

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Self-reported religious behaviour: Savanta ComRes poll for the Church of England

On behalf of the Church of England, Savanta ComRes has undertaken an investigation into the self-reported frequency of three religious practices, 2,073 adults in the United Kingdom being interviewed online on 1–3 July 2022. Monthly or more attendance at religious services, either in person or online, and excluding for rites of passage only, was claimed by 16% of respondents, with 49% never participating in such collective acts of worship. The same proportion reported reading a religious text (such as the Bible) monthly or more, including 5% daily, but 59% never read one at all. More than one-quarter (28%) claimed to pray (the term being undefined), either on their own or with other people, once a month or more (including 13% daily), 49% never praying. In its accompanying press release (28 August 2022), the Church of England was struck by the comparatively higher incidence of prayer among younger cohorts, which it juxtaposed with the appeal to them of mindfulness and meditation. However, as already noted by BRIN (*Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 73, October 2021), Savanta ComRes has previously returned a greater frequency of prayer and attendance at religious services relative to YouGov polls, both in general and for young people; on that occasion, Savanta ComRes failed to respond to BRIN's invitation to advance a possible explanation for this divergence. More broadly, as we have observed numerous times, many polls on self-reported religious behaviour seem to elicit aspirational replies from their interviewees. The full data tables for this latest study, with breaks by religious affiliation as well as by standard demographics, can be found at:

- <https://comresglobal.com/polls/church-of-england-polling-on-prayer/>

By way of postscript, it should be noted that Humanists UK issued a press release on 30 August 2022, suggesting there were 'unexplained questions' concerning the correctness of this poll.

Latest YouGov trackers on perceived influence of religion and beliefs about god(s)

In early August 2022, YouGov posted updates to two of its religion-related tracker polls, conducted among samples of approximately 2,000 adults twice a year in Great Britain. Asked about the perceived influence of religion as a whole on the world, the majority (57%) replied that it has a negative influence against 19% saying it has a positive one (the remaining 24% being undecided or preferring not to say). Full data (with breaks by demographics) and trends are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/trackers/the-influence-of-religion-on-the-world-according-to-brits>

Regarding their beliefs, 26% believed there is a God or gods, 24% did not believe in God/gods but did believe in some sort of spiritual greater power, 39% believed neither in God/gods nor in a spiritual greater power, while 11% did not know what to think. Full data (with demographics) and trends are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/trackers/brits-beliefs-about-gods>

Trustworthiness of clergy and priests: public perceptions in Britain and worldwide

Doctors (66%), scientists (62%), and teachers (59%) are considered the most trustworthy professions in Britain, according to the Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index, 2022 (fielded among online samples of the adult populations of 28 countries between 27 May and 10 June 2022). Clergy and priests were ranked ninth of eighteen professions in Britain, 33% of the 1,001 respondents deeming them trustworthy, 29% untrustworthy, with 38% neutral or undecided. The net positive score of 4% saw clergy and priests in Britain drop to eleventh in this presentation of the rankings. Globally, the average trustworthiness rating for clergy and priests was only 26% (40% saying untrustworthy), with the highest figure in Denmark (46%). Topline results are available at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/doctors-and-scientists-are-seen-worlds-most-trustworthy-professions>

Attitudes towards religious groups in contemporary England: HOPE Not Hate report

As one might expect, HOPE Not Hate's latest survey of self-identity and community cohesion in England briefly touched on attitudes towards religious groups, although readers will need to work hard to extract the relevant data from Rosie Carter and Nick Lowles, *Fear and Hope, 2022: A Realignment of Identity Politics*, since, in their enthusiasm for segmentation and index analyses, the authors have forgotten to include a succinct listing of topline results. Of five religious groups, Muslims were still thought to be most likely to create problems in the United Kingdom, while 30% agreed that Islam generally poses a threat to the British way of life and 29% that Islamist terrorists reflect a widespread hostility to Britain among the Muslim community. The conspiracy theory that parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims was also judged to be true by 34% (and false by 27%). The conspiracy theory that Jewish people have an unhealthy control over the world's banking system, an age-old trope, is still thought to be true by 20% of the English population, although 42% considered it false. The findings mainly derive from an online poll of 3,000 adults in England conducted by Stack Data Strategy on 8–14 October 2021. HOPE Not Hate's report is available at:

- <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Fear-HOPE-2022-FINAL-1.pdf>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Methods of estimating the Roman Catholic population of England and Wales

The Pastoral Research Centre has been dusting down some of its unfinished research files on English and Welsh Catholicism during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and bringing them to a state of completion. The latest project to be processed is Anthony Spencer, *Estimating the Catholic Population of England and Wales: Eight Methods*. Despite its historical nature, this paper remains of some contemporary interest, given that (a) estimated baptised population has been the traditional constituency metric for the Catholic Church, and (b) publication of national figures (aggregated from returns made by parish priests) has been discontinued, on grounds of unreliability, by both the *Catholic Directory* and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for some years. Using one of the alternative methods outlined, the 18-page report features detailed tables of Catholic population for most years between 1947 and 1980; it is available from Russell-Spencer, Stone House, Hele, Taunton, Somerset, TA4 1AJ (for £9.45 plus postage and packing).

