

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Coronavirus chronicles: comfort about resuming attendance at places of worship

On 2–3 July 2021, in anticipation of further easing of coronavirus restrictions by the government, Ipsos MORI replicated a survey previously fielded in February and May about people's willingness to return to various out-of-home activities in the same way as before the pandemic struck. On this latest occasion, the online sample comprised 1,025 British adults aged 16–75. Of these, 34% said they felt comfortable about attending places of worship again, while 4% said that they were already doing so and thus 'back to normal'. The combined figure of 38% was 5% up on the April level, but it was well below the results for the thirteen other activities on the list, being just half of the first-ranked, taking holidays in the UK, which 76% were willing to contemplate again. Moreover, it is wholly implausible that 38% of the population will actually be attending places of worship in person again this summer (even for a rite of passage, such as a wedding); rather, people were simply expressing confidence in the improvement in the coronavirus situation such that attendance at religious worship might be (hypothetically) possible. More significant, perhaps, was the fact that 18% of respondents indicated they were not comfortable about attending places of worship, for this figure might well include many regular (and probably elderly) churchgoers in pre-pandemic times who are simply too anxious to venture out to public worship, at least for the moment. Topline charts from the survey are available at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/britons-becoming-increasingly-comfortable-returning-normality-around-4-10-still-unhappy-hugs>

Perceived tension between different religions: Ipsos multinational survey

More than three-fifths (62%) of 1,000 Britons aged 16–74 (interviewed online by Ipsos for King's College London between 23 December 2020 and 8 January 2021) considered that there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between different religions in the country. This was about the same proportion as in the USA (63%) and Germany (61%) but five points more than the 28-nation average of 57% (the range of responses being from 23% in Japan to 78% in South Korea). In Britain, however, other forms of friction were perceived as even greater than between religions, with 72% saying there was a great deal or fair amount of tension between rich and poor and between immigrants and people born in the country, and 70% between supporters of different political parties and between different ethnicities. Topline data from this study of 'culture wars' around the world can be found at:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/britons-most-against-political-correctness-globally-while-country-still-seen-less-divided-us>

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

For the thirteenth consecutive month, the Savanta ComRes political tracker has asked its respondents whether they regarded anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in the country. The latest online fieldwork was undertaken on 11–13 June 2021 among 2,108 UK adults. Bookend topline data are shown in Table 1, below, from which it will be seen that perceptions of both these forms of religious prejudice as problems have risen during the past year, from 47% to 53% in the case of anti-Semitism and from 52% to 58% for Islamophobia. The increase was entirely attributable to those replying that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia were big problems in society, the proportions saying they were just somewhat of a problem being unchanged in each case. The UK fall-out from the recent outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has almost certainly contributed to this perceived growth (the Community Security Trust logged 628 anti-Semitic incidents between 8 May and 7 June 2021 alone: see *The Month of Hate: Antisemitism and Extremism during the Israel-Gaza Conflict*, https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/4/a/The_Month_of_Hate.pdf). Full data tables from the Savanta ComRes tracker are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/savanta-comres-political-tracker-june-2021-westminster-voting-intention/>

Table 1: Perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems, UK, 2020 and 2021 (% down)

Scale of problem	Anti-Semitism	Anti-Semitism	Islamophobia	Islamophobia
	June 2020	June 2021	June 2020	June 2021
A big problem	13	19	19	25
Somewhat a problem	34	34	33	33
Not really a problem	25	19	22	17
Not a problem at all	8	10	9	10
Don't know	20	18	17	16

Source: Savanta ComRes

Reported sightings of, and suspected government secrecy about, UFOs: YouGov poll

As we have often observed, there is a rich tapestry of alternative beliefs in Britain, fuelled in recent years by social media and conspiracy theories. One of the most enduring aspects of this alternative scene is a suspicion that the government has knowledge of UFOs but is withholding the evidence from the public. According to an online poll by YouGov among 2,018 adults on 24–25 May 2021, 59% considered that it is very or somewhat likely that the government does indeed know something about UFOs that is not being shared with its citizens, while just 18% suspected that, if the government did have evidence of UFOs, it would share it with the public (against 62% who suggested the information would be hidden from view). One person in five claimed to have seen a UFO or to personally know somebody who had. On the related topic of aliens, 39% of the sample advised that, in the event of proof that aliens exist, humans should keep a low profile and try to remain undiscovered, with 31% wanting to make contact with the aliens and 30% undecided. Full data tables are available at:

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/science/articles-reports/2021/06/25/half-britons-think-aliens-exist-and-7-claim-have-s>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Church Army launches ‘investigating the distanced church’

