Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 99 – December 2023

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OPINION POLLS

Observance of Christmas traditions in 2023, as anticipated by YouGov panellists

On 7–13 December 2023, YouGov asked a representative online sample of 4,128 Britons aged 18 and over whether they tended to celebrate Christmas. One in nine (11%) did not, while 2% were undecided. The 88% who claimed to celebrate Christmas were then shown a list of thirty Christmas traditions and asked whether either they or members of their household would be observing them at Christmas 2023. Unlike in previous years, YouGov did not pose a question about intended churchgoing over Christmas, which has always generated very aspirational (and thus misleading) answers. In fact, the only religion-related activities put to 2023 YouGov panellists were: to go singing Christmas carols (13% yes and 82% no); to listen to Christmas carollers (34% yes and 53% no); and to set up a nativity display in their home (18% yes and 78% no). YouGov's report and tables, with breaks by demographics, are available at:

• https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/48208-how-do-britons-celebrate-christmas

Religious affiliation in Great Britain: aggregate data from Yonder polls

Since 2011, BRIN has been tracking self-assigned religious affiliation recorded in published polls undertaken by Yonder (formerly known as Populus) among representative samples of the adult population of Great Britain aged 18 and over. The question asked has been: 'Which of the following religious groups do you consider yourself to be a member of?' Annual data for 2011–20 were originally exhibited in Table 64 of Clive Field's book *Counting Religion in Britain*, 1970–2020: Secularization in Statistical Context (2022). In Table 1, below, this series is extended by data points for 2021–22 and 2023. It will be seen that, over this twelve-year period, the proportion of professing Christians has declined by 12.4 per cent, while the proportion of nones has increased by 11.9 per cent. In 2011 (indeed, until 2017), Christians were still in the majority, but by 2023 the nones formed the plurality. Non-Christians (including Muslims) grew relatively modestly, from 7.3 per cent in 2011 to 8.4 per cent in 2023.

Table 1: Self-assigned religious affiliation, Great Britain, 2011-23

% across	N =	Christian	Muslim	Other non-	No	Prefer not
				Christian	religion	to say
2011	44,551	56.1	2.0	5.3	34.1	2.5
2012	68,486	55.4	2.0	5.0	35.4	2.2
2013	80,302	54.7	2.6	4.7	35.7	2.3
2014	147,142	53.2	2.3	4.5	37.7	2.2
2015	67,698	52.0	2.3	4.3	39.1	2.2
2016	52,092	51.8	2.4	3.8	40.0	2.0
2017	64,725	51.3	2.4	3.7	40.9	1.7
2018	57,956	48.8	2.6	3.6	43.0	2.0
2019	39,771	46.8	2.6	3.7	44.7	2.2
2020	25,766	45.9	2.9	3.9	45.2	2.0
2021–22	22,346	45.1	3.9	4.6	44.4	2.1
2023	30,423	43.7	3.9	4.5	46.0	1.7

Source: Aggregated Populus and Yonder polls.

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

Below, we have extended by another month the two tables about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia being perceived as problems in the UK that were first published in the October and November 2023 editions (Nos. 97 and 98) of *Counting Religion in Britain*. This latest Savanta political tracker was undertaken online on 8–10 December 2023, the degree to which anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are perceived as problems seemingly having flattened out during the past month. This latest dataset is available at:

• https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-savanta-14-december-2023/

Table 2: Perceptions of anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK, July-December 2023

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Big problem	16	15	14	17	22	21
Somewhat a problem	34	35	37	37	35	36
Not really a problem	25	25	23	21	18	21
Not a problem at all	7	9	8	8	7	7
Don't know	18	17	18	18	17	14
A problem	50	49	51	53	57	57
Not a problem	32	33	31	28	25	29

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Table 3: Perceptions of Islamophobia as a problem in the UK, July-December 2023

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Big problem	20	21	22	20	23	21
Somewhat a problem	35	35	36	37	36	37
Not really a problem	21	21	19	19	18	21
Not a problem at all	9	9	10	9	10	10
Don't know	15	14	13	14	14	12
A problem	55	56	58	57	59	58
Not a problem	30	30	29	28	28	30

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: Survation poll of UK Jewish opinion