Anti-Semitic incidents in the United Kingdom, January-June 2022

The Community Security Trust (CST) logged 786 anti-Semitic incidents between January and June 2022, which was 43% lower than for the equivalent period in 2021, albeit still the joint-fifth highest figure for January-June ever recorded by the CST. This decline reflected the absence of a distinct anti-Semitic ‘trigger event’ (such as an escalation in conflict between Israel and the Palestinians), which had caused such a spike in 2021. Of the 786 incidents, 638 were categorized as offline and 148 as online. Four-fifths involved abusive behaviour, although 9% took the form of assaults, and 6% were expressed as threats. There is a comprehensive 32-page report by the CST at:

- <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/3/b/Incidents%20Report%20Jan-Jun%202022.1659023930.pdf>

Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and the use of the ‘Y word’

Tottenham Hotspur Football Club’s campaign to encourage its fans to ‘move on’ from the use of the ‘Y word’ (*vid*, which some consider to have anti-Semitic overtones), when singing or chanting for their team in the stadium, appears to be making slow progress. This is according to the eighth annual survey of fans undertaken by the Tottenham Hotspur Supporters’ Trust, achieving 6,001 replies. In particular, ‘Jewish respondents are amongst the highest demographic to regularly use the chant and the demographic where the Club’s campaign has prompted the biggest uplift in use.’ As many as 52% of fans who identified as Jewish disagreed that the time had come to ‘move on’ from using the ‘Y word’ in relation to Spurs. Historically, the Club has disproportionately attracted support from the local Jewish community. For fuller analysis, see p. 13 of the report on the survey of fans at:

- https://www.thstofficial.com/uploads/9/2/2/6/92268578/thst_annual_fans_survey_2022.pdf

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Non-stun slaughter of farm animals: latest Food Standards Agency data

Publication of the *Results of the 2022 FSA Slaughter Sector Survey in England and Wales*, the first full study by the Food Standards Agency since 2018, and based on a week’s data for 7–13 March 2022, seems bound to raise fresh questions about the non-stun exemption on religious grounds with regard to the slaughter of farm animals. The exemption benefits Muslims, whose halal meat is produced by a combination of stun and non-stun methods, and the Jews, whose kosher meat is produced solely by non-stun shechita methods. A very detailed statistical picture of the extent of non-stun methods can be found in the report. One particular finding already to have attracted negative comment is the revelation that the carcasses of 51% of cows and 43% of sheep slaughtered by shechita methods were ‘rejected as not meeting religious requirements but fit for wider consumption’. The report is available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-animals-slaughter-sector-survey-2022>

Public examination results in Religious Studies, June 2022: A Levels and GCSEs

The Joint Council for Qualifications has released provisional results from the June 2022 round of public examinations for school students. This is the first year since 2019 that students have sat actual examinations, grades during the pandemic (2020 and 2021) being assigned by teachers and thus not comparable with those for 2022. We shall therefore concentrate on reporting the overall number of entries for Religious Studies (RS) in England and Wales (the examination regime is different in Scotland). At A Level, there were 16,198 entries for RS, a

decline of 2.7% on 2021, even though entries for all subjects rose by 3.0%, meaning that RS lost market share. Additionally, 2,085 students sat for AS Level RS across England and Wales, substantially (14.8%) less than in 2021, a fall that was almost entirely attributable to the 29.0% reduction in Wales. For the GCSE Full Course in RS, the number of entrants was stable, at 231,730, a small increase in England offsetting the decrease in Wales. For the GCSE Short Course in RS, 7.2% more students in England and Wales sat the examination in 2022 than in 2021, but this is merely a blip in the long-term extinction of the qualification, in line with the progressive disappearance of GCSE Short Courses more generally. All the 2022 results can be found at:

- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Liverpool Cathedral's online music outreach in lockdown

