

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Coronavirus chronicles: Covid-19 and British Jewish and Muslim communities

Recently published by the Woolf Institute of Cambridge is a 36-page report by Julian Hargreaves and Philip Rushworth entitled *Transmission and Trust: The Impact of Covid-19 on British Jewish and British Muslim Communities*. Although it draws upon, and appraises, previous academic and governmental research into, and media coverage of, the topic, it is principally based on new UK polling among adults aged 18 and over commissioned by the Institute from Survation in April 2021, 404 self-identifying Jews and 400 self-identifying Muslims being interviewed by telephone, with a control national cross-section of 1,053 being interviewed online. The precise methodology for recruiting the Jewish and Muslim samples is not explained. All respondents were asked six questions relating to Covid-19, their answers providing a snapshot of experiences and attitudes at a single point during what is already a two-year-long pandemic (therein lies an acknowledged limitation of the study). Additional demographic variables included self-assessed religiosity and self-reported frequency of attendance at religious services; moreover, for the UK adult sample there are breaks for professing Christians and nones. Among the key findings highlighted by the authors are:

- Muslim people were more likely to have tested positive for coronavirus than Jewish people and the general population
- Muslim people were more likely to have experienced coronavirus symptoms than Jewish people and the general population
- Jewish and Muslim respondents were more likely than the general population to have self-isolated during the pandemic
- High levels of trust as sources of Covid-19 information were found towards the NHS and UK government in Jewish and Muslim communities, more so than in the general population, but rather less towards local religious leaders
- Jewish people were more likely to have been vaccinated than Muslim people and the rest of the general population
- Muslim people were no more likely to have broken lockdown rules than the general population, Jewish people being more likely to have broken some of the rules, albeit a majority claimed to have followed all or most of them

The Woolf Institute's report, together with a 7-page executive summary, can be found at:

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/transmission-and-trust>

The three underlying datasets are available at:

<https://www.surveon.com/archive/2022-2/>

Anglican attitudes towards same-sex marriage: YouGov poll for Ozanne Foundation

Continuing a series of YouGov polls inaugurated in 2013, the Ozanne Foundation has established that 63% of 5,120 adults in Britain interviewed online on 22–27 February 2022 believed that same-sex marriage is ‘right’, three times the number who said it is ‘wrong’. Among 1,177 professing Anglicans in England in the sample, there was also a majority in favour, albeit a somewhat smaller one (55% saying same-sex marriage was right and 29% wrong). However, the proportion of Anglicans in favour of same-sex marriage has risen significantly in recent years (from 38% in 2013, 45% in 2015, and 48% in 2020), with Anglicans aged 25–49 particularly supportive in 2022 (73%). Only with Anglicans aged 65 and over is there still a plurality against same-sex marriage. Regrettably, no data were collected on attitudes to same-sex marriage of other denominations and faiths. Full data tables and a press release are available at:

<https://www.ozanne.foundation/project/same-sex-marriage-research-2022/>

Antisemitism Barometer, 2021: surveys of the British public and Jews

In collaboration with King’s College London and YouGov, the Campaign Against Antisemitism has published the 46-page *Antisemitism Barometer, 2021*. It reports on the findings of two online surveys undertaken in 2021: (a) into the extent of prejudice against Jews in Britain (among a national cross-section of 1,790 adults on 19–20 December); and (b) into the effects of hatred on British Jews (among a non-probability convenience sample of 1,666 Jews between 17 August and 1 October). Attitudes in the first study were measured using the Generalised Antisemitism Scale, which comprises a basket of six Judeophobic and six anti-Zionist statements; it revealed that 43% of adults in Britain affirmed at least one anti-Semitic statement (two points down on the 2020 figure), with more than one in ten harbouring ‘entrenched anti-Semitic views’ by affirming four or more of the twelve statements. The most commonly believed statement was that ‘Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews’, to which 24% of Britons subscribed. In the Jewish sample, there was less optimism than in 2020, particularly on account of the surge in anti-Semitism consequent upon renewed conflict between Hamas and Israel in 2021, which had left almost four-fifths of these Jewish respondents feeling intimidated and more than two-fifths thinking they had no long-term future in the UK. The report, which includes comparative results from previous annual barometers from 2015 to 2020, as well as a long list of recommendations, is available at:

<https://antisemitism.org/barometer/>

Removal of British citizenship: the case of Shamima Begum, the Islamic State bride