On behalf of the Jewish Leadership Council, Survation carried out a survey of the opinions of 790 self-identifying religious or cultural Jews in Britain on 6–27 November 2023, against the backdrop of the murderous incursion by Hamas into Israel on 7 October and Israel's subsequent strikes against Hamas in Gaza. Respondents were mostly drawn from Survation's pre-recruited panel of Jews, augmented by a sample based on a modelled probability of ethnicity. Fieldwork was generally undertaken by telephone with some online interviews. Almost nine in ten Jews (89%) considered the state of Israel to be important for the security of Jewish people around the world. The same proportion thought that anti-Semitism was a problem in the UK and that it had increased over the previous five years. Since 1 January 2023, 32% felt they had personally experienced some form of anti-Semitic incident, disproportionately since 7 October, while 26% claimed to have witnessed an anti-Semitic incident involving other Jews in the same timeframe. Two-fifths agreed that they did not feel safe as a Jewish person living in the UK, and four-fifths alleged that they felt less safe as a Jewish person living in the UK than before the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel. Trust in several UK agencies had deteriorated since 7 October in the light of their handling of divergent attitudes in UK society to the Israel-Hamas conflict and rising anti-Semitism, with 64% trusting the BBC less since 7 October, 58% trusting university authorities less, and 50% trusting the UK police less. The dataset is available at:

• https://www.survation.com/archive/2023-2/

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: YouGov poll of British and European publics

An online YouGov poll on 15–16 November 2023, conducted as part of a seven-nation Eurotrack study, asked 2,007 adult Britons a series of questions about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. When invited to declare which side they sympathized with more, 19% said the Israeli side, 20% the Palestinian side (two points up from three weeks previously), 30% both sides equally, with 31% unsure. Majorities believed that both Israel and Hamas should enter peace negotiations. Majorities favoured the 'two state solution' and also rejected two of the radical alternatives for resolving the conflict: establishing a single Jewish state covering the whole of Israel and Palestine, with Palestinians expelled from the region; or establishing a single Palestinian state covering the whole of Israel and Palestine, with Jews expelled from the region. Notwithstanding, the plurality (45%) did not think it realistically possible for Israel and Palestine to agree a permanent peace during the next ten years. Topline results for all participating nations in the survey and full demographics (for Britain alone) are available at:

• https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48218-israel-palestine-fundamental-attitudes-to-the-conflict-among-western-europeans

Ipsos Veracity Index, 2023: the public's trust in clergy and priests to tell the truth

The Ipsos Veracity Index, 2023, the latest in a long line of studies to measure public trust in professions, was conducted by telephone among 2,035 British adults aged 16 and over between 8 and 21 November 2023. Respondents were asked whether they generally trusted each of 31 professions to tell the truth or not. Clergy/priests were ranked fourteenth in terms of veracity, trusted by 54% of the sample (one point less than in 2022) and distrusted by 36%, the remainder of interviewees being undecided. Trust in clergy/priests was lower among men (52%) than women (57%), but there were negligible differences by income and party preference. Nurses were the most trusted profession (88%) and politicians the least (9%). The report is at:

• https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-trust-in-professions-veracity-index-2023

Two Ipsos surveys of alternative beliefs

Alternative beliefs are alive and well in the UK and nine other Western nations, according to an online survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of *Les Entretiens de Royaumont* on 22–25 November 2023, 1,000 adults aged 16 and over being interviewed in each country. In the UK, 35% professed to believe in ghosts (the same as the global average), 25% in clairvoyance (global average 28%), and 23% in witchcraft (global average 27%). These beliefs were held especially strongly in Argentina (where 54% believed in witchcraft, 52% in ghosts, and 45% in clairvoyance). Apart from in Turkey, an additional question was posed about the proportion of people in the country who were Muslims. In the UK, the mean number of Muslims was guessed at 20%, more than six times the reality (as computed by Ipsos), exemplifying the pollster's longstanding caveat about the 'perils of perception'. Topline data only are available in the charts at:

• https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/perils-perception-prejudice-and-conspiracy-theories

In another (single-nation) Ipsos survey, 20% of the 1,062 Britons aged 16–75 interviewed online on 8–11 December 2023 believed that 2024 will see the discovery of evidence for alien life. The likeliest groups to predict this were members of Generation Z (36%), respondents with children in the household (34%), and ethnic minorities (34%). Three-fifths of the sample did not consider it likely that evidence of alien life would be discovered, while 18% were undecided. Charts and tables are available at:

• https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-britons-predictions-for-2024

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Catholic Union survey on attitudes to church closures

