

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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## OPINION POLLS

### **Easter as a ‘proper’ special occasion: international YouGov poll**

During the course of January and February 2022, YouGov conducted online polling in twelve countries (including Britain, where 2,002 adults were interviewed on 20–28 January), asking respondents whether they considered various events to be ‘proper’ special occasions or only celebrated because of pressure from commercial entities such as greetings card companies. One of the events was Easter, which majorities in all nations regarded as a ‘proper’ special occasion, ranging from 51% in France to 82% in Poland, the figure in Britain being 54% (40% attributing its celebration to pressure from commercial entities, with 6% undecided). It could be argued that, traditionally, any commercial pressures at Eastertide mainly came from the manufacturers of chocolate eggs and other treats; certainly, 55% of Britons usually eat one or more chocolate eggs over the Easter weekend, according to another YouGov study on 12–13 April 2022. However, after years in the doldrums, there has recently been an uptick in Easter card sales, while a minority of adults (11% in a third YouGov survey on 7 April 2022) even anticipated putting up decorations in their homes to celebrate Easter. Topline data from the international poll are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2022/04/14/easter-proper-special-occasion-or-it-too-commercial>

### **Planned attendance at religious services over the Easter weekend**

Meanwhile, on behalf of the *Mail on Sunday*, Deltapoll asked an online sample of 1,550 adult Britons on 13–14 April 2022 whether they expected to attend a place of worship over the forthcoming weekend in order to celebrate Easter. The overwhelming majority (86%) said they had no plans to do so, leaving just 11% of the population intending to be in the pews, the highest proportion being in London (17%) and the lowest in Wales (5%). The generational pattern was interesting, and counterintuitive (in that it contradicted the normative peak of religious practice by older cohorts): 12% among millennials, 10% among Generation X, and 8% among Baby Boomers. Even so, these 11% of aspirational Easter worshippers were significantly fewer than the quarter of people who had intended to attend a service at Easter between 1968 (when a question on the topic was first asked) and the end of the first decade of the new millennium. The numbers actually going to church at Easter have always been significantly fewer than those who aspired to be present, a realistic estimate for Britain prior to Covid-19 being 6%, which has probably reduced by now, since the pandemic has clearly had the effect of breaking the habit of in-person worship for many individuals. Tables for the Deltapoll survey are available at pp. 76–8 of the dataset at:

<https://deltapoll.co.uk/polls/mos220419>

### **Religious or spiritual wellbeing as source of greatest happiness: Ipsos global poll**

Religious or spiritual wellbeing was ranked relatively lowly as an actual or potential source of greatest happiness in a 30-nation online poll by Ipsos, undertaken between 19 November and 3 December 2021, just twenty-first of thirty-one sources globally, and twenty-sixth in Great Britain (where 1,000 adults aged 16–74 were interviewed). The top three spots in Britain were filled by relationship with partner or spouse, children, and physical health and wellbeing. Notable outliers were Saudi Arabia and Malaysia (where religious or spiritual wellbeing was ranked first) and Brazil (eighth). On the surface, the findings would appear to qualify, perhaps even challenge, other claims, based on empirical research, that religious people are happier than non-religious ones. Topline Ipsos findings are available at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/what-makes-people-happiest-health-family-and-purpose>