Citizenship has been in the news recently, not least on account of parliamentary debates on the Nationality and Borders Bill, one clause of which would allow government, exceptionally, to strip citizenship from people without notifying them. Public opinion on citizenship issues was tested by YouGov in an online poll of 1,695 adults on 17–18 January 2022. In the abstract, views were split about the circumstances under which government should be allowed to take citizenship away from individuals deemed a threat to the UK or suspected of serious criminal activity. However, in the particular case of Shamima Begum (the Muslim schoolgirl from London, who had travelled to Syria in 2015 to join Islamic State, had married one of its fighters, and was stripped of her British citizenship in 2019), there was a decided lack of sympathy among the people, as had been the case in YouGov’s last poll on the subject in 2020. More

than two-thirds (68%) thought government should have been allowed to remove Begum's citizenship, rising to 83% of over-65s and 89% of Conservative voters; only 20% disagreed, the outlier demographic sub-group being Liberal Democrats on 41%. Full data tables are available via the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/03/07/should-government-be-able-make-british-citizens-st>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

United Reformed Church statistical returns: not such a happy birthday

The United Reformed Church (URC) was created in 1972 through the merger of the majority of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. This year thus marks the URC's golden jubilee, but it has relatively little to celebrate, at least numerically. The URC's own statistics page seems to have disappeared from its revamped website, but URC minister Martin Camroux has compiled a regular survey of his Church's data. He has generously shared his latest four-page analysis with BRIN, based on returns for January 2021, noting: 'since I started this survey in 1975 this has been the most difficult, indeed the most painful, to write.' Between 2020 and 2021, the number of URC churches reduced by 3.5%, stipendiary ministers by 8.9%, membership by 7.4% (and by more than 10% in three of the URC's thirteen synods), average congregations by 14.4%, and children at worship by 70.4%. The only quantitative sign of hope was in the emergence of a new metric (a response to the Covid-19 pandemic) for 'digital congregation' (20,252). Camroux views this pattern as evidence of a secularization that is not peculiar to the URC, but it certainly appears to be at the 'cutting edge' of the process, something that Camroux attributes to 'a badly over-stretched ministry, an unproductive structure with no medium term future, and a theology deficit'. See also his article 'Another Year in the Life of the United Reformed Church' on the front page of Brierley Consultancy's *FutureFirst*, No. 80, April 2022.

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England cathedral statistics, 2020

The 21-page *Cathedral Statistics, 2020*, compiled by Tom Wood of Research and Statistics, enumerates the work of the Church of England's 42 cathedrals and Westminster Abbey (a royal peculiar, not a cathedral) during a year dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Returns were only received from 30 cathedrals, and thus the 2020 totals have been imputed to correct for the non-response, and to permit national comparisons with 2019. Understandably, given the restrictions on, and disruptions to, cathedral life arising from the pandemic, total weekly attendance at services was 64% lower than in 2019 and Christmas attendance down by 84%. Visitor numbers shrank by 67% from 2019 and by 81% in the case of paying or donating visitors. Church at Home activities, mostly online or by email/download, provided some compensation for the fall in in-person use of cathedrals. The report is available at:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/cathedrals_report_2020_final.pdf

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Updates on religious censuses

England and Wales (2021)

The Office for National Statistics posted an update on its website on 1 March 2022. The overwhelming majority (97%) of households in England and Wales responded to the 2021 census, with 89% of these responses made online. The volume of data, and the need for robust quality assurance of them, have led to a slippage of one month in plans for the phased reporting of results. The latest estimate is that age/sex totals will be announced in June, with counts by religion following in July.

David Voas writes: ‘There is speculation that the Christian share of the population in England and Wales as measured by the census may drop below 50%. That is a natural inference from the trajectory from 2001 to 2011, but there are reasons to think that it might stay just above that mark. In brief, generational replacement would take the Christian figure from 59.3% in 2011 into the low 50s now. It’s very plausible that individuals switching to “no religion” will leave Christians in a minority: recall that the drop between 2001 and 2011 was considerably larger than could be explained by the demise of elderly Christians. As against that, in 2021 the religion question once again appeared immediately after the one on ethnic group, which arguably reinforces the tendency for respondents to report their ethno-religious heritage rather than current affiliation. That connection was weaker in 2011, when two questions on language were inserted between those on ethnicity and religion.’

Scotland (2022)

The postponed decennial census, including a question on religious affiliation, took place on 20 March 2022. Religious nones could well be in the majority when the results come to be counted. This is suggested by an online poll of 991 adult Scots conducted by YouGov on 24–28 February 2022 on behalf of the Humanist Society Scotland (HSS). Asked the census religion question (‘What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?’), 56% of the whole sample (and 70% of those aged 18–35) replied ‘none’, with 33% identifying as Christian (20 points less than in 2011, equivalent to a drop of one million people) and 6% as another faith, 5% preferring not to say. The most common reasons given for professing Christianity were baptism (58%) and religious education at church, Sunday school, or school (46%); just 36% cited a belief in the teachings of Christianity as an explanation and 28% a belief in Jesus as a real person and the son of God. When it came to self-assessing their own religiosity, 75% of all Scots said they were not religious, with only 19% declaring they were (few of whom did so strongly). A press release from HSS and full data tables are available at:

<https://www.humanism.scot/what-we-do/news/non-religious-people-encouraged-to-be-honest-about-their-beliefs-in-2022-census/>

Coincidentally, to assist potential users of religion-related data in Scotland, the Scottish Government has recently published an 11-page methodological paper, *inter alia* noting the comparability implications of the introduction of a new ‘Pagan’ response option in the census; *Data Collection and Publication Guidance: Religion/Belief* is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/data-collection-publication-guidance-religion-belief/documents/>

Republic of Ireland (2022)

David Voas writes: ‘Census day in the Republic of Ireland is Sunday, 3 April 2022 (again, postponed by a year because of Covid). The results will be relevant to BRIN readers, because the question on religion has been modified. In the past the question has been “What is your religion?”, just as in England and Wales, but with “No religion” as the last rather than the first response option. This year, the question is “What is your religion, if any?”, and “No religion” is now at the top of the list. It will be interesting to try to assess the impact of that amendment, a task that is complicated by the very rapid pace of religious change in Ireland.’

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Four recent journal articles

- Daniel Gover, ‘Christian Interest Groups in a Religiously Changing United Kingdom: Issues, Strategies, Influence’, *Politics and Religion*, First View, 2021, 23 pp.; investigation of the public policy issues and tactics, and self-reported influence of, 60 Christian interest groups in the UK surveyed in 2017–18:
https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/959784482002C4EFF74DE240E2E89B80/S1755048321000274a.pdf/christian_interest_groups_in_a_religiously_changing_united_kingdom_issues_strategies_influence.pdf
- Marek Wodka, Stanislaw Fel, Beata Zarzycka, and Jaroslaw Kozak, ‘How Does the Catholic Clergy Influence What Poles in the UK Know and Think about Brexit?’, *Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2022, article 45, 13 pp.; survey of a convenience sample of 620 Poles living in the UK in September-October 2019, concluding that Polish Catholic clergy did not play an important role in shaping what Polish emigrants to the UK knew and thought about Brexit, the British mass media being the most powerful factor in opinion-formation on the topic:
<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/1/45>
- Leslie Francis, David Lankshear, and Ursula McKenna, ‘Comparing the Attitudes of Muslim and Christian Year 5 and 6 Students within Four Anglican Primary Schools in Wales’, *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2022, pp. 80–6; analysis of attitudes towards religion in school of 84 Muslim and 87 Christian pupils:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01416200.2021.1877614>
- Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, ‘Why Lockdown Drove Some away from Church’, *Church Times*, 18 March 2022, p. 14; further analysis of data from the ‘Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey’, revealing that 23% of Anglican laity living in England had given up online worship or socially distanced in-person worship by the third national lockdown:
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/18-march/comment/opinion/why-lockdown-drove-some-away-from-church>

NEW DATASETS

UK Data Service, SN 855354: Catholics in Britain Survey, 2019

This study, undertaken by Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is the first systematic large-scale survey of Roman Catholic opinion in Britain for forty years. It is based upon online interviews by Savanta ComRes with a cross-section of 1,823 self-identifying Catholic adults in Britain between 21 October and 7 November 2019. The questionnaire covered socio-demographic characteristics, religious engagement, and attitudes to a range of religious, moral, and secular issues. Further information is available at:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=855354>

Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes Survey, Spring 2021

The Pew Research Center has released the dataset for the Spring 2021 wave of its Global Attitudes Survey. Fieldwork was conducted by telephone among samples of adults aged 18 and over in sixteen advanced economies, including the UK (where 1,012 persons were interviewed by Gallup from 15 March to 22 May 2021). Although Pew has issued several reports based on this wave, none has covered the handful of religion-related questions. One question, concerning the importance of religion in respondents' lives, has been asked by Pew on fourteen previous occasions in Britain since 2002 (see Table 1, below). Two further questions appear to be new, relating to the perceived strength of conflict between religious and non-religious people and between people who practice different religions. Both topline results and the dataset can be accessed at:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/dataset/spring-2021-survey-data/>

Table 1: Self-assessed importance of religion, Great Britain, 2002–21 (percentages across)

Year	N =	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Don't know/refused
2002	501	33	36	26	4	1
2006	902	25	37	26	13	1
2007	1,002	18	24	24	34	1
2008	753	18	24	23	34	1
2009, May-Jun	754	21	25	22	31	1
2009, Sep	1,000	19	26	23	31	1
2010	750	17	25	23	34	1
2011	1,000	17	21	21	40	1
2015	999	21	23	20	34	2
2016	1,460	16	23	26	34	1
2017	1,841	10	30	26	34	0
2018	1,005	21	20	23	34	1
2019	1,031	20	19	21	39	1
2020	1,003	21	19	22	36	2
2021	1,012	22	23	21	33	1

Source: Pew Research Center.