

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 67 – April 2021

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OPINION POLLS

Religious and faith groups ranked bottom of ten agencies for the support they offer

Much is made nowadays of religious organizations as a source of social capital. But, asked about the support that was available from ten different agencies, only 29% of the 2,677 UK adults interviewed online by Savanta ComRes on 19–21 March 2021 claimed to feel supported (either highly or somewhat) by religious and faith groups. This was the lowest figure of perceived support from any of the ten agencies mentioned in the questionnaire. Unsurprisingly, respondents felt most supported by friends and family (75%) and health and care workers (58%). However, the proportion feeling supported by religious and faith groups was significantly larger for ethnic minorities, including for a slim majority of Asians and black persons, and it was also elevated among the under-35s (45%) and Londoners (42%). Three-tenths of the whole sample said they felt neither supported nor unsupported by religious and faith groups, 6% reported that such groups actively made life more difficult for them, and 35% answered they did not come into contact with religious or faith groups often enough to be able to pass an opinion. Data tables from the poll, which was commissioned by the RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce), are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/rsa-public-polling-march-april-2021/>

Perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in the UK

For the eleventh consecutive month, the Savanta ComRes political tracker has asked its respondents whether they regarded anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in the country. Online fieldwork was undertaken on 16–18 April 2021 among 2,093 UK adults, 51% of whom said that anti-Semitism was a problem and 60% Islamophobia, with, respectively, 16% and 23% thinking they were big problems. On the Labour Party's handling of the anti-Semitism issue since the December 2019 general election, just 25% of the sample judged it had performed well and 37% badly, with 39% neutral or undecided. Data tables are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/westminster-voting-intention-and-starmer-vs-corbyn-20th-april-2021/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: the Church of England's community response to the pandemic

The Church Urban Fund and the Church of England have collaborated to produce *Church in Action, 2020/21: A Survey of Churches' Community Responses to the Pandemic*. The survey was sent to all Church of England clergy of incumbent status, 1,023 of whom completed it in

October and November 2020. Respondents were said to have reflected a broad and representative cross-section of Anglican parishes in terms of region, context, and levels of deprivation (albeit they may not have been fully typical with regard to their level of commitment to social action and to tackling poverty). The questionnaire covered issues perceived to be affecting individual communities (the list headed by isolation/loneliness and mental health problems); responses of churches to social needs (food banks and pastoral support being most frequently mentioned); ways in which ongoing projects had been adapted during the pandemic; new initiatives that had been launched; challenges in sustaining social action; and new and changing partnerships with other local agencies. The thirty-one page report, which was written by Jessamin Birdsall, Bryony Loveless, and Tom Sefton, is available to download via the press release at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/listening-services-food-deliveries-churches-step-support-local>

Coronavirus chronicles: the Scottish Church experience of Covid-19

On behalf of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum (SCLF), Brendan Research has undertaken an online survey of Scottish church leaders between 26 October and 4 December 2020 into the impact on the Churches of coronavirus and consequential lockdowns. The survey was disseminated to members of ACTS and SCLF, also by direct email to other places of worship, and via social media. Completed replies were received from 369 local leaders, approximating to one in ten of all congregations in Scotland, but with a serious underrepresentation of Catholic informants (just seven from almost four hundred parishes), seemingly because the Scottish Catholic Church had conducted its own investigation in July 2020. At one in eight, the response from Church of Scotland congregations was also below par. The rapid and widespread engagement with online services and other online activities during lockdown is headlined (although this is almost certainly overstated since digitally less advanced places of worship probably would not have answered the enquiry) and is seen as the way forward. However, foodbanks apart, church-based community projects (especially for children and young people) have been disrupted by the pandemic. Loneliness was the most prevalent pastoral challenge arising from the crisis, while church leaders themselves were most stressed by a sense of guilt they were not doing enough. The full (forty-four-page) report on the survey, entitled '*Adapt and Be Flexible – the Mission Doesn't Stop*': *The Scottish Church and the Covid-19 Pandemic*, and written in late January but not released until early April 2021, is available at:

<https://www.brendanresearch.com/projects/sclf-acts-covid19>

A qualitative summary of the earlier Roman Catholic study was published by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland as *Living in Faith in the Age of Covid-19* and can be found at:

<https://www.bcos.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/PMWG%20Newsletter%20August%202020.pdf>

Coronavirus chronicles: the Muslim experience of Covid-19

A Year of Lockdown: The Impact on Muslims is the latest report from Muslim Census, based on an online survey of 1,000 Muslims aged 18 and over in Britain between 28 February and 14 March 2021. The report highlights the disproportionately negative effect that coronavirus has

had on the Muslim community. Among this sample, 23% had tested positive for Covid-19, three and a half times more than the national average, while 15% had lost their jobs, six times the rate in the population as a whole. Additionally, during the course of the pandemic, 17% of Muslims had fallen into poverty (as defined by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation); 38% had experienced the death of a loved-one; 38% stated their job satisfaction had been negatively impacted; and 58% said their mental health had been negatively affected. At the same time, 61% of respondents claimed the successive lockdowns had brought them closer to their faith. The report is available at:

<https://muslimcensus.co.uk/a-year-of-lockdown/>

Coronavirus chronicles: the Jewish experience of Covid-19

According to data released to the *Jewish Chronicle* (16 April 2021, p. 30) by the United Synagogue (US, a union of British Orthodox Jewish congregations), attendance has steadily increased since the start of 2021 as more synagogues reopen and congregants feel more confident about attending in person. On 9–10 January, 14 US synagogues were open with an overall attendance of 500. By 9–10 April, however, 44 US synagogues (77% of the total) were open, with some 2,500 attendees.

Meanwhile, the Board of Deputies of British Jews has continued to monitor the number of UK Jews who have died from Covid-19, whether in hospitals or other settings, and who subsequently received a Jewish burial. The most recent cumulative death toll figures from the start of the pandemic are: 900 on 26 March, 901 on 2 April, 902 on 9 April, and 903 on 16 and 23 April 2021.

British Sikh Report, 2020

Although only published relatively recently, fieldwork for the fifty-four-page *British Sikh Report, 2020* (the eighth in an annual series) was mostly conducted at the start of that year, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which did not therefore feature among its questions. The principal topics covered, besides standard demographics, were disability, loneliness, marriage and weddings, relationships and sex education, Sikh faith schools, organ donation, crime, voting in the 2019 general election, art, connections with Punjab and India, and drugs in Punjab. The survey was primarily conducted online but supplemented by self-completion paper questionnaires. The 2,700-strong sample was a self-selecting one, recruited by snowballing techniques and social media, and thus may not have been fully representative of the UK Sikh community as a whole (albeit it was a good match with the 2011 census in terms of age and region). The report can be found at:

<https://britishsikhreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/British-Sikh-Report-2020.pdf>

Widespread disregard of daily collective worship in maintained schools in England

The requirement for all maintained (state-funded) schools in England to hold a daily collective act of worship is in the news again. On the one hand, pressure is building (for example, from the National Secular Society) to have this legislative duty scrapped, but, on the other, the Schools Minister has recently reaffirmed (in a written answer to a parliamentary question) the Department for Education's commitment to ensuring schools comply with their obligations, promising that those failing to do so will be 'investigated'. Surveys in the past have

demonstrated a large measure of non-compliance, often driven by logistical and operational considerations. Now a snap poll of 2,680 primary school teachers on Twitter, not necessarily fully representative of the universe, has suggested that the schools of 53% of the respondents do not hold a daily act of collective worship, the 24% that do all being faith schools. The poll is briefly reported by the *TES* at:

<https://www.tes.com/news/53-primary-schools-dont-offer-collective-worship>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain

The process whereby Britain became an increasingly Eurosceptic nation in the period between the 1975 and 2016 referenda on the UK's membership of what is now the European Union (EU), and the extent to which religion influenced that process, is quantitatively explored in Ekaterina Kolpinskaya and Stuart Fox, *Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain* (London: Routledge, 2021, 138 pp., ISBN: 978-0-367-34225-8, £44.99, hardback). More specifically, three research questions are addressed: 'What was the contribution of religion to the rise of Euroscepticism in Britain and the Brexit vote?'; 'How does religion affect Euroscepticism?'; and 'How has the relationship between religion and voter behaviour in Britain changed because of rising Euroscepticism and/or Brexit?' Answers to these questions are provided through a wealth of sample survey data, notably from the British Election Study and the UK Household Longitudinal Survey. Only a fraction of the analysis can be presented in the seven short chapters of this book, and in the twenty-two figures and three tables contained therein, but additional supporting evidence is available online in a thirty-page appendix of descriptive statistics, regression analyses, and structural equation models at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10871/124138>

The authors conclude that the role of religion in shaping British Euroscepticism has been undervalued. 'While not the most influential or decisive trait for explaining the Brexit vote, the religious characteristics of more than a third of British adults helped determine how they felt about EU membership and how they voted in the referendum. By far the most Eurosceptic religious community were Anglicans, a clear majority of whom voted for Brexit . . . At the other end of the scale were Catholics and Presbyterians, both of whom (albeit for very different reasons) were strongly opposed to Brexit . . . One of the starkest findings of this research is the emergence of the Conservative Party as the closest Britain has ever seen to a Christian Democratic Party, as the traditional links between Labour and the Catholic and free church Protestant communities deteriorates.' The book's webpage is at:

<https://www.routledge.com/Religion-and-Euroscepticism-in-Brexit-Britain/Kolpinskaya-Fox/p/book/9780367342258>

The authors also have a blog post about the subject, 'How Religion Contributed to Brexit', at:

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/how-religion-contributed-to-brexit/>

Attitudes of contemporary British Catholics to personal morality and the priesthood

In a recent twenty-four-page journal article, Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant have drawn upon an online survey of 1,823 self-identifying British Catholics, conducted by Savanta ComRes between 21 October and 7 November 2019, to investigate their attitudes to current issues affecting the Catholic Church (in the areas of personal morality and reforming access to the priesthood), and how they varied by socio-demographic, religious socialization, and religious commitment variables. Women emerged as consistently more liberal in their views than men, while greater religious commitment was always associated with support for the traditional teachings of the Church. ‘To Conscience First, and to the Pope (Long) Afterwards? British Catholics and their Attitudes towards Morality and Structural Issues Concerning the Catholic Church’ is available, on an open access basis, in the online *Review of Religious Research* at:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-021-00452-3>

Primitive Methodism in Hertfordshire before 1918

The ongoing historiographical renaissance of Primitive Methodism’s contribution to the British Methodist heritage of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is exemplified in a series of county-level case studies, the latest of which is David Peter Noble, ‘Primitive Methodism in Hertfordshire from 1838 to 1918: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Study’ (PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2020, xii + 328 pp.) Hertfordshire was never part of the traditional heartlands of the Primitive Methodist movement, and the extant source material for this county is not especially abundant. However, Noble has performed a useful service to scholarship in clearly presenting what is known about the social history of Primitive Methodism in Hertfordshire, including a chapter each on property matters and financial arrangements, two significant topics that other historians have frequently overlooked. Appropriate recourse is made to quantitative data, not just in the thirty-nine tables and twenty-two figures but also in the text, and this is especially true of the analysis of the occupational composition of Primitive Methodism as recorded for fathers in baptismal registers (pp. 123–61, 280–9). The thesis can be found at:

<https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/24147/13089410%20NOBLE%20David%20Final%20Version%20of%20PhD%20Submission.pdf>