

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
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OPINION POLLS

The UK's first Hindu prime minister

On 24 October 2022, Rishi Sunak was declared leader of the Conservative Party, and, on the following day, he was invited by His Majesty the King to form an administration, thus becoming the UK's first Hindu Prime Minister. Asked about his religion, just under half (49%) of the British population correctly identified Sunak's faith as Hinduism, according to an online survey by YouGov on 3 November of a sample of 8,334 adults. The proportion was highest among Londoners (62%) and Liberal Democrat voters (63%), and it was lowest for the under-25s (36%). A further 8% of interviewees thought that Sunak was a Muslim, 5% gave other answers, while 36% could not say what his religion was. Full results are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2022/11/03/c67da/3>

Contact with and attitudes towards local churches: ComRes poll for Church of England

The Church of England has press released a second instalment of results from a Savanta ComRes poll it commissioned on 1–3 July 2022 among 2,073 UK adults. BRIN readers may recall (from the August and September 2022 issues of *Counting Religion in Britain*) that the first instalment raised a few expert eyebrows on the grounds of plausibility. This time, asked whether they had ever (timeframe undefined) had contact with their local church (likewise undefined), 46% replied in the affirmative and 53% in the negative. Individuals reporting past contact with the local church were then asked in which of several ways they had done so, the commonest interactions being attendance for a rite of passage (50%), attendance for a religious service (42%), attendance at a carol service or for Christmas (39%), and through a community group associated with the church (30%). A plurality (47%) of the whole sample agreed that the local church (again undefined) was an important part of their community, with 23% dissenting and 30% uncertain, while slightly more, 52%, agreed that the Church (undefined) was an important part of British society, with 22% dissenting and 26% uncertain. Full breaks by demographics, including by religious affiliation and for active Christians, are available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/church-of-england-contact-with-local-churches/>

What makes someone a good member of society? Pew Global Attitudes Survey

The Spring 2022 wave of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, undertaken in the UK by telephone between 14 February and 15 April, asked adults in 19 countries which of seven factors made someone a good member of society. Attending religious services regularly was ranked as very important by only 17% of the 1,313 UK respondents (the 19-country median being 16%, with Israel, Singapore, and Malaysia the main outliers above this figure), albeit by as many as 47% of those agreeing that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values. A further 24% of the entire UK sample said that attending religious services was somewhat important in being a good member of society, while the majority (58%) of the population considered it was either not too important (25%) or not at all important (33%). The most commonly cited attributes for being very important in making a good member of society

in the UK were voting in elections (77%), making choices that help reduce the effects of global climate change (71%), and getting a coronavirus vaccine (67%). Topline data are available at:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/11/16/what-makes-someone-a-good-member-of-society/>

The Open Generation: Barna Group survey of teens around the world

With a trusted group of partners, the US Barna Group has completed an international research project designed to help Church leaders understand teenagers' perceptions of and engagement with three crucial elements of the Christian faith: Jesus, the Bible, and justice. Between 21 July and 24 August 2021, 24,870 teens aged 13–17 were interviewed online in 26 countries, including 1,009 in the UK. They were recruited to participate through their parents. Global findings for each of the 30 questions are available on the Barna website, as are country-specific results by clicking on the 'explore the research' button, selecting the relevant question, and setting the Europe and UK filters. Alternatively, three research reports are available to buy, each priced at US \$19 (digital) or \$29 (paperback): *How Teens around the World Relate to Jesus*, *How Teens around the World View the Bible*, and *How Teens around the World Can Make an Impact*. They may be ordered online at:

- <https://www.barna.com/the-open-generation/>

Ipsos MORI Veracity Index, 2022: trust in clergy and priests to tell the truth

In the latest annual Ipsos MORI survey, a series inaugurated in 1983, the general public ranked clergy and priests seventeenth out of thirty professions for their trustworthiness to tell the truth. Just over half (55%) of the 1,004 Britons aged 16 and over interviewed by telephone between 26 October and 1 November 2022 said that they trusted clergy and priests to tell the truth, while 31% did not and 14% were undecided. At +25, the net trustworthiness indicator for clergy and priests was three points less than in 2021. Clergy and priests were more likely to be deemed trustworthy by non-manual than manual workers and those educated to degree level than with lower qualifications. Nurses (89%), engineers (87%), and doctors (85%) topped the veracity index, with government ministers (16%), advertising executives (14%), and politicians generally (12%) coming bottom of the league table. Topline data and breaks by demographics are available at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-veracity-index-2022>

Removal of British citizenship: Shamima Begum, the Islamic State bride (continued)

