

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources  
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## OPINION POLLS

### **Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (1926–2022): public attitudes to her funeral**

The death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September overshadowed the news in Britain for the first half of the month under review, and much of the nation was deeply saddened and affected by it. The public's response to her passing, and to the subsequent period of national mourning in advance of her state funeral on 19 September, was interpreted by some commentators as a quasi-religious or spiritual phenomenon. Indeed, Chris Cotter of the Open University went so far as to suggest, in a blog for the Religion Media Centre, that the Queen's death 'is probably going to be seen as being one of the most, if not the most, significant religion related events in the UK for a century'.

As yet, the religious and spiritual dimensions or significance of the outpouring of public grief at the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and her succession by her eldest son, now proclaimed as King Charles III, have not filtered through into published opinion polls. In fact, YouGov was the principal agency to undertake surveys into the monarchy between the Queen's death and her funeral at Westminster Abbey, followed by interment at St George's Chapel, Windsor. Ipsos MORI, which has regularly measured public attitudes to royalty in former years, chose not to release polling data on this topic during the mourning period (but has done so since).

The day of the funeral was designated a public (or bank) holiday, and this was one of the aspects that YouGov chose to investigate. In its poll on 12 September 2022, among an online sample of 3,282 adults in Britain, respondents were asked whether they felt it was a good or bad idea that the day of the late Queen's funeral had been made a bank holiday at all. Unsurprisingly, 86% considered it a good idea, while only 6% thought it a bad idea, with 8% undecided. Full breaks by demographics are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2022/09/12/7bf5e/1>

As a mark of respect for the late Queen, and in recognition of the fact that their employees might wish to watch the funeral, many shops and other venues decided not to open their doors on that day. But would it be right or wrong for public houses to be closed? YouGov put that question to a sample of 3,341 Britons on 14 September 2022. Attitudes were divided, with a plurality (44%) thinking it right for pubs to close on the day of the funeral, compared with 36% opposed to this and 20% offering no view. Full breaks by demographics are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/consumer/survey-results/daily/2022/09/14/7ed75/1>

A third YouGov poll, on 15 September 2022, quizzed 3,031 adults about their plans for spending the unexpected bank holiday. No more than a plurality (43%) replied that they would be watching the funeral or doing something else to commemorate the late Queen, with 34% treating it as a normal day off, 7% having other intentions, and 9% being undecided. The sole demographic sub-groups recording majorities planning to watch the funeral or otherwise celebrate the Queen's life were Conservatives (62%), over-65s (58%), 'leave' voters in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union (54%), and persons aged 50–64 (52%). Under-25s (58%) were especially likely to regard the extra bank holiday as a normal day off. Full breaks are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2022/09/15/e8157/1>

The YouGov data were Britain-wide. However, on 14–16 September 2022 on behalf of *The Sun on Sunday*, Deltapoll conducted an online poll of 659 adults in Scotland, a home nation where support for the monarchy has often been demonstrated as lower than in other parts of the UK. In this sample, as many as 57% of Scottish residents indicated that they expected to watch the late Queen’s funeral on television or in some other way, with 33% not expecting to watch it and 10% undecided about their plans. Among the under-35s and supporters of Scottish independence, more anticipated not watching than watching the funeral. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://deltapoll.co.uk/polls/scotland220920>

But what was the reality? Actual television viewing figures for the late Queen’s funeral on 19 September featured widely in the print and broadcast media on the following day, based upon provisional data from the Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board (BARB) and individual broadcasters, notably the BBC. According to BARB, the average audience for the funeral service in Westminster Abbey (11 am to 12.06 pm) was 26.2 million in the UK across all channels (70.6% of which was on the BBC), the peak being 29.2 million, 95% of people who were watching television at that time tuning in to the funeral. These BARB figures indicated a viewership of less than half the UK population; however, they excluded individuals watching via streaming apps or on large screens, indoors or outdoors. Separate data from the BBC suggested that 32.5 million individuals, equivalent to 52% of the UK population aged 4 and over, watched at least three consecutive minutes of BBC television, iPlayer, or Red Button coverage of the actual funeral service and related programmes on the day (coverage of events, processions, and services starting on BBC1 at 8 am and running continuously until 5 pm). Nevertheless, many commentators have made the point that, based on BARB’s statistics, the UK television audience for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral was somewhat less than that for the 1966 FIFA World Cup Final between England and West Germany, the funeral of Diana Princess of Wales in 1997, the UEFA 2020 Final between Italy and England, the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981, and the Prime Minister’s first statement on Covid-19 in 2020, among other programmes.