### **Science and religion: YouGov poll for Theos and Faraday Institute**

*‘Science and Religion’: Moving away from the Shallow End*, by Nick Spencer and Hannah Waite (London: Theos, 2022, 140 pp., ISBN 978–1–8382559–1–6), represents the first fruits of a three-year research project undertaken by Theos and the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, with funding from the Templeton Religion Trust. The goal was to map the landscape of science and religion conflict in the UK, both qualitatively (through in-depth interviews with 101 scientists, philosophers, theologians, sociologists, and journalists, named in appendix 1, between autumn 2019 and autumn 2020) and quantitatively (an online YouGov poll of 5,153 UK adults aged 16 and over from 5 May to 13 June 2021). Although the ‘angry hostility towards religion engineered by the New Atheist movement’ is alleged to be over, the majority (57%) of the public still considers that, overall, science and religion are incompatible, almost double the number (30%) stating the opposite. However, according to the authors, such a stark generalization about the relationship between science and religion feeds disproportionately on a handful of specific issues (evolution, the ‘Big Bang’, and neuroscience), around which debate has polarized. They seek to apply, in their qualitative and quantitative fieldwork, a ‘wide-angle lens’ that unpacks the multiple forms of both ‘science’ and ‘religion’ and teases out a more complex picture of their interaction, with more nuanced opinions. Background variables (not much discussed in the report) extend to religious affiliation, religious beliefs, and religious practices. The full document, executive summary, survey questionnaire, and a partial set of data tables (with breaks by gender, age, ethnicity, region, and generation) are available at:

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2022/04/21/science-and-religion-moving-away-from-the-shallow-end>

Spencer also had an article about the report, “‘Science and Religion’ is Not a Zero-Sum Game”, in the *Church Times* for 29 April 2022, p. 14, available online at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/29-april/comment/opinion/science-and-religion-is-not-a-zero-sum-game>

He had another article, ‘Science and Religion: Let’s Agree to Disagree’, in *The Tablet*, 30 April 2022, pp. 12–13, available online to subscribers at:

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/21811/science-and-religion-let-s-agree-to-disagree>

### **Talking Jesus: HOPE Together's 2022 research**

HOPE Together, which is responsible for the 'Talking Jesus' course designed to help Christians to be witnesses to Jesus Christ, has updated its original 2015 research by commissioning Savanta ComRes to undertake, mostly between 28 January and 13 February 2022, an online survey of a nationally representative sample of 3,115 UK adults aged 18 and over and a booster sample of 917 practising Christians. Most of the questions were directed either to practising Christians (teasing out their personal experience of face-to-face evangelism) or to non-Christians and non-practising Christians (exploring their receptivity to the gospel). Among the entire (weighted) sample of 4,032 individuals:

- 54% believed Jesus Christ was a real person who actually lived
- 20% believed He was God in human form who lived among people in the 1st century
- 43% described Him as spiritual, 39% as peaceful, 38% as a leader, 37% as loving, and 37% as wise
- 45% believed in His Resurrection, albeit not necessarily in all aspects of the Biblical account of it

The proportion of professing Christians was 48%, of whom:

- 49% had been Christian since birth and 30% came to faith up to the age of 18
- 19% read the Bible at least monthly
- 41% participated in an act of prayer, either privately or in worship, at least monthly
- 23% participated in a religious service, either in person or online, at least monthly

HOPE Together is promising there will be a booklet about the survey on its website. In the interim, full data tables have already been posted at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/hope-together-talking-jesus-2022/>

### **Importance of teaching Religious Studies at secondary school: YouGov tracker data**

Religious Studies (RS) is viewed as one of the least important subjects to teach at secondary school, according to a YouGov poll of 1,779 adults aged 18 and over interviewed online in Britain on 9–11 April 2022. Given a list of eighteen subjects, respondents ranked RS fifteenth in terms of being important (40%), only drama (37%), classics (31%), and Latin (11%) being positioned lower. By far the most important subjects were mathematics (96%), English (95%), computing (93%), and science (92%). A majority of the sample (55%) deemed RS either not very (32%) or not at all important (23%), the proportion varying by demographic sub-group between 46% (among under-25s, who would obviously have had the most recent experience of being taught RS at school) and 63%. The findings are consistent with those from a series of YouGov polls undertaken since 2010. Data tables from the current survey are available at:

[https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/6unbtxlzh2/P\\_Main\\_Political\\_Tracker\\_Survey\\_Rotation7\\_sr\\_2.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/6unbtxlzh2/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation7_sr_2.pdf)

