

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources  
Number 72 – September 2021

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## OPINION POLLS

### **Savanta ComRes/Culham St Gabriel's Trust poll on religious education**

Culham St Gabriel's Trust has issued a press release highlighting some of the results from an online survey of the views of 2,010 UK adults about the importance and aims of religious education in schools that it commissioned from Savanta ComRes in June 2021. The full set of 38 tables from this poll have not yet been released (although BRIN has been given a preview by Culham St Gabriel's). Background variables include, besides the usual range of demographics, religious affiliation and the frequency of praying, meditating or practising mindfulness, reading a sacred text, and attending religious services, all of which are valuable indicators in their own right, as well as for cross analysis of the main questionnaire. Across a range of statements and questions, approximately two-thirds of the public recognized the importance of a knowledge and understanding of other people's beliefs and expressed support for religious education being taught in schools. This is a rather more favourable outcome than has been obtained from studies by some other agencies, including a mini-series from YouGov in 2019–21, in which religious education has been consistently ranked as unimportant by the majority of respondents, with only drama, classics, and Latin regarded as less significant. The Culham St Gabriel's Trust press release and an infographic can be found at:

<https://www.cstg.org.uk/activities/campaigns/public-perception/>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: Savanta ComRes poll on prayer and church attendance**

Almost one-quarter (23%) of the 2,075 UK adults interviewed online by Savanta ComRes on 13–15 August 2021 claimed they were more likely to pray now than before the Covid-19 pandemic, while 19% professed to have prayed during the crisis either for Prime Minister Boris Johnson or the Government. Overall, 36% claimed they prayed (in private or in public) once a month or more, with publicity for the poll making much of the finding that self-reported prayer frequency (and church attendance) was twice as high among the under-35s than the over-55s. The survey was commissioned by Jersey Road PR on behalf of The Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer, which has recently launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise the money to erect such a wall (in reality, a 52-metre-tall arch in the West Midlands made of a million bricks, each representing an answered prayer). The sponsor will doubtless be heartened by revelations that 30% of UK adults believe that prayers will be answered, 35% that miracles (defined in the poll as events thought to be caused by a God or higher spiritual power) are possible, and the same proportion that prayer has a positive role to play in modern British life. The problem, of course, is that, as argued elsewhere (for example, in *Social Compass*, Vol. 64, No. 1, March 2017, pp. 92–112), prayer is one of those areas of religious questioning to which respondents answer in especially aspirational fashion, meaning that the percentages quoted above are likely to be inflated. Full data tables are available at:

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/prayer-and-church-attendance-survey>

At the time of writing, The Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer has not put its press release into the public domain, but an indication of its content can be seen in the BBC's online coverage, including rather optimistic comments by the pollster, at:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58681075>

### **Science versus religion: two questions from Special Eurobarometer 516**

Having left the European Union, the UK is no longer automatically part of the standard Eurobarometer polling programme, but the European Commission still seems willing to include the UK in the occasional non-recurrent survey. Thus it was that the UK, alongside the 27 member states of the European Union and 10 other non-member countries and territories, featured in Special Eurobarometer 516 on *European Citizens' Knowledge and Attitudes towards Science and Technology*. UK fieldwork was conducted by Kantar among an online sample of 1,003 adults aged 15 and over between 14 April and 11 May 2021. Two findings will especially interest BRIN readers. The first is whether 'We depend too much on science and not enough on faith', a question that has been asked on 14 previous occasions in various studies in Britain back to 1988. In the UK in 2021, just 14% agreed with this statement (23% fewer than in the 2013 Eurobarometer), while 61% disagreed. The second query was whether 'Human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals'. In the UK, 79% agreed with this proposition (up by 4% on an earlier Eurobarometer in 2005), with merely 11% deeming it false and thus embracing an anti-evolution position. National topline are available in the data annexes at:

<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>

### **Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party**

Online polling by Yonder, undertaken on behalf of Labour Uncut among 2,010 UK adults on 13–14 September 2021, has revealed that both existing Labour voters and prospective Labour voters would be more likely actually to vote for the party at the next election if former party leader Jeremy Corbyn is expelled in the event of failing to apologize for his assessment that the extent of anti-Semitism in the party had been 'dramatically over-stated'. Three-fifths of prospective Labour voters claimed to be more likely to vote for the party if Corbyn was so expelled for not apologizing and even 35% of current Labour voters. Full results have not yet been released, but a blog was posted to the Labour Uncut website on 19 September 2021 at:

<http://www.labour-uncut.co.uk>

### **Online safety: public attitudes to anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial posts and comments**

In connection with a short report, *Free Speech for All*, about the sorts of posts and comments that should be permitted on social media, Hope Not Hate commissioned Focaldata to undertake an online survey of 1,512 UK adults on 20–21 July 2021. Of these, 85% were opposed to Holocaust denial posts and comments being allowed on social media and 84% to anti-Semitic posts and comments, with just 8% in favour in each case. The report is available at:

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Free-Speech-For-All-2021-08-FINAL.pdf>