### **Self-reported religious behaviour: Savanta ComRes poll for the Church of England (2)**

In *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 83 (August 2022), we noted the results of the recent Savanta ComRes poll for the Church of England, expressing reservations about the aspirational nature of the responses, and at the Church’s ‘take’ on them in its official press release. The latter statement provided the basis of much media reporting of the survey, including by the *Church Times* on 2 September 2022 (p. 7). In a letter to its editor, published on 9 September 2022 (p. 14), Professor Fraser Watts (University of Lincoln), wrote to express his concern about the coverage of this study, and to suggest that ‘something has gone badly wrong with the research’, so ‘completely unbelievable’ were some of the findings, thereby running the risk of encouraging church leaders ‘to live in a fantasy world about the current missionary challenges’. The letter (to which no reply was published) can be read in full at:

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/9-september/comment/letters-to-the-editor/letters-to-the-editor>

### **Importance attached to religious and other freedoms and rights**

Deltapoll recently released the findings of a major survey on public life, conducted among an online sample of 10,320 Britons aged 18 and over between 29 April and 11 May 2022. In one question, respondents were asked to select from a list of eleven freedoms and rights the three or four which mattered most to them. The options included ‘freedom of worship and the right to follow the religion you choose’. This was selected by just 20% of interviewees, with nine other rights and freedoms ranked ahead of it, the most popular (at 50%) being ‘the right to be

treated free of charge by the National Health Service if you fall ill'. Religious freedom was valued most by Londoners (27%) and Liberal Democrats (26%). Full data are available at:

- <https://deltapoll.co.uk/polls/publiclife220609>

### **Inaugural Global Faith and Media Study**

Initial findings from the inaugural Global Faith and Media Study were presented by Dritan Nesho at the Concordia Annual Summit held in New York in September 2022. This investigation into the portrayal of faith and religion in the news media across six continents was undertaken by HarrisX, in partnership with the Radiant Foundation, and comprised two elements: online interviews between 26 August and 9 September 2022 with 9,489 adults aged 18 and over from eighteen countries, including 503 in the UK; and in-depth interviews with more than thirty English-speaking journalists. Results from the online survey were mostly cited at the aggregate (global) level, so there was little UK-specific information. However, it can be noted that 35% of the UK population was categorized as 'highly faithful/religious' (global average 56%), 18% as 'middle of the way' (12%), and 47% as 'secular' (32%). Media sources focused on faith-based news were followed, so they claimed, by only 16% of people in the UK (compared with 34% internationally). At the same time, 48% in the UK said they wanted more media coverage of complex religious issues (56% worldwide). The presentation is available at:

- <https://index.faithandmedia.com/data>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Articles in the October 2022 edition of *FutureFirst***

The October 2022 edition (No. 83) of *FutureFirst*, the bimonthly newsletter of Brierley Consultancy, includes the usual mix of longer and shorter articles based on contemporary religious and social data. Of particular interest to BRIN readers will be the articles by Rebecca Harrocks (of the Salvation Army) on 'Singleness and Church Life', exploring the relationship between household structure on the one hand and religious identification and church attendance on the other, derived from a pooled dataset of British Social Attitudes Surveys between 2015 and 2019; and by Peter Brierley on 'London's Churchgoers', updating the results of his church censuses of 2005 and 2012 with pre-Covid-19 estimates for 2020 (revealing that levels of church attendance had declined between 2012 and 2020, both relatively, from 8.8% to 8.0% of the capital's population, and absolutely, from 722,000 to 704,000). Free e-subscriptions to *FutureFirst*, as well as back issues, continue to be available from:

- <https://+www.brierleyconsultancy.com>

### **Statistics of the Scottish Episcopal Church as at 31 December 2021**

The 39th *Annual Report* of the Scottish Episcopal Church, presented to the Church's General Synod held on 9–11 June 2022, included diocesan statistics to 31 December 2021. Membership (defined as the 'number of persons of all ages belonging to the congregation') in 2021 was 24,039, 5.9% down on the 2020 figure. There were 17,132 names on the communicants' roll, a reduction of 8.6% during the year. In-person church attendance (i.e. omitting online participation in virtual services) on the Sunday next before Advent was 7,644 in 2021 but was not measured in 2020 on account of Covid-19 restrictions; in-person attendance in 2019 had been 11,782. Full data are available on pp. 63–70 of the *Annual Report* at:

- <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/39th-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>

### **180 years of Jewish population change in the UK**

In his contribution to the *Jewish Chronicle*'s 180th anniversary special edition (23 September 2022, pp. 38–40), Jonathan Boyd of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research summarized changes in the size of the UK Jewish community from the 1840s (when there were about 30,000 Jews), to the peak of 420,000 in the 1950s, followed by decline to the approximately 300,000 since the 1990s. The principal underlying causative factors in this rise and fall are clearly identified. The article is freely available online at:

- <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/growth-trend-uk-jewish-success-story-goes-on-2FBptG5JMwSHfQQjRB0wru>

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

The latest publication from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a 10-page report by David Graham and Jonathan Boyd, *Six Takeaways about Jewish Life under Lockdown*. It is based upon data from the summer 2021 wave of the JPR's self-selecting Jewish population panel. Respondents comprised 4,152 self-identifying Jews aged 16 and over, interviewed online on 23 July–1 September 2021. Among the effects of the pandemic on UK Jewry were the loss of much of the in-person social interaction and assembly that had been central to Jewish religious and communal life, and the proliferation of online Jewish religious and secular content, which sometimes challenged existing strict rules about the use of technology. However, notwithstanding the identification of six trends, the authors conclude that 'almost three years since the pandemic started, it is still too early to see what the lasting impact ... on Jewish life will ultimately look like'. The report can be downloaded from:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=18133>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **The future of religion in Britain – according to Linda Woodhead**

'The continuing decline of Christianity in Britain, the resurgence of fundamentalism, the rise of non-religion, the emergence of British Islam, and a flourishing interest in "magic" – these are the predictions for the future of religion in Britain, according to Professor Linda Woodhead. Speaking at the Religion Media Centre annual lecture, the Professor gave the context to the 2021 census results on religion, which are due to be published in October or November this year. She said the census is expected to show a fall in those identifying as Christian in England and Wales, from 72 per cent in 2001, to 59 per cent in 2011, to perhaps below 50 per cent this time. Secondly, a steady rise in the number identifying as "none", having no religion, from 15 per cent in 2001, to 25 per cent in 2011, with predictions this could rise to 33 per cent this time. And thirdly, a steady rise in the number of those identifying as Muslim, from 3 per cent in 2001 to 5 per cent in 2011, to perhaps 8 per cent this time. At the lecture at St Bride's Fleet Street, she offered four predictions for the future of religion in the coming decades, building on work from the 70s and 80s which had proved remarkably prescient ... The trends identified are: fundamentalism, winning the battle, but losing the war; Muslims finding their place, or Islam finding its place; magic and the decline of religion; and the fire sale of the churches and the growth of non-religion.' This is an extract from Ruth Peacock's report of the lecture at:

- <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/the-future-of-religion-in-britain/>