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Future of UK church buildings: results of National Churches Trust consultation**

In November 2021, the National Churches Trust (NCT) published *The Future of the UK's Church Buildings*, containing a selection of views from UK public figures. The report was designed to initiate a debate about the purpose of churches and how best to ensure their future. To that end, the NCT ran an online consultation on its website between November 2021 and February 2022, the results of which have now been released. There were 1,250 respondents, inevitably comprising a self-selecting opportunity sample, and thus almost certainly not representative of the UK population. Overwhelmingly (79.5%), they rejected the suggestion that digital services (introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic) had reduced the need for church buildings, although a plurality (46.6%) agreed that congregations should share church buildings, so that fewer are needed overall. The NCT has a press release, incorporating a link to a 20-page analysis of the results, at:

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/churches-demand-despite-growth-digital-worship>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: some Anglican experiences of distanced church**

Research into the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on faith communities in Britain shows no sign of drying up. The latest report comes from the Church Army's Research Unit: Dave Lovell, John Tomlinson, and Andy Wier, *Zoomed Out? Church of England Experiences of Distanced Church amidst Covid-19*. It is based upon an online survey of a convenience (self-selecting) sample of 607 Church of England worshippers between 24 June and 22 August 2021 and follow-up focus groups and interviews with a sub-set of 16 of these participants in October. Perceived changes to 17 separate areas of church experience were noted. The headline finding was that 'Online church did not function as a wholesale substitute for onsite church to the satisfaction of the majority. Experiences of Holy Communion, corporate prayer, and corporate worship were rated as "worse" or "much worse" by the majority, and most respondents reported more negative changes to experience than positive' (64% versus 32%). The 32-page document is available at:

<https://churcharmy.org/zoomedout/>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: Methodist responses to 'Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey'**

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, 'The Pandemic and Church Life', *Methodist Recorder*, 22 April 2022, pp. 12–13 (not available online) compares the answers of 175 practising Methodists to the 'Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey' with those of 2,292 Anglican respondents, the former being significantly more positive than the latter about an online future for the Church, suggesting (the authors argue) Methodism may prove the more resilient of the two denominations in a virtual world. The survey was fielded online, via the Qualtrics platform, between 22 January and 23 July 2021 and reached an opportunity sample that was not necessarily representative of UK practising Christians.

**Coronavirus chronicles: Baptist Union statistics, 2021**

Last month, BRIN reported on the 2021 annual statistical returns for the United Reformed Church. This month, it is the turn of another of the traditional Free Churches, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, covering churches that are either members of the Union and/or one of its constituent associations. Trend data as at 31 December each year from 2010 are summarized in Table 1, below. Especially noticeable, relative to pre-Covid-19 pandemic levels (for 2019), are the decreases in the number of children (–29.3%), average attendance at the main weekly service of worship (–16.2%), and baptisms of believers (–54.7%, even though they have recovered a little from their nadir in 2020). Full data are available at:

<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/277439/Statistics.aspx>

**Table 1: Baptist Union of Great Britain membership and community, 2010–21**

Year	Churches	Members	Children up to 14	Young people aged 14–18	Average attendance	Baptisms
2010	2,077	135,536	78,648	39,602	not collected	3,566
2011	2,084	134,506	79,132	40,094	not collected	3,632
2012	2,080	132,008	78,909	38,955	not collected	3,629
2013	2,051	130,536	79,276	37,501	not collected	3,523
2014	2,036	127,768	76,604	34,686	not collected	2,524
2015	2,028	126,144	75,334	31,387	159,360	2,724
2016	2,014	122,752	73,678	30,002	154,445	2,329
2017	2,000	120,828	71,710	28,707	152,347	2,325
2018	1,996	117,475	66,184	26,691	148,695	2,531
2019	1,955	113,015	66,914	26,267	140,688	2,575
2020	1,945	101,138	56,581	24,447	not collected	631
2021	1,931	105,277	47,335	22,093	117,864	1,167

Source: Baptist Union.

