

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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## OPINION POLLS

### **Forgive us our trespasses: BBC and ComRes investigate the willingness to forgive sins**

In an online poll by ComRes for BBC local radio on 4-5 March 2019, just 26% of the 2,042 adults questioned agreed that ‘Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected at Easter so that you can be forgiven for your sins’. The proportion was at its highest among over-65s (33%), professing Christians (46%), persons who ever attended religious services (48%), monthly or more frequent worshippers (67%), and active Christians (82%). The figure was lowest among religious nones (6%), non-Christians (14%), under-25s (16%), and residents of Scotland (19%). Across the entire sample, 40% disagreed with the statement, while 20% were neutral about it and 15% undecided. For the remainder of the survey, respondents were asked about their willingness to forgive somebody who had committed any of nine different sins: murder, child abuse, sexual abuse (including rape), infidelity, verbal abuse (including mockery), abuse on social media, lying, stealing, swearing, and discrimination. In each of these scenarios, five predetermined reply options were on offer: impossible to forgive, difficult to forgive, easy to forgive, no need to forgive, and prefer not to say. Answers were disaggregated by standard demographics, religious affiliation, and attendance at religious services. Detailed data tables are available at:

<https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BBC-Local-Radio-Forgiveness-Poll-March-2019.pdf>

### **Lead us not into temptation: Populus probes the consumer market for Easter treats**

Easter may have lost much of its religious significance in Britain but it continues to generate strong sales of seasonal manufactured foodstuffs. By 22-24 March 2019, four weeks before Easter Sunday (21 April), an online poll by Populus for the Royal Society for Public Health discovered that 65% of 2,090 UK adults had already bought at least one Easter food product at a supermarket, with 38% having bought hot cross buns and 50% Easter eggs or similar chocolate treats. In many cases, presumably, they had also consumed them soon after purchase. Pangs of guilt had clearly begun to set in, with a tendency to shift the blame on to supermarkets: 77% agreed that supermarkets started selling these Easter products too early and 53% that they should stop placing them next to checkouts, thereby exposing consumers to temptation, more so in the case of children (57%) than adults (34%). Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.populus.co.uk/poll/easter/>

### **The importance of religion: findings from the Spring 2018 Pew Global Attitudes Survey**

The Pew Research Center is continuing to trickle-release the findings from its 27-nation Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, British fieldwork for which was conducted by Kantar Public

UK, via telephone interviews with 1,005 adults between 24 May and 29 June. The questions featured in the latest release touch on the significance of religion. Asked about the importance of religion in their own life, a majority (57%) of Britons answered that it was not too important (23%) or not at all important (34%), against 21% who said it was very important and 20% somewhat important. In terms of the number claiming that religion was not at all or not too important to them personally, Britain ranked fifth equal with Hungary, after Sweden (75%), Japan and France (both on 70%), and The Netherlands (59%). Britons were divided about the importance of religion's role in the country as a whole, when compared to twenty years previously: 52% said that it had become less important (15 points greater than the 27-nation median, albeit a lower proportion than in Spain, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, and United States), 21% more important, and 21% that it was unchanged. On the basis of replies to a rather ambiguous supplementary question as to whether this was 'a good thing' (39% in Britain) or 'a bad thing' (45%), Pew was able to derive a measure of support for or opposition to an increasing role for religion in society. The 27-nation median for support was 39%, three times more than opposition (13%); however, in Britain's case, the outcome was more finely balanced, with support for an enhanced role for religion at 32% and opposition to it of 31%. A report and topline data are available at:

<https://www.pewglobal.org/2019/04/22/a-changing-world-global-views-on-diversity-gender-equality-family-life-and-the-importance-of-religion/>