### **Sex and religiosity in Great Britain in the early 2010s**

'Women and men who saw religion as more important in their lives reported having less sex on average ... At the same time, religiosity was linked with overall higher levels of sex life satisfaction'. This is the headline finding, albeit with qualifications, of one of the latest articles

published in *Journal of Sex Research*: Nitza Peri-Rotem and Vegard Skirbekk, ‘Religiosity, Sex Frequency, and Sexual Satisfaction in Britain: Evidence from the Third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal)’. Natsal-3 was undertaken in 2010–12 among a stratified probability sample of 15,162 men and women, representative of the population of Britain aged 16–74 (although only a sub-sample of 10,683 persons aged 18–59 is analysed in this paper), and achieved a response rate of 58%. The article, together with other underpinning documentation, is available on an open access basis at:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00224499.2022.2108745>

### **Coronavirus chronicles: lay churchgoers’ attitudes towards online Holy Communion**

The latest article by Andrew Village and Leslie Francis from their ‘Covid-19 and Church 21 Survey’ investigated ‘Lockdown Communion: Voices from the Pews’, *Church Times*, 2 September 2022, pp. 10, 12. It is based upon the responses of an entirely self-selecting sample of 2,415 active lay people from a range of Christian denominations, albeit disproportionately Anglican, to nine statements about Holy Communion. Although a majority favoured the principle of online Communion during pandemic conditions, there was some divergence of views on specifics. When opinions were split, it was striking that those of Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical Anglicans tended to align more closely with those beyond the Church of England than with each other. The article is available at:

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/2-september/comment/opinion/lockdown-communion-voices-from-the-pews>

## NEW DATASETS

### **UK Data Service, SN 9005: British Social Attitudes Survey, 2020**

The British Social Attitudes Survey has been conducted annually, except for two years, since 1983, and hitherto always by means of face-to-face interviews, supplemented by self-completion questionnaire. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a switch to online and telephone interviewing in 2020, with a consequential substantial reduction in the household response rate (estimated at 14%), as well as a shortening of the main questionnaire. However, the traditional religion questions (on self-assigned religious affiliation and self-reported attendance at religious services) were retained. The sample comprised 3,964 adults aged 18 and over living in private households in Britain, who were interviewed by NatCen Social Research between 30 October and 7 December 2020. For a description of the dataset, see the catalogue entry at:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study/?id=9005>

### **UK Data Service, SN 9006: Annual Population Survey, Three-Year Pooled Dataset, January 2019-December 2021**

The Annual Population Survey (APS) is compiled by the Office for National Statistics in partnership with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. It incorporates a sub-set of key variables from the several Labour Force Surveys and is designed to be sufficiently robust and large-scale to produce reliable estimates at local authority level. This three-year merged dataset for 2019–21 is based on 430,347 face-to-face and telephone interviews with adults in private households and young persons living away from the parental home. A question on religious affiliation is included: ‘What is your religion?’ in Britain and ‘What is your religious denomination?’ in Northern Ireland. Religious correlates can thus be

calculated for the other core social indicators included in the APS. A catalogue description of the dataset is available at:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study/?id=9006>

APPENDIX  
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Village, Annual Population Survey, bank holiday, BBC, Brierley Consultancy, British Social Attitudes Survey, Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, church attendance, Church of England, Church Times, coronavirus, Covid-19, Covid-19 and Church 21 Survey, David Graham, Deltapoll, Fraser Watts, freedoms and rights, funeral, FutureFirst, Global Faith and Media Study, HarrisX, Holy Communion, household structure, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Jewish Chronicle, Jews, Jonathan Boyd, Journal of Sex Research, Leslie Francis, Linda Woodhead, London, NatCen Social Research, National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, Nitza Peri-Rotem, Office for National Statistics, Peter Brierley, public houses, Queen Elizabeth II, Radiant Foundation, Rebecca Harrocks, religion in news media, Religion Media Centre, religious affiliation, religious freedom, Ruth Peacock, Savanta ComRes, Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, sex, Sun on Sunday, UK Data Service, Vegard Skirbekk, YouGov