The Church Army has commissioned its own research unit to investigate how (self-selecting) individuals involved in Church of England places of worship since 2018 have experienced church, for good or ill, during the recent coronavirus lockdowns. As part of the initial gathering of evidence, an online questionnaire has been launched on Survey Monkey, although provision is also being made for completion on paper. More information, incorporating a link to the survey, is available at:

<https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/current-research/investigating-distanced-church>
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/R7T2H3J>

Coronavirus chronicles: Methodist Church Statistics for Mission

Following publication of the Church of Scotland’s statistics (see the coverage in *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 68, May 2021), the Methodist Church has become the second major British denomination to release its post-pandemic 2020 membership figures, as at last October. Members numbered 164,024, representing a decline of 3.3% on the total of 169,377 in 2019 (although it must doubtless have been a rather low priority for ministers to prune the Methodist membership roll during the midst of a pandemic). The crude mortality rate of Methodists in 2020 was 38 per 1,000 (nearly four times the provisional rate for England and Wales that year, in reflection of the elderly profile of Methodists), with deaths outstripping new members by a factor of almost six. Because of coronavirus restrictions on public gatherings, no attempt was made in 2020 to estimate the average attendance of worshippers at typical Sunday or mid-week Methodist services. For a complete breakdown of the membership returns, go to:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/statistics-for-mission/2020-statistics-reports/>

Coronavirus chronicles: Jewish mortality during the first year of the pandemic

In the Institute for Jewish Policy Research’s latest report, Daniel Staetsky, Brigitta Horup, and Carli Lessof ask: *Did Jews in the UK Die Disproportionately from Covid-19? A New Look at Jewish Mortality over the First Year of the Pandemic*. Their question is answered in the affirmative, based upon calculations of monthly excess Jewish mortality between January 2020 and March 2021, the underlying data for which derived from the records of Jewish burial societies back to 2016. Elevated Jewish mortality was dramatically evidenced during the first wave of the pandemic, in March-May 2020, which the authors tentatively relate to Jewish sociability and communal activities, with the inherently greater exposure to coronavirus, prior to the introduction of national lockdown measures. The report is available at:

<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17873>

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 total had reached 903 by 16 April 2021, at which it remained on 18 June, after which three further Covid-related deaths occurred before the next reporting date of 13 July 2021, bringing the current figure to 906.

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Coronavirus chronicles: marriages in Scotland dramatically down in 2020

The National Records of Scotland have published *Vital Events Reference Tables, 2020*, which reveal what a devastating impact the coronavirus pandemic, with its associated lockdowns and restrictions on public gatherings, has had on the number of marriages in Scotland. As will be seen from Table 2, below, summarizing data for the past ten years, there were 53.9% fewer marriages in Scotland in 2020 than in 2019 and 60.1% fewer religious marriages, including reductions of 70.8% for the Church of Scotland, 65.9% for the Roman Catholic Church, 47.6% for other religions, and even 66.3% for humanists (who had previously registered strong advances ever since humanist marriages were first legalized in Scotland in 2005). The full data are available at:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/general-publications/vital-events-reference-tables/2020>

Table 2: Mode of solemnization of marriages, Scotland, 2011–20

Year	Civil	All Religious	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other religion	Humanist	Total
2011	15,092	14,043	5,557	1,729	4,271	2,486	29,135
2012	15,592	14,942	5,508	1,827	4,555	3,052	30,534
2013	14,024	13,523	4,616	1,582	4,140	3,185	27,547
2014	15,000	14,069	4,505	1,555	4,043	3,966	29,069
2015	15,583	14,108	4,052	1,438	4,287	4,331	29,691
2016	15,066	14,163	3,675	1,346	4,602	4,540	29,229
2017	14,201	14,239	3,166	1,182	4,571	5,320	28,440
2018	13,596	13,929	2,789	1,079	4,549	5,512	27,525
2019	12,635	13,372	2,225	911	4,930	5,306	26,007
2020	6,653	5,333	649	311	2,585	1,788	11,986

Source: National Records of Scotland.

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Recent articles in academic journals: theme issue on psychological type and religion

Vol. 24, No. 4, 2021 of *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* is a theme issue on ‘psychological type, religion, and culture’ edited by Christopher Alan Lewis. It includes the following six articles exploring the theme in an English and Welsh Anglican context:

- Andrew Village, ‘Testing the Factor Structure of the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS): A Replication among Church of England Clergy and Laity’ (pp. 336–46): analysis of self-selecting samples of 1,522 clergy and 2,474 laity who completed a questionnaire in the *Church Times* in 2013, concluding that the expected four-factor structure was ‘a reasonable approximation to the data’ but that there was scope for limited revision of some items in the FPTS, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1780575>
- Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and David Voas, ‘Psychological Type Theory, Femininity, and the Appeal of Anglo-Catholicism: A Study among Anglican