### **Religion and the legalization of assisted dying: Populus poll for Dignity in Dying**

Online polling by Populus for Dignity in Dying on 11-24 March 2019 found that 84% of the 5,695 adult Britons interviewed endorsed the legalization of assisted dying for a terminally ill person of sound mind and with six months or less to live, subject to certain safeguards, with 9% opposed and 7% undecided. Analysis by religious affiliation demonstrated strong support from religious nones (90%) and Christians (82%), with a smaller majority of non-Christians in favour (63%, five points fewer than in a previous survey in 2015), falling to just 37% of Muslims, 48% of whom were opposed. Asked, in a second question, how they would react if their own MP were to vote for a law permitting assisted dying, 52% of the entire sample and 58% of religious nones thought they would feel more positive towards the MP, against 49% of Christians and 42% of non-Christians; approximately two-fifths in each group replied that it would make no difference to how they perceived the MP. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.populus.co.uk/poll/dignity-in-dying-2/>

The poll incorporated an over-sample of Scots, the results from whom were separately reported. They were asked the same two questions as in the Britain-wide poll but also a third, about a respondent's likely reaction to their own MSP voting for a law permitting assisted dying. In Scotland alone, 87% of all interviewees supported the legalization of assisted dying for a terminally ill person of sound mind and with six months or less to live, the religious spread being from 77% of a tiny sub-sample of non-Christians to 92% of nones, with Christians on 80%. Full data tables are available at:

<https://www.populus.co.uk/poll/dignity-in-dying-scotland-poll/>

### **Perceived traits of a ‘good’ Christian (according to YouGov panellists)**

Kindness is the single most important trait for someone to exhibit in order to be deemed a ‘good’ Christian, according to 2,012 members of YouGov’s adult panel, interviewed online between 29 March and 1 April 2019. This was mentioned by 35% of respondents, followed by 14% for love and 11% for goodness. The identical priorities were named by professing Christians in the sample, albeit with slightly higher ratings (of, respectively, 39%, 19%, and 12%). The list of nine possible traits did not include any specifically religious attribute. The data table is available via the blog post at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/articles-reports/2019/04/18/kindness-and-love-most-important-traits-good-chris>

### **YouGov poll on the acceptability of godparents who do not believe in God**

There has been intense speculation concerning the choice of godparents for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex’s baby. But, given the life-long commitment which godparents are supposed to have to the religious nurture of their godchild, is it acceptable to become a godparent without actually believing in God? The majority (59%) of the British public thinks so, according to an online survey by YouGov of 4,145 adult Britons on 3 April 2019, the proportion peaking at 73% of under-25s. Only 20% of the whole sample deemed it unacceptable, including 29% of over-65s, with 21% undecided. Full results are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/cd1a4ccb-55f2-11e9-a559-57f9c67f2c8a>

### **YouGov poll on public belief in science-based conspiracy theories, including creationism**

In a belatedly-published poll, YouGov tested the extent of public belief in five science-based ‘conspiracy theories’, one of them being that ‘the universe was created by God in seven days, and evolution was just part of His creation plan’. Only 14% of the 2,039 Britons interviewed online on 8-11 February 2019 considered this statement was definitely (6%) or probably (8%) true. The figure was somewhat higher among women and over-55s (17% each). A majority (70%) deemed the claim to be probably (14%) or definitely (56%) false, with 15% undecided. The data table is accessible via the link in the blog post at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/science/articles-reports/2019/04/25/which-science-based-conspiracy-theories-do-britons>

### **Someone to open up to about worries or personal issues? Rarely to religious leaders**

Interviewed online by YouGov on 4-5 February 2019, 72% of 1,825 Britons said they had someone they could ‘open up’ to about any big worries or personal issues they were facing. In a supplementary question, this sub-sample was asked to choose, from a list of ten categories of person, those to whom they would ‘open up’ (multiple selections being permitted). A friend (54%), parents (35%), other family members (32%), and siblings (29%) were the most popular options. Religious leaders languished in ninth position, on 4%, with no more than 7% willing to consult them in any demographic sub-group (women aged 65 and over being most likely to seek advice from a religious professional). The data table is at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/relationships/articles-reports/2019/04/19/one-five-britons-have-nobody-open-about-problems>

