

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
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OPINION POLLS

Religious affiliation

Lord Ashcroft's latest large-scale political poll, conducted online among 8,011 voters between 11 and 22 August 2016, included his customary question about professed 'membership' of religious groups. As the following table indicates, the proportion identifying with no religion has increased steadily in similarly-sized Ashcroft surveys for the second half of each year since 2011, by almost five points over this quinquennium. There has been a corresponding reduction in self-identifying Christians, who seem destined to lose their overall majority share within a matter of years. Indeed, religious nones are already in the ascendant among under-35s and supporters of green and nationalist political parties. Full breaks by demographics are contained in table 65 at:

<http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-New-Blueprint-Full-data-tables-Sept-2016.pdf>

% down	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Christian	56.0	54.2	52.6	53.2	51.2	51.4
Non-Christian	6.4	7.3	7.4	6.5	6.5	6.1
None	35.8	36.3	37.7	37.9	40.1	40.5
Prefer not to say	1.8	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.0

Importance of religion

Asked in a YouGov Daily app-based survey on 14 August 2016 about the importance they attached to their religion, 47% of Britons replied that they had no religious beliefs. Of the remainder, 13% said religion was very important to them, 16% somewhat important, and 21% not very important. Topline results are published at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/14/funding-farmers-lose-memory-personal-importance-re/>

Obsessions

Just 4% of Britons admitted to being obsessed about religion, according to another YouGov Daily app-based survey on 28 September 2016. Given a list of ten things to be obsessed about, 44% said they were obsessed about none of them. Money (29%), food (26%), and politics (18%) topped the list of obsessions, with religion coming in joint last position with the arts. Topline results are published at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/09/28/david-cameron-and-theresa-may-claims-and-counter-c/>

Human extinction

Almost half of Britons (49%) anticipate that the human race will die out at some stage, according to YouGov, which interviewed a sample of 1,581 adults online on 11-12 September 2016. The remainder did not believe it would expire or were unsure what to think. Asked to pick up to three from a list of 12 possible causes of human extinction, the top-rated choices were a nuclear bomb (38%), climate change (31%), a pandemic (27%), and a meteor or asteroid (26%). But 8% considered that a religious apocalypse could bring human life to an end, rising to 18% of UKIP voters and 12% of 18-24s. Still more, 27%, agreed that the government should be developing contingency plans against a religious apocalypse, varying by demographic sub-groups between 22% and 36%. Full data tables can be accessed via the link in the blog post at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/09/26/end-isnt-nigh/>

Burkas and burkinis

Debate about Islamic women's dress, notably the wearing of burkas and/or burkinis in public, reignited in several European countries during the summer. In Britain, according to an online poll by YouGov on 24-25 August 2016, a majority (57%) of the sample of 1,668 adults was in favour of a law banning the wearing of the burka, three points less than in 2012, with 25% opposed to a prohibition and 18% undecided. Endorsement of a ban was highest among Conservatives (66%), persons aged 50-64 (68%), over-65s (78%), people who had voted for the UK to leave the European Union (78%), and UKIP supporters (84%). Only among 18-24s and those who had voted to remain in the European Union did opponents outnumber proponents, albeit they never constituted a majority. The distribution of female opinion was broadly the same as the national average. However, when it came to the burkini, just a plurality of 46% agreed with a legal ban, with 30% against (including almost half of 18-24s and 'remainers') and 24% unsure. The lower level of support for prohibition of the burkini may be related to the fact that, unlike the burka (as popularly defined), it does not cover the face. Detailed results can be accessed via YouGov's blog post on the survey at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/31/majority-public-backs-burka-ban/>

Attitudes to the burkini were further explored in another YouGov poll, for which 4,052 Britons were interviewed online on 31 August 2016. The question this time was not whether the burkini should be legal in the UK but, following controversy in France, whether it is acceptable to wear one at the beach. A small majority (51%) thought it was acceptable, but 35% disagreed (including 61% of UKIP voters and 46% of over-60s), with 14% uncertain. Data are posted at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/2fc0ca50-6f66-11e6-87b8-005056900101>

Circumcision

In 2013 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution about violation of the physical integrity of children which, *inter alia*, expressed concern about the circumcision of young boys for religious reasons. The matter was aired in one of YouGov Daily's app-based surveys on 5 August 2016, respondents being asked whether infant male circumcision should be banned or not. Four options were given, multiple answers being permitted. In reply, two-fifths of Britons said that it should be banned with a further one-quarter

wanting it discouraged. Support for circumcision on religious grounds stood at 14%, the same proportion as thinking the practice should be encouraged for health reasons. Topline results are published at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/05/circumcision/>