On 5 December 2023, the Catholic Union of Great Britain, a membership organization dedicated to the defence of Catholic values in Parliament and public life, published a summary of the online survey it launched on 10 October to gauge Catholic attitudes to the closure of places of worship during the pandemic. The detailed results will be used to inform the Catholic Union's submission to the UK Covid-19 public enquiry which is now in train, chaired by Baroness Hallett. The survey attracted almost one thousand responses. These appear to have been entirely self-selecting and thus are unlikely to be representative of any particular universe; an indication of the skew is that fewer than one in ten informants claimed to attend church less frequently or not at all since the pandemic, which does not square with what we know from other sources about a significant decline in Mass attendance in the aftermath of Covid-19. Among the headlines of the survey: 62% claimed their physical or mental health had been affected by church closures; 93% did not think that politicians gave enough consideration to people's faith when making decisions during the pandemic; and 90% agreed that, in any future pandemic, places of worship should be treated as 'essential' services and kept open. The Catholic Union's press release is available at:

• https://catholicunion.org.uk/2023/12/shocking-impact-of-church-lockdowns-revealed/

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: anti-Semitic incidents

Since the conflict began on 7 October 2023, the Community Security Trust (CST) has published several reports on its blog of the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK which it has investigated and validated. By 29 November, there had been 1,747 anti-Semitic incidents across the UK during the current conflict, by 6 December 1,890, and by 13 December 2,093 (representing a sixfold increase over the same 68-day period in 2022). The CST's blog posts can be found at:

• http://cst.org.uk

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: Islamophobic incidents

In parallel to the Community Security Trust, Tell MAMA has been monitoring the growth of Islamophobic incidents in the UK since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict on 7 October 2023. By 30 November, 1,202 anti-Muslim cases had been logged, by 6 December 1,350, and by 13 December 1,432. For more analysis, see the news releases at:

• https://tellmamauk.org/news/

Do the UK's Jews celebrate Christmas?

In the Institute for Jewish Policy Research's latest publication, Carli Lessof asks *Do Jews in the UK Celebrate Christmas?* Drawing on data from the Institute's National Jewish Identity Survey (conducted online in November-December 2022), Lessof attempted to answer her own question by the number of Jews who claimed they always or generally had a Christmas tree at home. This proportion turned out to be 28%, peaking at 58% among non-practising (secular or cultural) Jews, at 55% among those who described themselves as having very weak religiosity, and at 54% for Jews who were not members of a synagogue. Framing the question more broadly, 38% of respondents had a Christmas tree at home either now, in their childhood, or both. The eight-page report is available at:

• https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/do-jews-uk-celebrate-christmas

Do UK Jewish students feel their university cares about their wellbeing?

'The Global Student Living [GSL] Index, which monitors the experiences of students at universities around the world, gathered feedback from over 40,000 students across more than 100 universities in the UK between 1st October and 5th December 2023. Key findings from the survey reveal that fewer than half (46%) of Jewish students agree that their university "cares about their wellbeing". This stands in stark contrast to the sentiments of Muslim students, among whom 64% feel their university is concerned about their welfare, compared with 65% of the general student population.' This quotation is taken from GSL's press release of 19 December 2023 at:

• https://gsl.news/2023/12/19/latest-gsl-index-data-raises-concerns-for-jewish-student-welfare-in-uk-universities/

British Muslim charitable giving: second report

Hard on the heels of its first investigation into Muslim charitable giving (featured in *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 95, August 2023), the Muslim Charities Forum (MCF) has published Aymen Habib and Ben Roberts, *British Muslim Charitable Giving Report, II: The Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on British Muslim Charitable Giving*. This is based upon an online survey developed in collaboration with nfpResearch, distributed by the MCF and nfpResearch (via panel provider, Savanta), and open to respondents between 26 May and 14 June 2023. It was answered by 1,092 British Muslims, their profile skewed towards younger and more affluent (AB social grade) individuals, and towards Londoners, which may help explain the higher level of optimism about future giving behaviours among Muslims than in the population at large. The principal survey topics comprised top issues of concern, the cost-of-living crisis, donation behaviour, and volunteering behaviour. An executive summary (p. 4) headlines the five key takeaways from the research. Copies of the report can be requested at:

• https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/resources/british-muslim-charitable-giving-report-ii-the-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis/

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Public Opinions and Social Trends, Great Britain: Christmas plans

