

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Faith Research Centre

The major polling news of the month was the official launch by ComRes, in London on 24 January 2017, of its Faith Research Centre, directed by Katie Harrison and claimed to be ‘the UK’s first dedicated commercial capability with specific expertise in researching religion and belief’. The Centre’s vision is ‘to help improve the quality of knowledge . . . by providing robust and impartial evidence of current religious identity, belief, practice, and behaviour’. It aims to do so by offering thought leadership programmes and research and consultancy services on faith issues, domestically and across Europe. Two major projects have already been announced: a series of National Faith Surveys, on a five-year rotational basis, in the UK and four other European countries; and Faith in the Workplace, a set of tools and services to help employers. The Centre’s webpage is at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/faith/>

As a trailer for the launch of the Centre, ComRes conducted an online survey into the religious attitudes of 2,048 adult Britons on 4-5 January 2017, the data tables for which can be found at:

<http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/general-public-research-religion-of-britain-january-2017/>

Respondents were initially asked to assess whether Britain was still a Christian country, a concept which has been to the fore in debates about ‘British values’ during recent years. A slight majority (55%) replied in the affirmative, a big reduction on the 80% found in 1968 and 71% in 1989 but broadly in line with other post-Millennium polling. The proportion judging Britain a Christian country varied widely with age, ranging from 31% of 18-24s to 74% of over-65s. It was also high among professing Christians (72%). Just over one-quarter (28%) considered Britain to be a country without any specific religious identity, and this was especially true of 18-24s (41%), religious nones (37%), and non-Christians (36%). The remaining 17% of the whole sample gave another answer or did not know what to think.

Interviewees were then presented with six pairs of statements and asked to select the one from each pair which best represented their own position. Four of the statements concerned understanding of religion(s), with pluralities saying that a good understanding of religion(s) was important for politicians and policy makers in the UK (47%); for tackling global terrorism (44%); and for understanding the world itself (47%). A further question asked about self-understanding of religion(s) in the UK, rated as good by 43% and not so by 41%. However, similar numbers were scathing in their own assessment of religion(s), which 45% regarded as generally a cause of wars and violence and 44% as doing more harm than good. Somewhat remarkably, nones were no more critical than the rest of society, the assenting figure being 45% for each statement.

Angels

One-third (32%) of Britons claim to believe in angels, and the same number feel they have a guardian angel watching over them, according to a poll commissioned by the Bible Society and conducted online by ICM Unlimited with 2,037 respondents on 17-18 August 2016. This was a similar proportion to 2010 (31% then believing in angels and 29% in guardian angels). In the 2016 survey, women (39%) were more likely to believe in angels than men (26%) and also to have seen or heard an angel (11% and 8%, respectively). Belief in angels otherwise peaked among over-75s and residents of the South-East (both 39%) and the lowest (DE) social group (41%). Data tables are unpublished but a few results were reported in a Bible Society press release of 13 December 2016 at:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/a-third-of-all-brits-believe-in-guardian-angels/>

Corruption of religious leaders

UK findings from Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, 2015/16 have recently been released, based upon telephone interviews by Effience3 with 1,004 adults between 15 December 2015 and 28 January 2016. One of the questions concerned the perceived corruption of national leaders and institutions, including religious leaders. Among UK respondents, 6% assessed all religious leaders corrupt, 8% most of them, 52% some of them, and 27% none of them, with 8% unable to say. The proportion (14%) claiming that most or all religious leaders were corrupt was lower than in many other European and central Asian countries, the regional average being 17% and the range from 2% in Estonia to 39% in Moldova. Within the UK, five groups were seen as being more corrupt than religious leaders, most or all of local government representatives (19%), business executives (21%), government officials (25%), members of the Prime Minister's office (27%), and MPs (28%). However, religious leaders were seen as more corrupt than judges and magistrates (9%), police (11%), and tax officials (12%). Topline data are available by clicking on the download link at the bottom of the press release at:

https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/governments_are_doing_a_poor_job_at_fighting_corruption_across_europe