### **Scottish views on increased immigration from Muslim-majority countries**

Increased immigration from Muslim-majority countries for the next five years is viewed as positive for Scotland by only 18% of 2,003 Scottish adults interviewed online by Panelbase on behalf of the *Sunday Times*, Scotland on 6–10 September 2021. The plurality (44%, peaking at 67% of Conservative voters) regarded it negatively, while 38% were undecided on the matter. The negative scores for other forms of increased immigration were somewhat lower: 22% in the case of overseas seasonal workers on temporary visas, 30% for immigrants from the United States, and 34% from the European Union. Breaks by demographics are available at:

<https://www.drg.global/wp-content/uploads/Sunday-Times-tables-for-publication-100921.pdf>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Coronavirus chronicles: the impact of the pandemic on English Anglican cathedrals**

A 60-page booklet by Ecorys on *The Economic and Social Impact of England's Cathedrals: A Report to the Association of English Cathedrals* was originally conceived as an update, for 2019, to the previous assessments of the socio-economic impact of the 42 Church of England cathedrals that were conducted in 2004 and 2014. However, Covid-19 intervened, and the survey questionnaire (pp. 43–60) completed by the cathedrals in November 2020 was extended to encompass the pandemic's effects on their lives. The answers to the relevant questions are written up in a separate section of the report (pp. 35–40) on the impact of Covid-19. Although the pandemic presented opportunities to reach people in new ways, coronavirus restrictions resulted in dramatic falls in income from worshippers, visitors, and other users of cathedral facilities. The report is available at:

<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Economic-Social-Impacts-of-Englands-Cathedrals-2019.pdf>

As part of the same study, there are also case studies of Gloucester, Leicester, Liverpool, Rochester, St Edmundsbury, and Winchester cathedrals at:

<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Economic-Social-Impacts-of-Englands-Cathedrals-Case-Studies-2019.pdf>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: Quaker statistics for year-ending 31 December 2020**

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has recently published its customary annual tabular statement of *Patterns of Membership*. As at 31 December 2020, there were 12,125 members (3.0% fewer than in the pre-pandemic year of 2019) and 8,066 non-member attenders (down by 2.2%). The full analysis, including details of incomings and outgoings, is available at:

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/tabular-statement2021>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: the Jewish experience of Covid-19**

An informal survey of synagogues by the *Jewish Chronicle* (24 September 2021, p. 26) has revealed significantly higher in-person attendances at the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, although the numbers present have not recovered to pre-pandemic (2019) levels. Many Jews apparently remain reluctant or unable to attend synagogue, and, to meet their needs, online festival services and study sessions were widely on offer. Indeed, one London Reform synagogue is quoted as reporting twice as many people attending online festival services as came in person. The article can be read at:

<https://www.thejc.com/community/community-news/yomtov-shul-attendances-rise-but-not-to-pre-covid-levels-1.520705>

According to a separate article in the online edition of the *Jewish News*, Liverpool's Old Hebrew synagogue registered only half of the 2019 attendances for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in 2021, with Sabbath congregations currently very sparse. Accordingly, the synagogue is suspending all services with effect from 28 September 2021 and until further notice. See:

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/liverpool-shul-suspends-all-services-due-to-low-turnout/>

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 latest figures of deaths to be released were 907 on 28 July, 915 on 13 August, 920 on 3 September, 925 on 10 September, and 927 on 17 and 24 September 2021.

### **National Secular Society's new tool against faith schools: the local authority scorecard**

As a new tool in its continuing campaign against faith schools, the National Secular Society has published its 2021 local authority scorecard. For each authority, and differentiating between primary and secondary phases, the scorecard seeks to illustrate quantitatively how 'faith schools restrict families' choice and access to a secular education across England'. The scorecard can be downloaded as an Excel file at:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/faith-schools/choicedelusion.html>

### **Centre for Muslim Policy Research paper on animal slaughter without pre-stunning**

The Centre for Muslim Policy Research has published a 12-page briefing document to inform the ongoing public debate about the ethics of slaughtering animals without pre-stunning, a practice that is permitted by law to accommodate the dietary habits of Jewish and Muslim communities. In respect of Muslims, *To Stun or Not to Stun: Why Current Law is Right to Allow an Exception to Stunning Animals Prior to Slaughter for Religious Reasons* presents two empirically-based arguments for the status quo. First, the prohibition of slaughter without pre-stunning would have a negative economic impact on the UK meat industry since 'The UK halal market is worth approximately [£]4.5 billion and is expected to grow 5% annually'. Second, it would have a 'drastic lifestyle impact' on British Muslims who 'consume up to 8 times more meat and poultry than their non-Muslim counterparts', 70% of halal meat consumers preferring meat from animals that have not been stunned. The document can be found at:

<https://cmpr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/202109-CMPR-Briefing-Document-To-stun-or-not-to-stun.pdf>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

