

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLL

Importance of teaching Religious Studies at secondary school

Almost three-fifths (58%) of British adults no longer consider it important that Religious Studies is taught in secondary schools, 31% saying it is not very important and 27% not at all important. The proportion is highest among men (65%). Only 10% of the whole population believe it very important to teach the subject, rising to 17% in London, with an additional 27% regarding it as quite important and 5% undecided. Online fieldwork for the study was conducted by YouGov on 1–3 October 2022 with 1,791 respondents. Full data are available at:

- https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/fpyiw3xdad/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation8_sr_2.pdf

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Hate crimes in England and Wales, 2021–22

According to the Home Office, there were 155,841 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales during the year ending March 2022, of which 8,730 (5.6%) were categorized as relating to religion or belief (by far the largest proportion of hate crimes that year, 70.5%, concerned race). Both the overall total of hate crimes, and the number in each of the five strands, rose significantly between 2020–21 and 2021–22 (by 25.6% overall and by 36.8% for religion alone). However, the lower incidence and reporting of hate crimes in 2020–21 were undoubtedly influenced by the fact that it was a pandemic year throughout, with several ‘lockdowns’. If the 2021–22 religion figure is compared with that for 2017–18 (8,339) or 2018–19 (8,559), it will be seen that the overall picture is flatter (exact statistics for 2019–20 are not available, as they were not returned by one major authority, Greater Manchester Police). Of course, this is not to suggest there are any grounds for complacency, only that the data should be kept in perspective and that perhaps they do not warrant some of the media coverage and community responses this Home Office release has attracted. In 2021–22, the perceived religion of the victims of religious hate crimes were: Muslims (40.2%), Jews (22.3%), Christians (8.1%), other religions or non-religion (12.9%), and unknown (16.6%). This relative distribution is similar to the pattern for earlier years. Full commentary and data are at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crimes-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>

Race Disparity Unit’s consultation on standards for ethnicity data

In its response to the consultation (now closed) on the Race Disparity Unit’s draft standards for ethnicity data, the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) made the following observation with regard to data collection: ‘We would like to see stronger guidance about collecting data on religion. The current wording is “You should include national identity and religion questions to improve the acceptability of the ethnicity question”. However there are significant groups in Britain (for example Sikhs and Jews), who cannot be identified within the current ethnicity classification. Only by collecting both ethnicity and religion can they be identified and statistics compiled for them. We would welcome a stronger guidance on this.’ On data reporting, the

RSS similarly commented: ‘The Standards correctly emphasises the importance of ethnicity data and states that reporting it should be a priority. We would suggest adding a related point on reporting data on religion. There are sources, such as the Crime Survey of England and Wales, where religion is collected, but not always analysed and reported, due to relatively small sample numbers. In this case pooling together three years of data can enable further reliable insights to be produced, showing, for example, differences of experience of crime and fear of crime among Sikhs and Jews. This type of analysis should be carried out routinely, not just under special requests. Under the ethnicity classification, Sikhs are unidentifiable within the much larger Indian category, and Jews within the white category.’ The RSS response is at:

- <https://rss.org.uk/news-publication/news-publications/2022/general-news/rss-responds-to-consultation-on-standards-for-ethn/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Catholics in Contemporary Britain: new sociological data and insights

Catholics in Contemporary Britain: Faith, Society, Politics, by Ben Clements and Stephen Bullivant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, ISBN: 978-0-19-285660-9, viii + 222 pp., £75, hardback), represents a significant milestone in the social scientific study of Roman Catholics in Britain. Not since the pioneering investigation by Michael Hornsby-Smith in 1978–79 has there been such a large academically rigorous nationwide survey of Catholics in Britain. The volume is principally based upon online interviews with a representative sample of 1,823 self-identifying Catholics undertaken for the authors, with funding from the AHRC, by Savanta ComRes between 21 October and 7 November 2019. However, this static snapshot of Catholic opinions and practices is contextualized by a wide range of earlier primary and secondary sources (American as well as British), which provide a degree of longitudinal perspective, notably in the discussion of Catholic political behaviour over time. Other datasets deployed include the British Social Attitudes Surveys, which are important for quantifying the scale of Catholic disaffiliation, leading to an interesting (albeit cursory) methodological reflection about how the exclusion from the research of cradle Catholics who no longer self-identified as such in 2019 may have skewed the outcomes (through ‘survivorship bias’).

The six substantive chapters skilfully examine: the demography of contemporary Catholicism; patterns of religious behaving and belonging; patterns of religious believing; attitudes to social morality issues; party support and voting behaviour; and attitudes to the institutional Church (the Pope, bishops, and Catholic schools). These are logically structured and tightly argued – and exceptionally data rich (with 47 figures and 28 tables, many featuring disaggregations by both secular demographic and/or religious variables). Each chapter helpfully has its own summary, but there is no overarching conclusion to the book, for example, situating the Catholic Church within the broader landscape of a secularizing Britain (although there is a not wholly substantiated claim that ‘the “modal British churchgoer” is now a Roman Catholic. Before long, it is feasible that the “modal British Christian” will be too’). In an effort to bring the story right up to date, an epilogue briefly addresses the possible long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Britain’s Catholics and their Church. Understandably, the authors cannot entirely answer this question, but they note the likely value of their own study as a benchmark for comparison with any eventual post-Covid survey of British Catholicism. The text of the questionnaire is reproduced in one of the two appendices, while the full dataset is available for secondary analysis via the UK Data Service as SN 855354. The book’s webpage is at:

- <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/catholics-in-contemporary-britain-9780192856609>

Baby boomers as architects of religious change

The principal focus of Abby Day's *Why Baby Boomers Turned from Religion: Shaping Belief and Belonging, 1945–2021* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, ISBN: 978–0–19–286668–4, x + 244 pp., £70, hardback) is the 'non-religious lives of ex-religious Boomers, baptised and confirmed as Anglicans before rejecting religion, and on their influence on subsequent generations of Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z'. According to Day, baby boomers, the generation of post-Second World War babies who came of age in the 1960s (and who are said to have been promoters of many of the 'revolutionary' societal changes during that decade), were less religious than their parents (the church-attending Generation A investigated in one of Day's previous books, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen*) and raised even less religious children, born in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Data gathering was primarily qualitative, by means of online interviews between April 2020 and August 2021 with 55 ex-Anglican Boomers living in the UK and Canada and matching four combined criteria (the viability of which were tested in a national YouGov poll in the UK), and recruited through personal and professional networks and by snowballing techniques. This oral history component was supplemented by archival and textual research, and by secondary data comparative analyses. The four research questions addressed were: 'How and why did ex-religious Boomers' religious beliefs and practices change over time?'; 'What, if any, alternative forms of moral, meaning-making, spiritual, and community values are believed in and practised by the non-religious Boomers?'; 'How and why did ex-religious Boomers decide to raise their own children in non-religious ways and what beliefs and practices were transmitted instead to the next generations?'; and 'What academic theories need to be generated, amended, or challenged?' The interviews have certainly yielded a rich resource of information and insights about the process of denominational disaffiliation and its aftermath, and the eleven chapters are woven together into a fascinating story. Nevertheless, as with most oral history projects, the relative smallness of the numbers, and the potential unrepresentativeness of the sample, do somewhat inhibit the ability to make well-anchored generalizations, even when the testimonies are wrapped around by contextualizing literature. The book's webpage is at:

- <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/why-baby-boomers-turned-from-religion-9780192866684>

The statistical movement in Victorian Britain

Lawrence Goldman's *Victorians and Numbers: Statistics and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, ISBN: 978–0–19–284774–4, lxiii + 371 pp., £35, hardback) is an authoritative guide to the Victorian 'statistical movement' and to the organizations and individuals that helped to shape it. However, apart from a reference to the 1851 religious census, relatively little is said about the evolution of religious statistics during this century. The book's webpage is at:

- <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/victorians-and-numbers-9780192847744>

Coronavirus chronicles: psychological wellbeing of Church of England clergy and laity

In the current issue of *Pastoral Psychology* (Vol. 71, No. 5, October 2022, pp. 653–66), Andrew Village and Leslie Francis ask 'How Did the Psychological Well-Being of Church of England Clergy and Laity Change from the First to the Third National Covid-19 Lockdowns?' The question is answered by reference to two self-selecting online samples of Anglicans in England who responded to the 'Coronavirus, Church, and You' survey in 2020 (n= 792 stipendiary parochial clergy and 2,815 laity) and the 'Covid-19 and Church-21' survey in 2021 (n= 401 clergy and 1,027 laity). Wellbeing was measured by 'The Index of Affect Balance Change' (TIBACH). 'Both clergy and lay people showed increased proportions reporting lower positive affect and increased proportions reporting higher negative affect in the second survey,

suggesting psychological well-being had continued to deteriorate as lockdowns persisted.’ The change was judged to be ‘highly statistically significant’ in each case. ‘There was no evidence to suggest that coping might have improved with greater experience of lockdowns, nor that the church as a whole had learnt how to mitigate the effects of lockdown on the clergy or laity.’ The article is available at:

- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11089-022-01017-z>

NEW DATASET

UK Data Service, SN 9011: National Survey for Wales, 2021-2022

The National Survey for Wales (NSW) is conducted by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Welsh Government and its sponsored bodies. Between April 2021 and March 2022, 12,580 adults aged 16 and over living in private households in Wales were interviewed by telephone, with a supplementary online survey trial element for 2,000 of the participants taking place from July 2021 to January 2022. The NSW now subsumes topics from five predecessor surveys, including local area and environment, NHS and social care, internet and media, children and education, housing, democracy and government, sport and recreation, wellbeing and finances, culture and Welsh language, and population health. Answers for these can be analysed by the single question on religion (‘What is your religion?’). A catalogue description of the dataset is available at:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9011>

APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Abby Day, Andrew Village, Anglicans, baby boomers, Ben Clements, Canada, Church of England, coronavirus, Coronavirus Church and You, Covid-19, Covid-19 and Church-21, hate crimes, Home Office, Index of Affect Balance Change, Jews, Lawrence Goldman, Leslie Francis, National Survey for Wales, Office for National Statistics, oral history, Oxford University Press, Pastoral Psychology, police, psychological wellbeing, Race Disparity Unit, religious affiliation, Religious Studies, Royal Statistical Society, Savanta ComRes, Sikhs, standards for ethnicity data, Stephen Bullivant, Victorian age, YouGov