The 29 November–10 December 2023 release of *Public Opinions and Social Trends, Great Britain* included a question about Christmas plans, which was completed by an online sample of 2,370 adults aged 16 and over in the Office for National Statistics' fortnightly Opinions and Lifestyle Survey. Overwhelmingly (86%), respondents expected to meet up with friends and family during the forthcoming Christmas period. The second most anticipated activity was going to a place of worship or carol concert, cited by 20%; experience suggests that the proportion actually going will be far less than this, probably half that number or even fewer. Donating to a food bank came third (18%), followed by donating presents to a gift appeal (15%), and volunteering time with groups or organizations (8%); again, the likelihood is that these 'virtuous' activities will be overclaimed. See, further:

• https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritainchristmasplansandworriesaboutaffordability

Census, 2021, England and Wales: new article and datasets on Sikh identity

In the run-up to the 2021 census in England and Wales, part of the Sikh community mounted an unsuccessful legal challenge to the government's refusal to recognize Sikh as an ethnic as well as religious entity in the census by including a Sikh tick-box in the ethnicity question, the argument in the Sikh community being that there were many cultural Sikhs who were being

overlooked by the religion question alone. In part response, and honouring a commitment made in the census White Paper, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has now published an article and associated datasets on *Sikh Identity, England and Wales: Census 2021*. The analysis contained therein is based upon 525,865 people who identified as Sikh in the census. Of these, 426,230 identified as Sikh through the religion question alone, 1,725 through the ethnic group question alone (by a write-in answer), and 97,910 through both questions in combination. Relative to the overall population of England and Wales, Sikhs were more likely to be homeowners, to live in multi-family or multi-generational households, and to be married and to have married younger. More information is available at:

• https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sikh-identity-england-and-wales-census-2021

Census, 2021, England and Wales: new article and datasets on Jewish identity

The ONS has also published an article and associated datasets on *Jewish Identity, England and Wales: Census 2021*. The analysis contained therein is based upon 287,360 people who identified as Jewish in the census. Of these, 219,160 identified as Jewish through the religion question alone, 16,030 through the ethnic group question alone, and 52,165 through both questions in combination. There has been a 5.7% increase in self-identifying Jews since the 2011 census, which is broadly in line with the general increase in the population of England and Wales over the decade. The majority of Jews (53.6%) lived in London, approaching four times the national average. People who identified as Jewish were also more likely to be self-employed than society at large. More information is available at:

• https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jewish-identity-england-and-wales-census-2021

ACADEMIC STUDIES

A century of Roman Catholic statistics in Britain and Ireland

Back in October, Oxford University Press published, in five hardback volumes at £125 apiece, The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, paralleling the two existing five-volume sets The Oxford History of Anglicanism and The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions. Volume V of the new project (ISBN: 978–0–19–884431–0), subtitled Recapturing the Apostolate of the Laity, 1914–2021, is edited by Alana Harris. It comprises an introduction by the editor, sixteen chapters on diverse themes and by diverse hands, and eleven statistical appendices (pp. 357-76) compiled by Timothy Kinnear, a PhD candidate at St Mary's University, London. The last-named, according to Harris, are conceived as a 'British and Irish Catholicism in Numbers' (p. 9) and will be of special interest to BRIN's readership (a review of the entire book is obviously beyond our immediate scope), gathering together the principal quantitative sources between 1920 and 2019 for the three Catholic jurisdictions of England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, the respective Catholic Directory being the principal source for each, albeit its limitations are fully acknowledged by Kinnear. In practice, the data are actually mostly presented at a slightly more granular level, for England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland, all but Scotland's statistics being estimated since archdioceses and dioceses cross home national boundaries. The topics covered, in tables and graphs, are Catholic population, Mass attendance, priests, places of worship, religious communities, ordinations, conversions, marriages, baptisms, and Catholic schools. For each topic and sub-topic, one data point is generally cited for every ten years, so researchers in need of annual series will still have to consult Churches and Churchgoers (1977) by Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, for the period to 1970, and Counting Religion in Britain, 19702020 (2022) by Clive Field, for the subsequent half-century. The contributions by Tony Spencer (Newman Demographic Survey and Pastoral Research Centre) and Peter Brierley to enumerating Catholics are briefly mentioned but not explored in any depth. Closer consultation with such experts might have enriched the value of these appendices.