Anti-Semitism (1)

Concerns that anti-Semitism has not been rooted out of the Labour Party will not go away. The latest revelation is that 87% of a sample of 1,864 British Jewish adults felt that the Labour Party is too tolerant of anti-Semitism among its MPs, members, and supporters. Significant numbers of Jews also said the same about the Green Party (49%), the United Kingdom Independence Party (43%), the Scottish National Party (40%), and the Liberal Democrat Party (37%). Only the Conservative Party (13%) is perceived as having a good track record at combating anti-Semitism in its midst. The survey was commissioned by the Campaign against Antisemitism, and full results will be released in October 2016 as part of the Campaign's Antisemitism Barometer. Meanwhile, its press release can be found at:

<https://antisemitism.uk/caa-launches-manifesto-for-fighting-antisemitism-as-poll-reveals-extent-of-antisemitism-crisis/>

Anti-Semitism (2)

One-third of 3,660 Britons interviewed online by YouGov on 27 September 2016 agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that anti-Semitism has become so deeply entrenched in our thought and culture that it is often ignored and dismissed. The proportion thinking so was highest among the over-60s (42%) and lowest for UKIP voters (26%). Dissenters numbered 37% while 30% of respondents did not know what to think. Demographic breakdowns of results are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/ec63a420-8497-11e6-b0e1-005056900101>

Lucky charms

Avid television viewers of the Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games may have noticed many athletes carrying lucky charms or performing little routines to bring them luck. Respondents to one of YouGov Daily's app-based surveys of Britons on 17 August 2016 were asked whether they thought these charms and routines actually helped athletes to do well. Only 9% said they had no effect whatsoever, as many as 86% perceiving a psychological benefit in helping the athletes' state of mind. A further 4% agreed with this suggestion but also believed that lucky charms and routines can genuinely bring about good luck. Topline results are published at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/17/state-schools-and-oxbridge-luck-charms-gdp-and-len/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Funeral music

Even funerals are no longer immune from secularization. Not only is the proportion of them conducted by religious celebrants fast diminishing, but religion is disappearing from their

content. Co-operative Funeralcare's latest biennial survey of funeral music confirms the trend, 54% of its funeral directors stating that hymns are the funeral music genre declining fastest in popularity. In a survey of over 30,000 funerals conducted by the group, seven of the top ten pieces of funeral music in 2016 were secular, the chart being headed by Frank Sinatra's *My Wat*. Although the other three were hymns, they had all slipped since the 2014 rating: *The Lord is My Shepherd* from second to fifth position, *Abide with Me* from third to ninth, and *All Things Bright and Beautiful* from sixth to seventh. Outside the top ten, the next most requested hymns were *How Great Thou Art*, *Amazing Grace*, and *The Old Rugged Cross*. Co-operative Funeralcare's press release is at:

<http://www.co-operativefuneralcare.co.uk/arranging-a-funeral/organising-the-day/funeral-music/Survey/2016/>

Christians and the supernatural

Two-thirds of practising Christians in the UK claim to have personally experienced the supernatural, more than half of them during the past year and one-quarter in the previous week. This is according to a study conducted by Christian Research in July 2016 among 1,409 self-selecting members of its online Resonate panel, disproportionately Protestant, male, and over 55 years of age. Most of the claimed experiences involved answered prayer and healing. Two-thirds of the sample thought that paranormal or evil forces could be behind the supernatural as well as the divine, and a similar proportion agreed that an over-emphasis on 'miracles' gave Christianity a bad name. The survey was commissioned to coincide with the launch of a new book written by the co-pastors of Soul Survivor Watford: Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft, *Everyday Supernatural: Living a Spirit-Led Life without Being Weird* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2016, 239pp., ISBN 978-0-7814-1499-9, \$16.99, paperback). However, it should be noted that no results appear in the book itself. The foregoing account is largely based on the coverage by Premier Christian Radio and the *Church Times* at, respectively:

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Two-thirds-of-UK-Christians-have-experienced-the-supernatural>

and

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/2-september/news/uk/christians-supernatural-experiences-surveyed>