The benefits of participation in online music activities during the Covid-19 pandemic are highlighted in a recent 57-page research report from Liverpool John Moores University: Simone Krüger Bridge, *The Digital Turn: Exploring the Social Value of Liverpool Cathedral's Online Music Outreach Programme during the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Insights into the impact of the Cathedral School of Music's coronavirus outreach were gathered by a combination of: observations of online rehearsals/classes; an online questionnaire; and qualitative interviews with adults and parents of participating children. A few statistics are cited but based on small samples. The report is available at:

- <http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/17200/>

Scottish Catholics not so distinctive from their English and Welsh counterparts

Michael Rosie draws upon the dataset for the 'Catholics in Britain Survey, 2019', undertaken by Savanta ComRes among an online sample of 1,832 self-identifying Catholics on behalf of Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant, to help answer the question: 'Scotland's Catholics, a Distinctive Community?', *Scottish Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 3, August 2022, pp. 366–81. Having examined a range of demographic, religious, moral, and life choice indicators, Rosie reports: 'The overarching finding here is that Scotland's Catholics are remarkably similar to their southern co-religionists and, wherever there do seem to be statistically significant differences, these often operate across a North-South divide rather than a national one between Scotland and England.' The article is available at:

- <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/10.3366/scot.2022.0422>

Separatist Presbyterianism in Scotland

An overview of 'Separatist Presbyterianism in 20th Century Scotland' is given by Angus Morrison in *Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 7, July 2022, article 571, 14pp. The origins and development of six separatist denominations are detailed, with estimates mostly given for their current membership (the Free Church of Scotland being the largest, with 6,000 members). The article is available on open access at:

- <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/7/571>

The History of Methodist Insurance in Britain

Of the various facets of organized religion in Britain, its finances are, perhaps, inherently among the most quantitative. Yet, religious finance is comparatively rarely the subject of scholarly endeavour. Clive Murray Norris is an exception. Having already written an acclaimed book on *The Financing of John Wesley's Methodism, c.1740–1800* (Oxford University Press,

2017), Morris has now turned his attention to *A History of Methodist Insurance in Britain* (Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, 2022, xix + 328 pp., ISBN: 9798843997908, £14.99 hardback, orders via Amazon), and including 53 tables and 28 figures. This is an anniversary volume, charting the 150-year history of the Methodist Insurance Company, but it also covers all its various forerunners, including in the non-Wesleyan branches of Methodism. Although the focus is very much on the insurance of Church property against fire and other risks, there is some discussion of other forms of Methodist insurance and provident institutions.

NEW DATASETS

United Kingdom Data Service, SN 4562: Great Britain Historical Database, Census Data, Religion Statistics, 1851 (second edition) and SN 8945: Great Britain Historical Database, Census Data, Education Statistics, 1851 (first edition)

SN 4562 is the second edition of a dataset initially made available in 2004. It comprises the checked and corrected data from the tables of religious accommodation and attendance on 30 March 1851, computerized from the contemporary published reports for England and Wales (by 624 registration districts) and Scotland (by 33 counties and 53 burghs) and islands in the British seas. However, it generally does not transcribe the extensive information contained in the notes to the tables, although they have been used to create estimates for missing values, thereby adjusting the tabulated data. For a full bibliographic description and documentation, go to:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=4562>

SN 8945 is the first edition of an equivalent dataset of checked and corrected education statistics (schools, enrolled scholars, scholars in attendance) for England and Wales and Scotland at the March 1851 census, including for religiously-provided day schools and Sunday schools. For a full bibliographic description and documentation, go to:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8945>

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

A Level examinations, Angus Morrison, anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, attendance at religious services, attitudes towards religious groups, belief in god or gods, Ben Clements, Bible, Church of England, Clive Murray Norris, Community Security Trust, conspiracy theories, coronavirus, Covid-19, Food Standards Agency, GCSE examinations, halal, Hope Not Hate, Humanists UK, influence of religion on the world, Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index, Ipsos MORI, Islam, Islamophobia, Jews, Joint Council for Qualifications, Liverpool Cathedral School of Music, Methodist Insurance Company, Michael Rosie, Muslims, Nick Lowles, online music outreach, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, prayer, reading a religious text, Religions, religious accommodation, religious census, religious prejudice, Religious Studies, Roman Catholics, Rosie Carter, Russell-Spencer, Savanta ComRes, schechita, Scotland, Scottish Affairs, Scottish Presbyterianism, Sharia law, Simone Krüger Bridge, slaughter of farm animals, Stack Data Strategy, Stephen Bullivant, Sunday schools, Tony Spencer, Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust, trustworthiness of clergy and priests, unhealthy control over world banking system, YouGov