Attention should also be drawn to 'Catholicism in Numbers', hosted on the Catholic Record Society's website, which is inviting contributions from others to build upon Kinnear's ten Excel datasheets, (exceptionally short) methodology note, and bibliography, all of which can be found at:

• https://www.crs.org.uk/catholicism-in-numbers

Science and religion: multinational study by YouGov for University of Birmingham

In Science and Religion. Exploring the Spectrum: A Multi-Country Study on Public Perceptions of Evolution, Religion, and Science (London: YouGov, 2023, 33 pp. with 22 figures), Kate Gosschalk, Laura Piggott, Honor Gray, James Riley, and Fern Elsdon-Baker present initial findings from a seven-nation study undertaken in May-June 2023 by YouGov on behalf of the University of Birmingham, with funding from the Templeton Religion Trust. Online fieldwork was conducted in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Spain, UK (where 2,133 adults were interviewed), and the USA. Many of the findings relate to aspects of beliefs about evolution, including comparisons with a previous (2017) YouGov/University of Birmingham survey in the UK and Canada. Here it is perhaps worth highlighting just a few of the measures surrounding the relative importance of evolution, religion, and science to the UK general public. Asked about the importance of these concepts to their sense of personal identity and view of the world, 44% in the UK said their religious, spiritual, or non-religious position was important to them, whereas for science it was 52% and for evolutionary science 40%. Half of UK respondents agreed that religion often has more negative consequences for society than positive ones, but only 13% said the same about science. When it came to the reliability of various experts as sources of information, 81% in the UK had faith in the reliability of scientists and 68% in evolutionary science experts; by contrast, experts in theology (38%) and religious leaders (27%) were rated much less favourably for their reliability as sources of information, with 42% of the latter perceived as unreliable. The report is available at:

• https://scienceandbeliefinsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/UoB-YouGov.-Science-and-Religion-Survey-Report.-8-Dec-2023-.pdf

Cathedral studies: special issue of Journal of Beliefs and Values

Journal of Beliefs and Values, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2023, pp. 457-623 is the first of two special issues (the second will appear in 2024) devoted to (Anglican) cathedral studies in England (apart from one article on Wales). Guest edited by Leslie Francis and Stephen Parker, it comprises a relatively brief editorial introduction with twelve research articles which investigate, by a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, aspects of contemporary cathedral life. Five of the articles offer overviews of a particular topic, while seven are case studies of individual cathedrals (including no fewer than four on Liverpool). In themselves, the essays are full of interest, shedding social scientific light on a formerly neglected corner of the Anglican scene. However, considered in the aggregate, their authors tend to skirt around the central question that religious statisticians will wish to have answered. While there is little doubt that, at least until Covid-19, the cathedral sector within the Church of England has seen some numerical growth over recent years, as measured by the performance indicators that appear in the Church's recurrent Cathedral Statistics, does such growth represent the tilling of new ground through evangelistic success among the unchurched, or does it mostly take the form of lateral growth, at the expense of parish churches; and is it on such a scale as can make any substantive difference to the declining worshipping fortunes of the Church of England?

Cathedral studies seem rather niche, almost divorced from the religious mainstream. Their importance requires a stronger academic rationale and contextualization than appears to be on offer here. The theme issue can be found (behind a paywall) at:

https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjbv20/44/4

APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Alana Harris, alternative beliefs, anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, attendance at religious services, Aymen Habib, Ben Roberts, Carli Lessof, cathedral studies, Catholic Directory, Catholic Record Society, Catholic Union, census of population, charitable giving, Christmas, Christmas carols, Christmas traditions, Christmas tree, Church of England, clairvoyance, clergy and priests, closure of places of worship, Community Security Trust, conspiracy theories, coronavirus, cost-of-living crisis, Covid-19, England, Entretiens de Royaumont, ethnicity, Eurotrack, evidence for alien life, evolution, Fern Elsdon-Baker, Gaza, ghosts, Global Student Living Index, Hamas, Honor Gray, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Ipsos, Ipsos Veracity Index, Islamophobia, Islamophobic incidents, Israel-Hamas conflict, James Riley, Jewish Leadership Council, Jewish university students, Jews, Journal of Beliefs and Values, Kate Gosschalk, Laura Piggott, Leslie Francis, Muslim Charities Forum, Muslims, National Jewish Identity Survey, nativity display at home, nfpResearch, Northern Ireland, Office for National Statistics, Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Oxford University Press, Palestine, Palestinians, perils of perception, predictions, professions, Public Opinions and Social Trends, religious affiliation, religious census, religious festivals, religious prejudice, Republic of Ireland, rites of passage, Roman Catholics, Savanta, science and religion, Scotland, Sikhs, Stephen Parker, Survation, Tell MAMA, Templeton Religion Trust, Timothy Kinnear, trust to tell the truth, University of Birmingham, volunteering, Wales, wellbeing, witchcraft, Yonder, YouGov