Islamist terrorism

Islamist terrorism is the major external preoccupation of Britons for 2017, 62% of them telling YouGov in an app-based poll on 2 January that the threat posed by it was most on their mind as an expectation for the year. This was closely followed by the negative effects of the presidency of Donald Trump (59%). Economic disruption as a consequence of Brexit was in third place, at 48%. Just 21% were confident that 2017 would see significant progress in defeating Islamic State. Topline results only can be found at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/01/02/positive-and-negative-expectations-2017-new-year-r/>

Banning the burka

International debate about the wearing in public of certain forms of 'Islamic' female dress has been raging for a decade or more now and legal bans have already been imposed in certain countries, albeit not (yet) in Britain. Here the appearance of burkinis on holiday beaches was a

matter of contention last summer but attention has now reverted back to the wearing of burkas and niqabs. According to an online YouGov poll of 1,609 Britons on 15-16 December 2016, 50% of the adult population would like to see a law passed against the use of full body and face coverings, backing for such a measure being especially strong among over-65s (72%), UKIP supporters (74%), and those who voted for the UK to leave the European Union (EU) in the 2016 referendum (70%). The national figure in favour of a ban is lower than in Germany (69%, seven points more than five months ago) but higher than in the United States (25%), a majority (60%) in the latter country agreeing that people should be allowed to wear what they want, a position taken by just 38% of Britons (but by half of 18-24s, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters and 57% of ‘remainers’ in the EU referendum). The full data table is accessible via the link in the blog at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/01/17/brits-and-germans-want-see-burqa-banned-whilest-ame/>

‘Muslim’ travel ban

President Donald Trump’s executive order banning citizens of seven Muslim majority nations from entering the United States for 90 days has caused a storm of protest, both in his own country and around the world, including in the UK. Sky Data seems to have been the first organization to test British public opinion on the matter, on behalf of Sky News, among a sample of 1,091 Sky customers contacted via SMS on 30 January 2017. This was obviously a niche – and potentially unrepresentative – audience, even though results were weighted to the profile of the population as a whole. Asked whether they would support a similar ‘Muslim’ travel ban in the UK, 34% of respondents said that they would, rising to 40% of over-55s and 44% of residents in the Midlands and Wales. A plurality, 49%, was opposed to a Trump-style policy being adopted in the UK, with hostility greatest among the under-35s (71%) and Londoners (76%), while 18% expressed no clear view. There was also a plurality, again of 49%, in favour of cancelling the proposed state visit to the UK by President Trump later in the year, with 38% wanting it to go ahead and 12% undecided. The data tables can be found at:

http://interactive.news.sky.com/SMSXLIII_TRAVELBAN_300117_FP.pdf

Predictions

Britons are a sceptical lot when it comes to believing the predictions of so-called ‘experts’, according to a YouGov poll of 1,943 adults on 7 January 2017. Weather forecasters (29%) and astronomers (27%) are deemed the most credible, some way ahead of economists (19%). Astrologers have one of the poorest ratings, their predictions trusted by no more than 6% of the population overall, albeit they hold special appeal to 18-24-year-olds (12%) and UKIP voters (10%). Pollsters scored just 1%. Results disaggregated by standard demographics are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/6019c410-d4d6-11e6-b6a9-c26f3e0c0822>

Psychic powers

Prompted by recent CIA revelations about scientific tests which apparently ‘proved’ that the Israeli psychic Uri Geller really did have special powers, YouGov asked the 4,645 respondents to an app-based poll on 20 January 2017 whether they believed that some people possess

psychic powers. Just over one-quarter (27%) did so, women (36%), Scottish Nationalists (36%), and UKIP voters (40%) being especially convinced. A slim majority (51%) disavowed the existence of psychic powers, men (62%) and 18-24s (66%) being most sceptical. The remaining 22% were undecided. Data have been posted at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/105875e0-def7-11e6-9747-82ef68f86b7f/question/c12b5630-def7-11e6-ba0f-2678bf7c8139/social>