**Two recent blogs from Muslim Census**

Muslim Census, which utilizes multiple social media platforms to gauge Muslim opinion in Britain, has published blogs that feature two of its most recent surveys. The methodology employed does not guarantee that findings are fully representative of the Muslim community.

‘How Social Media Impacts Muslim Mental Health’ was released on 4 March 2022, based upon responses from 300 Muslims aged 13 and over on 25–28 February, is available at:

<https://muslimcensus.co.uk/social-media-impacts/>

‘Labour at Risk of Losing Half of their Muslim Vote’ was released on 28 January 2022, based upon responses from 1,042 Muslims aged 18 and over on 23–26 January, is available at:

<https://muslimcensus.co.uk/muslim-vote/>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **Scotland's census of population, 2022**

The National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Scottish Government have reported a comparatively slow response in the proportion of Scotland's households completing the schedule for the decennial census of population in Scotland, already postponed by a year from 2021, to 20 March 2022. On 28 April, three days before the original deadline for returns, and despite repeated reminders (including home visits), it was announced in the Scottish Parliament that 23% of Scottish households had still failed to submit one, the figure rising to 34.5% in Glasgow city, and not falling below 18% in any Scottish local authority. In consequence, the NRS have extended the deadline by a further four weeks from 1 May, in the hope of encouraging a better response. Scottish opposition parties have complained that the Scottish Government's decision to delay the census by a year, and to decouple it from that taking place in the rest of the UK in 2021, was the main reason for the critically low return rate in Scotland.

## ACADEMIC STUDY

### **Levels of religious commitment among British Catholics**

An important contribution to understanding how Catholics in Britain engage with their faith and mediate processes of secularization is made by Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant, using data from an online survey of 1,823 self-identifying Catholics aged 18 and over interviewed by Savanta ComRes between 21 October and 7 November 2019. Somewhat counterintuitively, the authors found that younger cohorts showed greater involvement on some aspects of commitment, and two potential explanations for this are explored. They also discovered that religious socialization played a key role in patterns of commitment relative to the weak impact of schooling. 'Why Younger Catholics Seem More Committed: Survivorship Bias and/or "Creative Minority" Effects among British Catholics' is published in the 'early view' version of *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jssr.12791>

## NEW DATASET

### **UK Data Service, SN 8928: Annual Population Survey, January-December 2021**

The Annual Population Survey is compiled by the Office for National Statistics in partnership with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. It incorporates a sub-set of key variables from the several Labour Force Surveys and is designed to be sufficiently robust and large-scale to produce reliable estimates at local authority level. The January-December 2021 dataset is based on 212,976 face-to-face and telephone interviews with adults in private households and young persons living away from the parental home. A question on religious affiliation is included: 'What is your religion?' in Britain and 'What is your religious denomination?' in Northern Ireland. A catalogue description of the dataset is available at:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8928>

APPENDIX  
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Village, Andy Wier, baptisms, Annual Population Survey, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Ben Clements, Bible, Big Bang, census of population, children and young people, Church Army Research Unit, church attendance, church buildings, church membership, Church of England, Church Times, coronavirus, Covid-19, Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey, Dave Lovell, Deltapoll, distanced church, Easter, evolution, Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Hannah Waite, happiness, HOPE Together, Ipsos, Jesus Christ, John Tomlinson, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Leslie Francis, Mail on Sunday, mental health, Methodist Recorder, Methodists, Muslim Census, Muslims, National Churches Trust, National Records of Scotland, neuroscience, Nick Spencer, Office for National Statistics, online church, onsite church, prayer, religious affiliation, religious commitment, religious festivals, religious or spiritual wellbeing, Religious Studies, Roman Catholics, Savanta ComRes, science, Scotland, secondary school, special occasion, Stephen Bullivant, Talking Jesus, Templeton Religion Trust, The Tablet, Theos, voting, YouGov