan Lewis, ‘Spiritual Awakening among Anglican Clergy during the Pandemic: Exploring the Effects of Personal Factors, Personality, Church Orientation, and Religious Practice’, *Spirituality of a Personality: Methodology, Theory, and Practice*, Vol. 101 (P.1), No. 2, 2021, pp. 234–57; the authors highlight how considerably more of the 1,050 respondent Anglican clergy serving in England or Wales experienced a sense of spiritual awakening during the early phase of the pandemic than exhibited a spiritual decline:
<https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/search/article?articleId=3238429>
- Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, ‘Churches and Faith: Attitude towards Church Buildings during the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown among Churchgoers in England’, *Ecclesial Practices*, Vol. 8, No. 2, December 2021 pp. 216–32; analysing responses from 6,476 churchgoers in England, the authors demonstrate that Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics were the most positive towards church buildings during the pandemic and Anglican Evangelicals and Free Churches the least;
https://brill.com/view/journals/ep/8/2/article-p216_216.xml
- Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, ‘This Blessed Sacrament of Unity? Holy Communion, the Pandemic, and the Church of England’, *Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 34, No. 1, December 2021, pp. 87–101; analysing responses from 3,275 Church of England laity and 1,351 clergy, the authors illustrate divergences in views between Church traditions (Anglo-Catholic, Broad, and Evangelical) concerning four key aspects of Eucharistic practice brought into sharp focus by the sudden move to online services during the first Covid-19 lockdown:
https://brill.com/view/journals/jet/34/1/article-p87_6.xml
- Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, ‘Shaping Attitudes toward Church in a Time of Coronavirus: Exploring the Effects of Personal, Psychological, Social, and Theological Factors among Church of England Clergy and Laity’, *Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 34, No. 1, December 2021, pp. 102–28; the authors use multiple regression to

explore factors predicting attitudes towards church buildings, the lockup of churches, and the trajectory into virtual church among 4,374 Church of England clergy and laity: https://brill.com/view/journals/jet/34/1/article-p102_7.xml

Other recent academic outputs

- Béatrice de Gasquet, ed., 'Usages religieux de la quantification', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 195, July-September 2021; theme issue, comprising introduction and nine case studies on the use of religious statistics, but containing nothing explicitly on the UK: <https://journals.openedition.org/assr/59372>
- Gina Zurlo, 'Religions in Europe: A Statistical Summary', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, edited by Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 793–7; an appendix, sourced from the *World Religion Database* and comprising two tables, the first recording estimated religious adherence (numbers and percentages) for Europe as a whole in 1900, 1970, 2000, and 2020, the second estimated percentage religious allegiance (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Independent, unaffiliated Christian, Eastern religions, all other religions, and agnostic/atheist) for each country (including the UK) in 2020: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-oxford-handbook-of-religion-and-europe-9780198834267>
- Michael Anthony Hirst, 'Preferential Places in the Manchester and Stockport Methodist District during the Early Twenty-First Century', *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2022, pp. 72–95; the author plots the location of Methodist churches and manses in this conurbation in relation to measures of neighbourhood deprivation for five years between 2004 and 2019, a period when there were many church closures and church membership fell by two-fifths, demonstrating no clear bias towards deprived areas, as might have been expected from the Methodist Church's self-proclaimed prioritization of marginalized communities: <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org>

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Alternative beliefs, Amy Unsworth, Andrew Village, anti-Semitism, Archives de sciences sociales des religions, Béatrice de Gasquet, Christopher Alan Lewis, church buildings, Church of England, clergy, coronavirus, Coronavirus Church and You, Covid-19, Ecclesial Practices, Europe, Gina Zurlo, Holy Communion, ISIS, Islam, Islamic State, Islamophobia, Jews, Journal of Empirical Theology, Leslie Francis, Living Ministry, Liz Graveling, Louise McFerran, Manchester and Stockport District, manses, Methodist Church, Michael Hirst, mortality, Muslims, Office for National Statistics, Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe, religiosity, religious prejudice, Savanta ComRes, spiritual awakening, spirituality, Spirituality of a Personality, Stephen Jones, Sunday trading, University of Birmingham, vaccination rates, wellbeing, Wesley and Methodist Studies, YouGov