Triskaidekaphobia

The occurrence of Friday the 13th in the month occasioned at least a couple of polls about triskaidekaphobia and superstition more generally, neither sufficiently reported to enable their credentials to be established, although there was some print and online media coverage (from which this brief account has been compiled). One survey was conducted by the property website Zoopla among 2,839 homeowners, ascertaining that 43% acknowledged being superstitious and 46% having a lucky number (seven being the most popular); 30% also said they would be less likely to buy a property with thirteen in the address and 23% that they would be unwilling to exchange, complete, or even move into a home on Friday the 13th. The other study was undertaken by the hotel chain Travelodge, 74% of its 2,500 respondents reporting they had suffered bad luck on a previous Friday the 13th and 68% they would be making some kind of gesture on the day in order to bring them good luck; 50% expressed belief in the power of lucky numbers and 40% owned up to being superstitious. An associated survey of Travelodge's 532 UK hotel managers revealed that room 13 was the one customers wished to avoid most, with room 101 and room 666 the second and third least requested; room 7 is the room most in demand.

Holocaust and genocide

More than a quarter (27%) of survivors of the Holocaust and later genocides who live in the UK have experienced discrimination or abuse in this country linked to their religion or ethnicity, according to a survey released by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT), marking Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January 2017). This is despite the fact that 72% of survivors said they felt very or fairly welcome when they arrived in the UK. The majority (52%) waited more than twenty years after their arrival before they began to talk about their experiences. Relatives of these survivors are even more likely (38%) to report being victims of faith- or race-based hatred in the UK. The poll was conducted online by YouGov among 208 survivors of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides and 173 of their family members. HMDT's press release can be found at:

<http://hmd.org.uk/news/holocaust-and-genocide-survivors-experience-abuse-uk>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Faith-based charities

New Philanthropy Capital published the final report from its programme of research into faith-based charities on 29 November 2016: Rachel Wharton and Lucy de Las Casas, *What a Difference a Faith Makes: Insights on Faith-Based Charities*. It draws together the key findings from interim publications and blogs, including an analysis of the statistical importance of faith-

based organizations to the charity sector in England and Wales, previously featured by British Religion in Numbers. One-fourth of charities registered with the Charity Commission were found to be faith-based of which two-thirds are Christian. An in-depth survey of 134 faith-based charities was also undertaken. The 33-page report further discusses the main themes which have emerged from the research and makes sundry recommendations. It is available at:

<http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/what-a-difference-faith-makes/>

Evangelical opinions

The Evangelical Alliance (EA) has recently released headline findings from two surveys conducted among its online research panel of evangelical Christians. It should be noted that these were self-selecting (opportunity) samples and may not be representative of the evangelical constituency, still less of churchgoers as a whole.

The first survey was completed by 811 evangelicals between 28 November and 5 December 2016 and was press-released by the EA on 16 December. It concerned attitudes to Christmas, the key messages being that the overwhelming majority of evangelicals, 89% and 99% respectively, intended (a) to volunteer or give money to charitable causes at Christmas and (b) to sing carols or attend a Christmas service. Further information is available at:

<http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/media/press-releases/jesus-and-giving-at-the-heart-of-christmas.cfm>

The second survey was answered by 1,562 evangelicals and published on 23 December 2016 in the January/February 2017 edition of *Idea* magazine; dates of fieldwork were not given. The subject matter was belief and unbelief with particular reference to: sharing the gospel with people of other faiths; religious freedom in the UK; secularism; and religious illiteracy in the public square. On the last-named topic, 94% of evangelicals criticized the media and 88% politicians for their lack of understanding of religion. The article is available at:

<http://www.eauk.org/idea/belief-and-unbelief.cfm>

Faith journeys

What Helps Disciples Grow? is the final report by Simon Foster on a 2014-15 research project for the Saint Peter's Saltley Trust, a Christian educational charity covering the West Midlands. It is based upon responses to a paper questionnaire completed during services by 1,191 churchgoers in the region drawn from 30 places of worship of different denominations. To what extent this constituted a representative sample is unclear. Respondents were asked how they viewed their own calling, growth, and spirituality and what had helped or hindered their Christian journey over the years. Analysis of the data in partnership with Leslie Francis and David Lankshear suggested that there were four distinct paths of discipleship: group activity, individual experience, public engagement, and church worship. The report, tables (with breaks by gender and age), and questionnaire can be downloaded from:

<http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg/>

Christians against Poverty

Debt-counselling charity Christians against Poverty (CAP) has highlighted the lasting impact of its work, based on the experiences of 214 of its clients surveyed at least twelve months after becoming debt free with CAP's help, in *The Freedom Report: The Importance of Debt Advice in Building Financial Capability and Resilience to Stay Free of Problem Debt*. The vast majority of clients (93%) remained free of unmanageable debt, 85% felt in control of their finances, 74% no longer used credit, 62% had passed on to others skills learned through CAP, and 46% even had savings. The 34-page report is available at:

https://capuk.org/downloads/policy_and_government/the_freedom_report.pdf

Surveying Sikhs

Jagbir Jhutti-Johal considers methodological issues raised in surveying the Sikh community, with reference to the UK Sikh Survey (2016), in her Religion and the Public Sphere blog at:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionpublicsphere/2017/01/research-on-the-sikh-community-in-the-uk-is-essential-to-better-inform-policy-but-surveys-must-be-improved/>

Aliyah statistics

In its latest report, written by Daniel Staetsky, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research asked *Are Jews Leaving Europe?* It focused on migration to Israel from six countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the UK – which collectively account for 70% of Europe's Jewish population. Since the Millennium, migration to Israel from the UK, Germany, and Sweden was found to be at a 'business as usual' volume whereas in the other three nations, notably in France and Italy, there has been a steep rise in very recent years, to reach historically unprecedented levels. Staetsky deployed statistical modelling in an attempt to identify potential factors which might be driving this pattern, with particular reference to France and the UK, albeit an explicit link to the extent of anti-Semitism could not be proved. Data sources are fully explained in an appendix (pp. 23-6). The report is available at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Are_Jews_leaving_Europe.pdf

ACADEMIC STUDIES

British Social Attitudes Surveys

In his latest research note for British Religion in Numbers, Ben Clements presents trend data from British Social Attitudes Surveys to 2015 in respect of current religious affiliation, religion of upbringing, and attendance at religious services. See:

<http://www.brin.ac.uk/2017/religion-and-the-british-social-attitudes-2015-survey/>

Materiality and religion

Material culture has emerged in recent years as a significant theme in the study of religion, and a specialist journal (*Material Religion*) has been published since 2005. The three phases of

materiality – production, classification, and circulation/use – are further illustrated in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2017, x + 245pp., ISBN 978-1-4724-7783-5, £95.00, hardback). Its thirteen chapters, with introduction and afterword, offer fresh empirical research and theoretical insights, disproportionately drawn from Britain. Reflecting the nature of the subject, these contributions are of a mainly qualitative bent, the exception being Elisabeth Arweck, ‘Religion Materialised in the Everyday: Young People’s Attitudes towards Material Expressions of Religion’ (pp. 185-202). This draws upon data from the 2011-12 ‘Young People’s Attitudes to Religious Diversity’ project, demonstrating a considerable awareness by young people of the cultural factors at work shaping the everyday deployment, circulation, and reception of religious symbols, clothing, and dietary observances. The book’s webpage is at:

<https://www.routledge.com/Materiality-and-the-Study-of-Religion-The-Stuff-of-the-Sacred/Hutchings-McKenzie/p/book/9781472477835>

Psychology and religion

Vol. 29, No. 2, 2016 of *Journal of Empirical Theology* is a theme issue on psychology and religion, guest-edited by Emyr Williams and Mandy Robbins. Two of the six articles are of particular British religious statistical interest, although their findings are not entirely conclusive. The more substantial, in terms of its evidence base, is Andrew Village, ‘Biblical Conservatism and Psychological Type’ (pp. 137-59), a correlation explored through responses given by 3,243 self-selecting readers of the *Church Times* in 2013, 1,269 of them clergy and 1,974 laity. Meanwhile, in ‘The Relationship between Paranormal Belief and the HEXACO Domains of Personality’ (pp. 212-38), Emyr Williams and Ben Roberts illustrate the effects of introducing honesty/humility as an additional (sixth) measure of personality when appraising belief in the paranormal among a preponderantly female sample of 137 undergraduate students in Wales. Access options to these articles are outlined at:

<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/15709256/29/2>

Church of England liturgies

The words used in Anglican worship have become more accessible over time but there is still scope for making them more so, argues Geoff Bayliss (Rector of Cowley, Oxford), who has appraised the readability of Church of England liturgies by testing them statistically against three standard readability formulae, covering ministry of the word, ministry of the Eucharist, and occasional offices. His summative evaluation is that currently 43% of adults living in England would find 50% of the Church’s liturgical texts difficult to read. Only 34% of these texts fall into the National Literacy Strategy’s Entry Level or Level 1 groupings while 64% are categorized as Level 2, characterized by longer sentences, unfamiliar vocabulary, and a high occurrence of polysyllabic words. Nor is it the case that linguistic complexity is the function of older liturgies such as the Book of Common Prayer; modern versions also exhibit readability problems. Although Bayliss concedes that use of a small core of challenging words may be hard to avoid, he feels many others could be couched in forms which would enhance their readability. The full results of the research are presented in his doctoral thesis, ‘Assessing the Accessibility of the Liturgical Texts of the Church of England: Using Readability Formulae’ (University of Wales DMin, 2016, 314pp.), which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.plainenglishliturgy.org.uk/>

An introduction to his findings can be found in his article ‘Speaking More in the Language of the People’ in the *Church Times*, 23/30 December 2016, p. 16, which is available at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/23-december/comment/opinion/speaking-more-of-the-language-of-the-people>

EURISLAM Project

Rather belatedly, we should note the publication of a special theme issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Vol. 42, No. 2, 2016, pp. 177-340) devoted to the EURISLAM Project, funded between 2009 and 2012 by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme. EURISLAM was undertaken by a consortium of six European universities, coordinated by the University of Amsterdam, and with the University of Bristol as the British member. The research took place in Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, and The Netherlands, utilizing a combination of media content analysis, telephone interviews, and interviews with representatives of Muslim organizations. In each of the six countries, telephone interviews were conducted with onomastically recruited samples of Muslims of Moroccan, Turkish, former Yugoslavian, and Pakistani descent (798 of them in Britain) and also with a cross-section of the national majority population (387 persons in Britain). The questionnaire explored cultural interactions between Muslim immigrants and receiving societies. The theme issue, *The Socio-Cultural Integration of Muslims in Western Europe: Comparative Perspectives*, contains nine articles, and is available on a subscriber or pay-per-view basis at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjms20/42/2?nav=tocList>

There is also much more information about EURISLAM, including further bibliographic references, many results, and a link to the dataset, on the project website at:

<http://www.eurislam.eu/>

Yearbook of International Religious Demography

The latest global attempt to number religious adherents is *Yearbook of International Religious Demography, 2016*, edited by Brian Grim, Todd Johnson, Vegard Skrbekk, and Gina Zurlo (Leiden: Brill, 2016, xxiv + 231pp., ISBN 978-9-0043-2173-1, €85, paperback). It draws upon a wide range of sources (described in part 3, pp. 167-78), many of them archived in Brill’s *World Religion Database*, albeit the 2011 census is the principal source of UK data. Country-by-country totals for each major faith group are tabulated in an appendix (pp. 197-225), with extensive statistical analyses in part 1 (pp. 1-93). From this we learn that, in absolute terms, the UK has the third largest population of Sikhs in the world, the fourth of Jains, the fifth of Zoroastrians, the sixth of Jews and agnostics, and the ninth of non-religionists. Part 2 of the volume comprises seven case studies and methodological essays, none specifically relating to the UK. The book’s webpage is at:

<http://www.brill.com/products/reference-work/yearbook-international-religious-demography-2016>