### **Rebuilding Notre-Dame de Paris after the fire: YouGov sounds out British opinions**

The disastrous fire at the Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral on 15 April 2019 dominated media headlines worldwide. Regardless of religious affiliation, or none, comparatively few people failed to recognize the building's historical and architectural significance. Inevitably, there has been some debate about how the cathedral should be restored or even whether it should be rebuilt at all. A snap YouGov online poll on 16 April captured the immediate preferences of 7,451 of the company's panellists. Overwhelmingly (76%), they judged that Notre-Dame de Paris should be rebuilt as close as possible to how it was before the fire, Conservative voters (82%) and over-65s (83%) particularly inclining to this view. Just 6% overall (but 12% of under-25s) favoured rebuilding to a new design, with another 6% opposed to rebuilding and 12% undecided. Full results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/8d5c1ec9-602d-11e9-a559-57f9c67f2c8a>

### **Should Catholic priests be able to marry? A YouGov poll seemingly inspired by *Fleabag***

BBC Television's hit television comedy *Fleabag* recently featured a Catholic priest wrestling with breaking his vow of celibacy, prompting some wider debate about whether Catholic priests should be able to marry or not. In an online survey by YouGov on 8 April 2019, 71% of 5,794 adult Britons were clear that they should be, rising to 80% of Liberal Democrats and 82% of over-65s. Just 6% thought that priests should remain celibate, the largest proportions being among Londoners (9%) and under-25s (10%), with 23% of the whole sample expressing no view. Full results are at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/72f684cd-59e2-11e9-88a5-3f19d4e08dae>

### **Contribution of non-Christian soldiers to British war effort during the First World War**

Public knowledge of the immense contribution made by non-Christian soldiers to the British war effort during the First World War has increased somewhat during the course of the recent centenary commemorations but still remains relatively low. As part of a tracker survey commissioned by British Future from YouGov, for which 2,008 adults were interviewed online on 9-10 December 2018, respondents were asked whether each of the five major world faiths had provided more than 10,000 soldiers who had fought for Britain. The results were compared with earlier studies conducted by ICM for British Future in June and November 2014, at the start of the centenary. By 2018, 46% of Britons believed that more than 10,000 Hindus had served in the British armed forces in the First World War (up from 34% in June 2014); 41% that there had been more than 10,000 Jewish soldiers (up from 33%); 48% that there had been more than 10,000 Sikh soldiers (up from 34%); and 38% that there had been more than 10,000 Muslim soldiers (up from 22%). In fact, for each of these four faiths, the 10,000 figure had been exceeded, considerably so in the case of Muslims, an estimated 400,000 of whom had been in the Indian Army during the First World War. More than one-third of interviewees in 2018 confessed that they did not know the answer to the question as regards Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, and Muslims. They were rather more confident (79%) in saying that over 10,000 Christian soldiers had fought on Britain's side, albeit, even here, 19% did not know whether that statement was true or not. Topline findings are given by Lucy Buckerfield and Steve

Ballinger in *The People's Centenary: Tracking Public Attitudes to the First World War Centenary, 2013-2018* (London: British Future, 2019), pp. 17, 26 (freely available on the organization's website), while full data tables for 2018, with breaks by demographics, are at:

[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/chrg0ad12j/BritishFuture\\_181210\\_WW1Tracker\\_w.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/chrg0ad12j/BritishFuture_181210_WW1Tracker_w.pdf)

### **Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, and anti-Semitism: latest ComRes poll for *Jewish News***

The general public seems far from convinced that the Labour Party as a movement, and its leader Jeremy Corbyn particularly, is effectively tackling the party's problem with anti-Semitism, according to the latest ComRes poll on behalf of the *Jewish News*, for which 1,047 adults were interviewed online on 15 April 2019. A majority (51%) of respondents agreed that Labour does have a serious issue with anti-Semitism, with only 18% dissenting and 31% uncertain. A majority (56%) likewise disputed the party is doing enough to combat anti-Semitism in its ranks. As for Corbyn, majorities agreed with the statements that he seems unwilling or unable to act decisively against anti-Semitism (56%); and that his failure to tackle it within the party showed he is unfit to be prime minister (55%) and undermined his claims to be anti-racist (54%); summatively, 61% denied he was handling the anti-Semitism problem well. Pluralities also doubted Corbyn's claim to have an 'absolute determination' to stamp out anti-Semitism in the party (48%), together with the claim advanced by some of his supporters that he is the target of a concerted smear campaign by political opponents (42%). A report of the poll appeared in the *Jewish News* for 18 April 2019, while full data tables are available at:

[https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Jewish-News\\_April-Poll-2019-1.pdf](https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Jewish-News_April-Poll-2019-1.pdf)

### **Multinational YouGov poll on the perceived threat posed by Islamic State**

An eight-nation poll investigating attitudes to NATO, undertaken by YouGov between 13 and 27 March 2019, included one question asking about the severity of particular threats to individual countries. Measurement was by means of a scale running from 0 (no threat at all) to 10 (a severe threat). Average scores for the threat from Islamic State were universally high. In Britain, where 1,697 adults were interviewed, it was 8.0, second only to France (8.6), and ahead of Germany (7.9) and the United States (7.6). The data table is available at:

[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/sgne3a1ojt/YouGov%20Eurotrack%20and%20US%20-%20NATO%2070th%20an](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/sgne3a1ojt/YouGov%20Eurotrack%20and%20US%20-%20NATO%2070th%20an)

### **Accessing legal aid to challenge the revocation of Shamima Begum's British citizenship**

In previous editions of *Counting Religion in Britain*, we have reported on the public's lack of sympathy for Shamima Begum, who had left her Bethnal Green home as a teenager to join Islamic State (IS), subsequently marrying a jihadist. Following the collapse of the IS caliphate, she announced her desire to return to the UK from Syria, where she lives in a refugee camp. Her repatriation was opposed by the Government, which also revoked her British citizenship. Her family has decided to fight her case and an application has been made for legal aid (state funding) to do so, an application which it is widely assumed will be successful. Asked by YouGov on 17 April 2019 whether Begum's lawyers should be able to access legal aid to challenge the Government's decision to revoke citizenship, 71% of 3,561 Britons responding

from YouGov's online panel said legal aid should not be granted, over-65s (81%), Conservatives (90%), and 'leave' voters in the 2016 referendum on European Union membership (92%) feeling especially strongly. About one person in six (17%) believed the case should qualify for legal aid, 'remain' voters in 2016 (31%) and Liberal Democrats (34%) being most favourable. One in eight was undecided. Results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/61935ede-60f6-11e9-80be-1b0957da78b7>

### **General public's knowledge of the name for a Sikh place of worship**

Even prompted with a list of eight possible answers, only 25% of the 8,036 British adults interviewed online by YouGov on 30 April 2019 knew that the name for a Sikh place of worship is a gurdwara, the proportion being no higher than 38% in any demographic sub-group (among Liberal Democrats and Londoners). A rather larger number (30%) thought that it was called a temple, with another 30% replying that they simply did not know. Full results are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/opi/surveys/results#/survey/0c2da57c-6b29-11e9-8bfd-07ef8e43ff7f>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Churches outnumber pubs and other public buildings, National Churches Trust finds**

Notwithstanding the spate of post-war closures in traditional Christian denominations, the UK still has more churches than any other type of public building, according to data compiled by the National Churches Trust (NCT). The most recent estimates by Brierley Consultancy show that there are 40,300 church buildings open to the public and being used for worship, including 16,600 Anglican. This compares with 39,000 public houses (11,000 fewer than a decade ago), 14,300 supermarkets operated by grocery retailers, 11,500 post office branches, 7,500 bank branches, and 3,600 public libraries. The NCT's press release is available at:

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/holy-spirit-uk-has-more-churches-pubs>

### **Church of Scotland statistical returns for 2018**

The Church of Scotland has published its statistical returns as at 31 December 2018 in the 'Blue Book' issued in connection with its forthcoming General Assembly (to be held in Edinburgh from 18 to 24 May 2019). For several indicators, comparisons are given for each year between 2007 and 2018, showing both 'stocks' and 'flows' in the case of membership. The overall picture is one of continuing decline, in congregations, communicants, elders, and baptisms. The number of communicants on the rolls in 2018 was 325,695, 3.3% down on 2017 and 33.4% fewer than in 2007. Data on attendance at worship and congregational activities have only been gathered since 2017 and are still outstanding from some presbyteries. The statistics can be found in Appendices II-VII of the Report of the Council of Assembly on pp. 44-56 of the 'Blue Book' at:

<https://ga.churchofscotland.org.uk/publications>

**Divine numerology: Ted Harrison reflects on the sacred significance of numbers . . .**

in a feature article in the *Church Times*, 26 April 2019, p. 15, available at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/26-april/faith/faith-features/divine-numerology>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

**Religion by local authority and region: estimates from the Annual Population Survey**

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has created (upon request) and published a spreadsheet containing *estimates* of the religious affiliation of the population by local authority for each calendar year between 2011 and 2018. The data derive from the Annual Population Survey, for which around 300,000 persons are interviewed annually. The question asked is: ‘What is your religion?’ The spreadsheet, without any ONS commentary, is available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/adhocs/009830religionbylocalauthoritygreatbritain2011to2018>

A preliminary analysis of the data by the National Secular Society suggested that, between 2011 and 2018, the number of religious nones in Britain had grown by 46% (which was almost ten times faster than the overall population) while the number of Christians declined by 15%. The increase in Muslims was 22% and of Jews 17%, with Hindus up by 13% over the seven years.

Also recently created by ONS, in response to a request, and again from the Annual Population Survey, was a spreadsheet of religious affiliation by region for the period October 2017 to September 2018. The distribution for home nations, by *estimated* numbers and percentages, is tabulated below, revealing that Christians are now struggling to retain their majority share in England and across Britain as a whole (having already lost it in Wales and Scotland). The spreadsheet itself, likewise without commentary, is at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/adhocs/009760religioningreatbritainbyregionoctober2017toseptember2018>

<b>Numbers</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Britain</b>
No religion	20,551,210	1,425,452	2,657,372	24,634,034
Christian	28,499,831	1,512,220	2,413,595	32,425,646
Buddhist	216,447	9,143	8,796	234,386
Hindu	963,153	7,794	20,547	991,494
Jewish	340,016	2,519	6,192	348,727
Muslim	3,289,377	49,931	93,136	3,432,444
Sikh	399,254	1,035	5,239	405,528
Any other religion	849,600	69,200	106,256	1,025,056
Total	55,108,888	3,077,294	5,311,133	63,497,315

<b>% down</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Britain</b>
No religion	37.3	46.3	50.0	38.8
Christian	51.7	49.1	45.4	51.1
Buddhist	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.4
Hindu	1.7	0.3	0.4	1.6
Jewish	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.5
Muslim	6.0	1.6	1.8	5.4
Sikh	0.7	*	0.1	0.6
Any other religion	1.5	2.2	2.0	1.6

### **The religion of prisoners in England and Wales as at 31 March 2019**

Table 1.5 of the report on ‘Prison Population, 31 March 2019’, part of Offender Management Statistics, shows the prison population of England and Wales by religion and sex. Relative to one year earlier, the position was broadly stable, with professing Christians (at 39,515) down by 1%, in line with the reduction in the overall number of prisoners (to 82,364), albeit Anglican and Free Church affiliates declined more sharply (by, respectively, 4% and 5%). Fewer inmates (25,034) identified as without religion, down by 3%, while Muslims rose by 1% to 13,008. The report can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2018>

## ACADEMIC STUDY

### **The predictors of young people’s views on the conflict between science and religion**

In a further output from the Young People’s Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project (2011-12), Leslie Francis, Jeff Astley, and Ursula McKenna deploy multiple regression techniques to explore the power of five sets of variables (personal, psychological, religious, attitudinal, and theological) to predict individual differences in the responses of 11,809 adolescents to the view that science disproves the biblical account of creation. Greater incompatibility between science and religion was found to be particularly associated with scientific fundamentalism, anti-religious attitude, and atheism, suggesting that young people who believe in science in an unqualified way are more distrustful of religion. “‘Science Disproves the Biblical Account of Creation’: Exploring the Predictors of Perceived Conflict between Science and Religion among 13- to 15-Year-Old Students in the UK’ is published in *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2019, pp. 188-201 and available on an open access basis at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01416200.2018.1540399>