Contemporary evangelicals

The Evangelical Alliance is celebrating its 170th anniversary. As part of the commemoration, it has conducted another wave in its 21st Century Evangelicals project. Almost 1,500 members of its self-selecting research panel were interviewed online. Some headline findings from the study are published in an article in the September-October 2016 issue of the Alliance's *IDEA Magazine* (pp. 14-15). Overwhelmingly, evangelicals said they were committed to sharing the gospel with their personal networks and to passing on the Christian faith to the next generation. However, 62% also believed British evangelicalism would increasingly depend upon the contribution of black and minority ethnic Christians, with 71% looking to growing immigration and the arrival of asylum seekers as a further opportunity to evangelize. Asked about future priorities for the Alliance, the protection of religious liberty topped the list. The article is freely available online at:

http://www.eauk.org/idea/upload/idea_magazine_septoct2016_webversion.pdf

Church Growth in East London

In *Church Growth in East London: A Grassroots View*, recently published by the Centre for Theology & Community, Beth Green, Angus Ritchie, and Tim Thorlby summarize insights into church growth derived from interviews with 13 church leaders in East London between March and May 2014. Eight of the places of worship visited were Anglican, and the rest from other traditions (one Baptist, one Pentecostal, one Roman Catholic, and two non-denominational). Nine of the 13 had black majority congregations. Seven reported numerical growth during the previous five years. Church-planting and immigration were identified as the two distinctive factors which have helped growth. The 52-page report, including reflections by the Bishop of Chelmsford (Stephen Cottrell) and recommendations for future action, can be found at:

<http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Church-Growth-digital.pdf>

Church bell-ringing

The centuries-old tradition of church bell-ringing may be under threat because of a shortage of new recruits. This is according to a survey, by BBC local radio, of 180 delegates to the 2016 annual conference of the Central Conference of Church Bell Ringers. Three-quarters of the delegates said that it had become harder during the past ten years to attract new members of any age, and an even higher proportion claimed that it was difficult to recruit young people under 21. More than half (54%) agreed that declining church attendance had exacerbated the problem. At the same time, three-fifths of delegates thought the actual demand for bell-ringing had increased in the previous decade. The BBC's press release about the survey is at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-37257729>

Church of England parochial finance

A 28-page report on the Church of England's parish finance statistics for 2014 has revealed a £41 million or 4% surplus of income (£989 million) over expenditure (£948 million). Viewed as absolute figures, total income has increased by 30% since 2004 and income from planned giving (as opposed to the collection plate and other means) by as much as 53%, even though the number of planned givers has fallen steadily since 2007, in line with declining church attendance. In real terms, however, adjusting for inflation, overall income has dropped by 5% since 2004 and planned giving by 8% since 2009, while expenditure has remained fairly steady. Data are reported nationally for each year from 2004 to 2014 and by diocese for 2014 alone. *Parish Finance Statistics, 2014* can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2853794/2014financestatistics.pdf>

Church of England ministry

Two new reports from the Church of England exemplify the challenges which it faces with regard to the future availability of stipendiary and other clergy. The 18-page *Ministry Statistics in Focus: Stipendiary Clergy Projections, 2015-2035* has been prepared by Research and Statistics and derives from the Church Commissioners' payroll system. It shows that, if the

number of ordinands and average retirement age remain unchanged (the status quo model), then the pool of stipendiary clergy will decline steadily, from 7,400 in 2016 to 6,300 in 2035. Of the three other projection models explored, only achievement of the ambitious Renewal and Reform target of a 50% increase in ordinations by 2023, and its maintenance thereafter, would ensure stability in stipendiary clergy numbers at around 7,600 full-time equivalents. The second report, *Ordained Vocations Statistics, 1949-2014*, runs to 22 pages and has been compiled by the Ministry Division. It charts the annual number of recommended candidates for the various forms of Anglican ministry (not just stipendiary) and, since 1988, their demographic characteristics (gender, age, and ethnicity). There is a particular focus on the years 2010-14 and there are also brief case studies of three dioceses. Both reports can be accessed via:

<https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Cover-note-for-stats-reports-FINAL-LINKS.pdf>

Church of England cathedrals

Cathedral Statistics, 2015 have recently been released by Church of England Research and Statistics. The 18-page annual publication contains the usual range of information about numbers of worshippers, communicants, occasional offices, attenders at other activities, volunteers, visitors, names on the community roll, and musical life in the 42 English cathedrals, often with trend data back to 2005. Unsurprisingly, the largest metric was for visitors, 9,490,000 (albeit 7% down from the recent high in 2013) plus a further 1,040,000 at Westminster Abbey. The report can be found at:

https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2859050/2015_cathedral_statistics.pdf