Clergymen in England’ (pp. 352–65): drawing on data from 1,107 clergymen participating in the 2013 Church Growth Research Project, the authors conclude that lower levels of psychological femininity are found among evangelicals, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1767557>

- Christopher Rutledge, ‘Psychological Type and Psychological Temperament of Non-Stipendiary Anglican Clergy: Appropriate to Meet the Needs of the Twenty-First Century?’ (pp. 366–76): comparison of 53 non-stipendiary and 77 stipendiary clergy in one rural Church of England diocese, identifying self-supporting ministers as more inclined to preserve the status quo than pioneer new initiatives, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1758647>
- John Payne and Christopher Alan Lewis, ‘The Payne Index of Ministry Styles: A Lens on Clergy Activity from the Perspective of Psychological Type Theory’ (pp. 377– 88): comparison of two surveys of clergy in the Church in Wales in the mid-1990s (n = 191) and mid-2000s (n = 370), highlighting two changes over time in the way that clergy are conceptualizing their ministry, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1784861>
- Leslie Francis, Susan Jones, and Andrew Village, ‘Psychological Type and Psychological Temperament among Readers within the Church of England: A Complementary Ministry?’ (pp. 389–403): comparison of psychological type and temperament between 155 readers attending the national readers’ conference in 2013 and 863 Church of England clergy in 2007, with discussion of the implications for reader ministry, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1764517>
- Leslie Francis, Owen Edwards, and Tania ap Siôn, ‘Applying Psychological Type and Psychological Temperament Theory to the Congregations at Cathedral Carol Services’ (pp. 412–24): comparison of 193 attenders at Christmas carol services at Bangor cathedral in 2013 with the normative profile of congregations at Anglican Sunday services in England and Wales, identifying significant psychological divergence between them, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1764516>

Reminder: most articles in academic journals are still not open access and a personal or institutional subscription, or one-time payment, may be required to read or download them:

Recent articles in academic journals: miscellaneous

- Stuart Fox, Esther Muddiman, Jennifer Hampton, Ekaterina Kolpinskaya, and Ceryn Evans, ‘Capitalising on Faith? An Intergenerational Study of Social and Religious Capital among Baby Boomers and Millennials in Britain’, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4, July 2021, pp. 862–80: analysis of data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study, concluding that ‘while lower levels of religious capital are contributing to lower levels of social capital among Millennials, religious activity is also a more effective source of social capital for Millennials than their elders’, available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038026120946679>

- Graeme Nixon, David Smith, and Jo Fraser-Pearce, 'Irreligious Educators? An Empirical Study of the Academic Qualifications, (A)theistic Positionality, and Religious Belief of Religious Education Teachers in England and Scotland', *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2021, Article 184, 21pp.: online survey of 355 secondary religious education teachers in 2017, principally recruited via social media platforms, revealing that half had no religion and the majority did not believe in god(s), available on an open access basis at:
<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/3/184>
- Humeyra Guleryuz Erken and Leslie Francis, 'Internal Consistency Reliability and Construct Validity of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith Revised among Muslim, Christian, and Religiously Unaffiliated Secondary School Students in England', *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2021, pp. 261–70: based upon questionnaires completed by 2,388 pupils aged 11–14 attending secondary schools in parts of England with significant proportions of Muslim students, and recommending the use of the shorter five-item Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith Revised as being most suitable for research among young Muslims, available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2020.1851667>
- Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, 'Wellbeing and Perceptions of Receiving Support among Church of England Clergy during the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic', *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2021, pp. 463–77: further analysis of self-selecting respondents to the 'Coronavirus, Church, and You' survey promoted in the *Church Times* in May-July 2020, revealing that the national lockdown had resulted in large increases in clergy fatigue and disengagement but also an experience of feeling closer to God, available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.1906214>
- Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, 'Has there Been Spiritual Awakening in Lockdown?', *Church Times*, 2 July 2021, p. 14; yet more analysis of self-selecting respondents to the 'Coronavirus, Church, and You' survey promoted in the *Church Times* in May-July 2020, this time of 2,280 Anglican and 1,393 Roman Catholic lay participants in online services, concluding that these committed churchgoers had experienced spiritual awakening rather than loss of faith, article freely available at:
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/2-july/comment/opinion/has-there-been-spiritual-awakening-in-lockdown>
- Sarah Holmes, 'Transforming the Resourcing of Christenings in the Anglican Diocese of Liverpool', *Practical Theology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2021, pp. 224–41: analysis of, and reflections upon, a three-year diocesan project to boost baptismal numbers, the third year being somewhat overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic, available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/1756073X.2020.1816409>