

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Changing public views on the possible timeline and causation for human extinction

YouGov has recently replicated a module on human extinction that it first fielded in September 2016, thereby affording an opportunity to see what difference the Covid-19 pandemic may have made to the public's views on the topic. The latest survey was conducted online on 21–23 January 2022 among a sample of 1,747 adults in Great Britain. Fewer people than in 2016 (23% against 30%) believed that human beings would never die out, and Britons were also slightly more likely to give a shorter timescale for human extinction than they were six years earlier. In the event of human beings becoming extinct, the majority thought it would happen because of nuclear war or climate change. Notwithstanding Covid-19, there was only a marginal increase (by three points) in the number citing a pandemic as the reason for our extinction. Among other possible factors, 5% considered that it would be caused by a religious apocalypse (and no more than 7% in any demographic sub-group, among Scots), which was down from 8% in 2016, and 2% by an alien invasion (unchanged from the previous study). One-fifth of the sample agreed the government should be developing realistic contingency plans against religious apocalypse and 15% against an alien invasion. Full data tables are linked from a blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/02/16/has-pandemic-changed-views-human-extinction>

Fashion and faith: Savanta ComRes poll for Tearfund

On behalf of Tearfund, Savanta ComRes conducted an online survey of 2,314 UK adults on 28–30 January 2022 concerning attitudes to the buying and reuse of items of clothing, with special reference to ethical and environmental aspects. Three background questions on religion were also asked, regarding self-reported frequency of: reading the Bible (24% claimed at least monthly, 23% less often, 51% never); participation in an act of prayer (39% at least monthly, 25% less often, 35% never); and worshipping at a religious service, either in-person or online (27% at least monthly, 30% less often, 41% never). By merging the answers for these variables, the pollster was able to identify three distinct sub-groups of: self-identifying Christians, practising Christians, and the 22% of practising Christians motivated by their faith to buy environmentally-friendly clothing (far fewer than those who cited doing their bit for the environment or value-for-money considerations). Replies to each of the nine (mostly sub-divided) questions on fashion were disaggregated for these three sub-groups, as well as by standard demographics, in the dataset available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/tearfund-great-fashion-fast-poll/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Churches and mental health: Christian Research Resonate panel survey

Christian Research recently published a summary of a survey of members of its Resonate research panel (a self-selecting group of church leaders and churchgoers) on the subject of mental health. Just over two-fifths (43%) of respondents acknowledged that they had experienced a mental health issue at some stage of their lives. Yet 47% claimed their own churches rarely spoke about mental health, with a further 9% never doing so, while 81% considered churches needed to become more tolerant of individuals exhibiting mental health difficulties. At the same time, 81% believed involvement with the Church helped people address their mental health issues. The summary is available at:

<https://www.christian-research.org/reports/recent-research/mental-health/>

Safeguarding LGBT+ Christians survey, 2021

A safeguarding survey among 754 UK LGBT+ Christians aged 18 and over has revealed that only 37% felt safe enough to be themselves to everyone in their local churches and just 20% felt safe to be 'out' to everyone in the wider Christian community. The survey ran on SurveyMonkey from 10 to 24 October 2021, with nine Christian LGBT+ organizations promoting the research on social media and by emailing their own members. Respondents were self-selecting and thus potentially unrepresentative of the target population. Three-fifths worshipped with the Church of England. A press release, report, and full results from the study are available at:

<https://www.ozanne.foundation/safeguarding-lgbt-christians-survey-2021/>

Jewish identities of UK and European Jewry

The latest publication from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research's European Jewish Demography Unit is Sergio DellaPergola and Daniel Staetsky, *The Jewish Identities of European Jews: What, Why, and How*. Most of the information in this 108-page report derives from new processing of data collected for the second (2018) survey of discrimination and hate crime against Jews, conducted for the European Agency for Fundamental Rights. This online study was undertaken in twelve EU countries, including 4,731 respondents in the UK (which was still in membership of the EU at the time of fieldwork). Much of the analysis proceeds at the aggregate European level, but there are breakdowns by country (and thus UK-specific statistics) on pp. 24–5, 29, 31, 42, 44–5, 56, 63, 68–70, 72, and 77. The report is available at:

<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17983>

Anti-Semitic incidents in the UK exhibit steep rise during 2021

The Community Security Trust has logged 2,255 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK during 2021, representing an increase of 34% over 2020, and being the highest total ever recorded in a single calendar year. The steep rise is attributed by the Trust to anti-Semitic reactions to the escalation of conflict in Israel and Palestine, which peaked in May 2021 (when there were 661 incidents alone). The majority (82%) of all incidents was categorized as abusive behaviour, but there

was a worrying 78% growth in the number of assaults. The 52-page *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2021* is available at:

<https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/f/Incidents%20Report%202021.1644318940.pdf>

Coronavirus chronicles: Jewish mortality exceeds 1,000

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Board of Deputies of British Jews has been monitoring 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 grim milestone of 1,000 Jewish coronavirus deaths has now been reached, the most recently-reported figures being: 988 on 21 January, 995 on 28 January, 996 on 4 February, 1,002 on 11 February, and 1,007 on 18 February 2022.

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Coronavirus chronicles: odds of testing positive for Covid-19 vary by religious group

An analysis by the Office for National Statistics of the adjusted odds ratios of receiving a positive test for Covid-19 in England has concluded that, during the second wave of the pandemic (1 September 2020 to 22 May 2021), case rates per 100,000 person-weeks were greatest among Muslims (334.9) and Sikhs (321.6), whereas in the third wave (23 May 2021 onwards) Christians had the highest rates of infection (353.8) with Buddhists (221.4) and Muslims (226.7) recording the lowest rates. Further information is available in the statistical bulletin and dataset at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-covid-19-case-rates-by-socio-demographic-characteristics-england-1-september-2020-to-10-december-2021>

Census of population, Scotland, 2022

The postponed (on account of Covid-19) decennial census of population for Scotland will take place on 20 March 2022 (although household schedules can be completed as soon as received from late February). Residents will be asked: ‘What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?’ The Humanist Society Scotland is encouraging non-believers to tick the ‘none’ box, but otherwise, at the time of writing, there is not much sign of active campaigning online about the Scottish religion question.

Scottish Household Survey: analysis of religion in relation to culture in 2020

Scottish Household Survey 2020 Telephone Survey Culture and Heritage Report includes breakdowns by religion (none, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, other Christian, another religion) for (a) attendance at cultural events and visiting places of culture in the last 12 months (pp. 31–2), (b) participation in cultural activities in the last 12 months (pp. 51–2), and (c) satisfaction with local authority cultural services (pp. 65–6). Fieldwork was undertaken between January and April 2021. The report is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2020-telephone-survey-culture-heritage-report/>

Religious affiliation of the legal profession in 2021

The Solicitors Regulation Authority has published the results of its latest biennial survey of law firms in England and Wales, which was carried out during late summer 2021. Data were gathered on more than 180,000 individuals (partners, solicitors, and other staff) working in 8,782 firms (around nine-tenths of the total). The religious profile of lawyers (partners and solicitors) was found to be: 43% Christian, 15% non-Christian, and 33% no religion, with the remainder preferring not to say. The proportion of Christians was higher among partners (48%) than solicitors (41%) and of nones lower among partners (27%) than solicitors (37%). Of other staff working in law firms, 41% were Christian, 13% non-Christian, and 41% nones, the rest preferring not to say. See the press release at:

<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Religion and science: still a gap to close among the clergy

UK clergy generally engage with science at a superficial level and lack the confidence or knowledge to talk about science in the public domain. So conclude Lydia Reid and David Wilkinson in ‘Building Enthusiasm and Overcoming Fear: Engaging with Christian Leaders in an Age of Science’, *Zygon*, Vol. 56, No. 4, December 2021, pp. 1087–1109. Their findings derive from a convenience sample of 1,100 UK clergy (disproportionately, 84%, from the Church of England) who completed paper-based questionnaires as part of the ‘Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science’ (ECLAS) project in 2015–18. The article is available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/zygo.12731>

Coronavirus chronicles: doubts about the long-term viability of online worship

In their ‘Virtual Worship Second Best for Leaders and Led’ (*Church Times*, 11 February 2022, p. 14), Leslie Francis and Andrew Village draw upon findings from the ‘Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey’ in January-July 2021 to demonstrate the perceived inferiority, on a range of indicators, of virtual to in-person worship among a self-selecting sample of Anglican clergy and laity in England. The article is available at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/11-february/comment/opinion/virtual-worship-is-second-best-for-leaders-and-led>