Church in Wales statistics

The annual report on Church in Wales membership and finance for 2015 generally depicted ongoing decline. Of 12 indicators of participation in parish life, only two showed an absolute increase between 2014 and 2015: confirmations (+7%) and funerals (+1%). By contrast, there was a 6% decrease in the number of weddings and a 5% reduction in Sunday attendance by both adults and young people and in Pentecost communicants. Average Sunday congregations have now fallen below 1% of the Welsh population. The Church's Governing Body, at its recent meeting in Lampeter, had originally been asked merely to 'take note of' the report but it was in no mood simply to do that and passed a resolution that it did so 'with a heavy heart' and with a request for an urgent investigation into the factors underlying church growth in the minority of parishes which were experiencing it. The membership and finance report is available at:

http://cinw.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Ag19-MembershipFinance_en.pdf

The Governing Body's debate on the report received full-page coverage in the *Church Times* (23 September 2016, p. 13) at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/23-september/news/uk/declining-figures-noted-with-a-heavy-heart>

Jewish students

The Union of Jewish Students, which represents 8,500 Jewish students in the United Kingdom and Ireland, has provided *The Jewish Chronicle* with the 2016 distribution of Jewish university students, summarized by the newspaper in its issue of 23 September 2016 (p. 88). Three universities (Birmingham, Leeds, and Nottingham) have more than 1,000 Jewish students. Five have more than 500: Bristol, Cambridge, Manchester, Oxford, and University College London. Nine have more than 100, 10 more than 50, and 29 fewer than 50.

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Scottish Household Survey, 2015

The proportion of Scots claiming to belong to no religion has increased from two-fifths to one-half within the space of just six years, according to the latest data from the Scottish Household Survey, for which a random sample of almost 10,000 adults is interviewed annually by a consortium led by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Scottish Government. The growth in religious nones has largely been at the expense of allegiance to the Church of Scotland, whose market share has declined from one-third to one-quarter since 2009. Adherents of the Roman Catholic and other Christian Churches and of non-Christian faiths have shown reasonable stability (see table, below). Non-Christians, however, are far more likely than affiliates of other religious to record that they have been subject to discrimination or harassment within the past three years, although this is not necessarily on religious grounds. *Scotland's People Annual Report: Results from the 2015 Scottish Household Survey* is available, alongside associated data tables, at:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/7673/0>

% down	2009	2011	2013	2015
None	40	42	46	50
Church of Scotland	34	32	28	25
Roman Catholic	15	16	15	14
Other Christian	8	8	8	8
Non-Christian	3	3	3	3

Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2015

The Scottish Government has also published the 103-page report *Scottish Social Attitudes, 2015: Attitudes to Discrimination and Positive Action*. It is based on the fourth in a series of special discrimination modules of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey which the Scottish Government has sponsored since 2002, for which 1,288 Scottish residents aged 18 and over were interviewed by ScotCen Social Research between July 2015 and January 2016. They were questioned about discrimination and positive action in relation to age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, race, and religion. Religion-related issues are discussed throughout the report but there is also a separate chapter (pp. 53-9) on religious dress and symbols. In general, discriminatory attitudes were found to have declined since the last module in 2010, including on the part of those with a religious affiliation. Nevertheless, varying degrees of negativity continued to be exhibited towards Muslims:

- 65% thought a bank should definitely or probably be able to insist a Muslim woman employee remove the veil while at work (69% in 2010)
- 41% agreed that Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live in Scotland (50% in 2010)
- 41% did not know anybody who was a Muslim (46% in 2010)
- 20% would be unhappy if a close relative married or formed a long-term relationship with a Muslim (23% in 2010)
- 18% thought a bank should definitely or probably be able to insist a Muslim woman employee remove the headscarf while at work (23% in 2010)
- 13% considered a Muslim would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher (15% in 2010)

The report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00506463.pdf>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Secularization in Britain and America (1)

Half a century has passed since Bryan Wilson (1926-2004) published his *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* as part of 'The New Thinker's Library', a series from C. A. Watts, which was a small London firm associated with the rationalist movement. The sociology of religion was still in its infancy in Britain at that time, but Wilson offered a pithy assessment of the secularization pattern in England, including an opening chapter summarizing the quantitative evidence, as well as a comparative treatment of religion in America. Reprinted by Penguin in 1969, his book quickly established itself as the key international text for the modern theory or paradigm of secularization.