**Coronavirus chronicles: final report of British Ritual Innovation under Covid-19 project**

Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Chester have published the final report on their AHRC-funded BRIC-19 project, undertaken in 2020–21: Joshua Edelman, Alana Vincent, Paulina Kolata, and Eleanor O’Keeffe, *British Ritual Innovation under Covid-19*. A key element of the research was an online survey, from September 2020 to May 2021, of a self-selecting sample (mainly recruited via the snowballing method) of 604 religious leaders and congregants, including some non-Christians and humanists, about their experiences of rituals (regular worship, life-cycle events, and festivals) both before and during the pandemic. A summary of the findings from this survey will be found on pp. 13–27 of the report. There are also accounts of fifteen mainly qualitative case studies (pp. 29–83) and of outputs from an action research group (pp. 85–111). While acknowledging ‘important positive developments and adaptations which will strengthen British religious life in the long term’, as well as ‘a tremendous appetite for religious ritual online’, the authors conclude that ‘for most people, the move to online ritual has been one of loss, not gain ... By almost every metric, the experience of pandemic rituals have been worse than those that came before them’ (p. 113). The report is available via the link in the project press release at:

<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/story/14445/>

**Coronavirus chronicles: the state of Anglican clergy morale one year into the pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on Anglican clergy morale, according to the empirical theologians Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, ‘Counting the Cost of Pandemic Ministry’, *Church Times*, 20 August 2021, p. 10. In this, their first report on the ‘Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey’ launched on 22 January 2021, they examine the responses from a self-selecting sub-sample of 413 Anglican clergy engaged in full-time parochial ministry in England. Applying the theory of balanced affect, developed by Norman Bradburn, Francis and Village demonstrate that, among this group, the increases in negative affect attributable to Covid-19 greatly outweighed any increases in positive affect. This finding is then elaborated through a series of questions asking respondents how well they had coped during the Covid-19 pandemic, 46% reporting a deterioration in their mental health, 36% in physical health, and 26% in spiritual health. The article is freely available at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/20-august/comment/opinion/counting-the-cost-of-pandemic-ministry>

**Coronavirus chronicles: newspaper coverage of Muslims during the Covid-19 pandemic**

The dominant post-9/11 negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the traditional media was not seriously disturbed during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to an analysis of 219 articles referencing Muslims and Islam published in four British newspapers (*The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Mirror*) between 30 March and 30 April 2020, notwithstanding the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Muslims and the contribution of Muslim health workers to combating coronavirus. ‘Disrupting or Reconfiguring Racist Narratives about Muslims? The Representation of British Muslims during the Covid Crisis’, by Elizabeth Poole and Milly Williamson, is available as an 18-page open access article in *Journalism*, 2021, at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14648849211030129>

### Other recent academic publications

- Elaine Howard Ecklund and David Johnson, *Varieties of Atheism in Science*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021, viii + 216 pp., ISBN: 9780197539163, £16.99; hardback; profile of the 1,293 US and UK atheist scientists (biologists and physicists) who featured in the broader ‘Religion among Scientists in International Context’ study, revealing ‘a vast gulf between the rhetoric of New Atheism in the public sphere and the reality of atheism in science’:  
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/varieties-of-atheism-in-science-9780197539163?cc=gb&lang=en>
- Alison Scott-Baumann, Mathew Guest, Shurruq Naguib, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, and Aisha Phoenix, *Islam on Campus: Contested Identities and the Cultures of Higher Education in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, 288 pp., ISBN: 9780192844675, £25.00, paperback; ‘based upon the largest data set yet collected about modern British Muslims and Islam on campus’, this was first published in hardback in 2020 and is now released in paperback:  
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/islam-on-campus-9780192844675?lang=en&cc=gb>
- Bethan Juliet Oake, ‘The Relationship between Holistic Practice and “Spiritual but not Religious” Identity in the UK’, *Secularism and Nonreligion*, Vol. 10, No. 9, 2021, pp. 1–14; analysis of an online survey in March–April 2020 of a self-selecting sample of 100 UK-based holistic practitioners, revealing little difference between SBNRs and other participants in their understanding and experience of spirituality through their holistic practice:  
<https://www.secularismandnonreligion.org/articles/10.5334/snr.150/>
- Otto Simonsson, Stephen Fisher, and Maryanne Martin, ‘Awareness and Experience of Mindfulness in Britain’, *Sociological Research Online*, 27 December 2020, 20 pp.; based upon an online survey of 1,013 adults by Deltapoll on 26–27 November 2018, revealing that 15% had learned to practice mindfulness, albeit not many maintained a regular practice, the most engaged being more likely to be found among the young and middle-aged but otherwise not concentrated in any particular groups:  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1360780420980761>
- ‘Improving Teachers’ Subject Knowledge of the Holocaust’, press release from the Centre for Holocaust Education at University College London, containing initial data from its survey of the knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust among 964 English secondary school teachers in 2019–20 who had taught the topic during the previous three years; comparisons are made with an analogous survey in 2009, showing improvement over the decade in subject knowledge of the Holocaust among those teaching it (mainly attributable to participation in CPD) but also noting enduring misconceptions and historical inaccuracies:  
<https://holocausteducation.org.uk/research/improving-teachers-subject-knowledge-of-the-holocaust/>