Now Steve Bruce, who has assumed Wilson's mantle as the leading exponent of secularization, has edited *Religion in Secular Society: Fifty Years On* (Oxford University Press, 2016, xix + 258pp., ISBN 978-0-19-878837-9, £27.50, hardback). It reproduces the full text of the 1969 edition of Wilson's work, together with an introduction and two appendices by Bruce. The introduction (pp. vii-xix) provides a short biography of Wilson and a commentary on the style and argument of *Religion in Secular Society*. The first appendix (pp. 231-40) summarizes and evaluates the most common or important criticisms of Wilson's thesis, while the second (pp. 241-58) outlines the major changes in the nature and status of religion in the United Kingdom (with a goodly use of statistics) and United States during the past 50 years. Bruce concludes that: 'By and large, the record of changes in "religion in secular society" since 1966 fits Wilson's secularization model better than it fits the alternatives.' The book's webpage is at:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/religion-in-secular-society-9780198788379?q=Religion%20in%20secular%20society&lang=en&cc=gb>

Secularization in Britain and America (2)

Most scholarship has asserted that the United States is an exception to the secularization model in Western societies, on account of its much higher levels of religiosity. But, focusing on trends rather than levels, David Voas and Mark Chaves argue in a recent article in *American Journal*

of *Sociology* (Vol. 121, No. 5, March 2016, pp. 1517-56) that the United States should no longer be regarded as a counter-example to secularization. This is for two reasons: (a) American religiosity is now known to have been declining for decades and (b) this decline has been produced by the same generational patterns as characterize religious declension elsewhere in the West, with each successive cohort less religious than the preceding one. This intergenerational effect is documented by the authors through analysis of population census data for Australia (1971-2011) and New Zealand (1986-2013) and cross-sectional survey data for the United States (1972-2014), Canada (1985-2012), and Britain (1983-2013). The British findings (discussed on pp. 1530-4) derive from the British Social Attitudes Surveys, three-survey moving averages demonstrating that religious affiliation has reduced from one cohort to the next for years of birth going back to the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in the early post-war decades. Access options for 'Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?' are outlined at:

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/684202>

Theistic belief

Research in the empirical psychology of religion is increasingly characterized by the deployment of attitude scales. In 2012 Jeff Astley, Leslie Francis, and Mandy Robbins proposed the use of the seven-item Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Belief as a means of operationalizing measurement of attitudes across the major theistic faith traditions. The psychometric properties of this scale have now been further examined among three sub-samples (cumulative N = 10,678) drawn from the 2011-12 Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity project, for which year 9 and 10 pupils (aged 13-15) attending state-maintained secondary schools throughout the United Kingdom completed questionnaires. The data supported the internal consistency reliability and construct validity of the instrument with all three groups and thus confirmed its suitability for application in subsequent research. The full report can be found in Leslie Francis and Christopher Alan Lewis, 'Internal Consistency Reliability and Construct Validity of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith among Religiously Unaffiliated, Christian, and Muslim Youth in the UK', *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 5, 2016, pp. 484-92. Access options to the article are outlined at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2016.1206871>

Science and religion

Berry Billingsley explored the attitudes toward science and religion of 670 pupils aged 14-17 from eight English secondary schools for a paper read at the recent annual conference of the British Educational Research Association. The results showed that for many respondents science was an insufficient explanation of what it means to be a person, with 54% believing humans have souls, 52% that life has an ultimate purpose, and 45% in God. The paper was briefly reported by *TES* at:

<https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/troubled-souls-a-higher-purpose-new-study-shows-how-pupils-view>

NEW DATASET AT UK DATA SERVICE

SN 8012: Scottish Election Study, 2011

The Scottish Parliament Election Study, 2011 was conducted online by YouGov on behalf of the Universities of Strathclyde, Edinburgh, and Essex and with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. A panel of 2,046 Scottish electors was interviewed both pre- and post-election, between 25 April 2011 and 24 April 2012. The questionnaire covered a range of political and related topics, the answers to which can be analysed by two religious variables: religious affiliation (using a belonging form of question) and frequency of attendance at religious services. A catalogue description for the dataset can be found at:

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8012&type=Data%20catalogue>