Shamima Begum is a former Muslim schoolgirl from London, who travelled to Syria in 2015 to join Islamic State, married one of its fighters, and was stripped of her British citizenship by the Home Office in 2019, on the grounds of being a security risk. That decision bars her from returning to the UK. The Special Immigration Appeals Commission has recently been hearing an appeal against the loss of citizenship, the renewed public profile of Begum's case prompting YouGov to ask 4,893 members of its British panel on 22 November 2022: 'From what you have read and heard, do you think Shamima Begum is or is not a national security risk?' A slim majority (53%) of the population thought that she still is, rising to 73% among Conservatives and those who voted 'leave' in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, and 66% of the over-65s. About one person in six (17%) judged that Begum is not a security risk, the highest proportions being among Labour supporters (32%), 'remain' voters in the 2016 referendum (30%), Liberal Democrats (27%), and Londoners (26%). One in eight of the sample claimed not to have heard of Begum and 19% did not know what to think about the issue. Full data are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2022/11/22/b635f/2>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: the place of families in church post-Covid-19

What is the Place of Families in Church Post-Covid? is a 17-page report newly published by the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) in partnership with a consortium of Evangelical organizations, and written by Ann Casson (NICER) and Sarah Holmes (Liverpool Hope University). It explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on UK church life in the light of the experiences of 209 parents of children up to 16 years and 175 church leaders interviewed online in February 2022, supplemented by in-depth interviews (between April and June 2022) with 36 children aged 7–11 and 18 Christian parents. Sampling methodology is not explained in detail, although it is noted that interviewees came from 12 different denominations and various UK locations. In essence, this is probably an opportunity sample among Evangelicals. Both parents and church leaders reported significantly decreased engagement with the local church by families during the pandemic, although faith nurture at home apparently improved. Parents and church leaders differed on the way forward, especially on the importance of regular attendance at Sunday morning worship, many families now regarding this as less of a priority. The report can be accessed through the link in the blog at:

- <https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer/new-research-report-what-is-the-place-of-families-in-church-post-covid/>

Praying online with the Church of England via podcast and app

The Church of England has reported that the number of unique users of its Daily Prayer audio service, which was launched in March 2021 via both audio app and on major podcasting platforms, has surpassed the one million mark. The service follows the Church of England's traditional cycle of morning and evening prayer, with a range of voices and music. Approximately three-quarters (77%) of listeners are from the UK, 12.5% from the USA, and the remainder from other countries. The total of daily unique users is naturally far less than the aggregate, 8,000 in the case of the podcast version. The Church's press release is at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/more-one-million-people-pray-online-church-england-podcast-and-app>

Community use of church buildings in the Church of England Diocese of Ely

The 28-page *Church Buildings & Community Audit Report* was written by Timur Alexandrov, Helen Haugh, and Geoffrey Hunter on behalf of the University of Cambridge Judge Business School, the Church of England Diocese of Ely, Benefact Trust, and Historic England, who are collectively undertaking the REACH Ely project (Reimagining Churches as Community Assets for the Common Good). The document summarizes findings from research into church and community interaction and community use of church buildings and church halls in the predominantly rural Diocese of Ely. Data were collected by means of a 111-item online questionnaire between 18 December 2020 and 31 May 2021, with responses from 244 of the Diocese's 334 churches. The questions concerned typical use of church buildings prior to March 2020 (the start of the Covid-19 pandemic) and plans for post-Covid-19 church buildings use. The authors highlight the considerable community use already being made of churches and the potential for its future growth. This short audit report includes 12 figures containing statistics from the research; an extended audit report and appendix will be separately published in due course. Further information is available at:

- <https://www.elydiocese.org/outcomes-and-documentation.php>

Methodists and their hymnbook(s): a new survey

It has often been claimed that Methodism was ‘born in song’, a reference to the strong hymnological tradition established for the movement by John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century. But is this necessarily still true of contemporary Methodists? In an effort to find out, in January 2022, as part of her dissertation research, Naomi Prince, a third-year music student at the University of York, used social media to launch a short questionnaire targeting British Methodists, which appears to have attracted several hundred replies. The sample was self-selecting and, given the survey platform was social media, is likely to have been skewed towards younger Methodists, understating the views of their elderly co-religionists who disproportionately form the backbone of Methodist congregations. The questionnaire covered: understanding of the Methodist Church’s authorized hymnody; ownership of Methodist hymnbooks; use of the hymnbooks; the role of music in the development of people’s faith lives; hymnbooks as a resource for education in theology and doctrine; hymnody as an agent of evangelism; and the extent to which hymnbooks have declined in importance in Methodism (half of participants thought they had). Findings are outlined in a double-spread feature article (pp. 12–13, incorporating eight graphs) by Prince in the *Methodist Recorder* for 4 November 2022: ‘Is Methodism still Rooted in Song?’ Regrettably, the newspaper continues to publish predominantly in print format, with no parallel online editions (even for subscribers). However, further information about the study can be obtained from:

- naomiprince29@gmail.com

Muslims and the cost of living crisis

The latest online poll conducted by the Muslim Census research team is *Muslims and the Cost of Living Crisis*, with responses obtained from 1,568 Muslims aged 18 and over living in the UK between 14 September and 10 October 2022. The sample was recruited by email invitations and social media channels, and sampling error is estimated at + or – 3%. Overwhelmingly (84%), Muslims reported having to make changes in their lifestyle since August 2021 as a consequence of the financial crisis, and 75% noted a detrimental impact on their mental health. The majority (54%) had experienced some level of difficulty in paying at least one of their household bills since August 2021, with 13% being in difficulty every single month during the same period. Two-thirds (65%) of Muslims also said they had taken out some form of debt in order to accommodate their everyday outgoings and bills. Almost one-third (29%) claimed to have missed a meal during the past year in order to afford their bills, while 19% admitted having to rely on food banks in the past 12 months and 24% to having to request Zakat (a form of almsgiving). The report on the survey, incorporating some breaks by demographics, can be found at:

- <https://muslimcensus.co.uk/cost-of-living-crisis/>

Profiling the ‘nones’: latest Theos report

The three-year project conducted by Theos and the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, with funding from the Templeton Religion Trust, has produced its second major research output of the year: Hannah Waite, *The Nones: Who Are They and What Do They Believe?* (London: Theos, 2022, 74 pp., including 21 figures and 3 tables, ISBN: 978–1–8382559–2–3, free to download, £5 + postage in paperback). As with the first report, it is based on an online survey of 5,153 UK adults undertaken by YouGov between 5 May and 13 June 2021. Over half the sample (2,705 individuals) identified as having no religion, disproportionately those under 50 years of age and especially among millennials. After an initial exploration of the demographics, beliefs, and practices of these ‘nones’, a cluster analysis (derived from 21 variables answered by 1,883 adults) revealed the complexities and (sometimes) contradictions

of the ‘nones’. Three sub-groups were distinguished, each displaying varying degrees of belief about religion, knowledge, God, and spirituality. ‘Campaigning nones’ (34% of ‘nones’) were self-consciously atheistic and hostile to religion. ‘Tolerant nones’ (35%) were broadly atheistic but accepting of (occasionally even warm towards) religion. ‘Spiritual nones’ (32%) were characterized by a range of spiritual beliefs and practices, often as much as many people who ticked the ‘religion’ box. These findings are broadly consistent with previous academic research into ‘nones’ but add a significant amount of quantitative data, particularly through the segmentation analysis, and nuanced interpretation. However, the report does not fully address the central methodological point that differential question-wording about religious affiliation, in sample surveys and the census of population, produces differential proportions of self-identifying ‘nones’ and, presumably, at least slightly differential profiles. Nor does the report substantively engage with the extent to which the values and beliefs held by, in particular, ‘spiritual nones’ can meaningfully (on any recognized typology of religion) be considered as ‘religious’. *The Nones*, which has used the British Social Attitudes Survey ‘belonging’ wording for its definitional question (p. 34, n. 6), can be read online or downloaded at:

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2022/10/31/the-nones-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-believe>

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Religious census of England and Wales, 2021

The first results (disaggregated by region and local authority level only) for the religion question in the official census of population of England and Wales in 2021 were released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 29 November 2022. They will be reported on more fully in a special census edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 87, December 2022, which will be published towards the middle of that month. It will include a round-up of initial reactions to the census findings by the media and faith and non-faith organizations, and comparisons with the 2001 and 2011 censuses. For those BRIN readers who cannot wait that long, we are pleased to quote here a few spoilers from the ONS statistical bulletin on the religion question in England and Wales in 2021 (which was answered by 94.0% of usual residents): less than half the population (46.2%) described themselves as Christian, a decline of 13.1% from 2011 (albeit by 14.0% in Wales); 37.2% self-identified as being of no religion, an increase of 12.0% during the preceding decade (14.5% in Wales); and the Muslim share rose to 6.5% from 4.9% in 2011. The ONS notes: ‘There are many factors that may be contributing to the changing religious composition of England and Wales, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to answer the religion question between censuses.’ There is a link to the 2021 statistics at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

Coronavirus chronicles: Scottish faith communities and the impact of Covid-19

The Impact of Covid-19: Conversations with Faith Communities, written by Ben Cavanagh, is a 26-page report on qualitative research undertaken by the Scottish Government in 2022, based upon conversations with Christian, Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish leaders in urban settings in the central belt of Scotland. It highlights ‘a prominent experience of loss in faith communities ... in direct bereavement, lost membership, lost spaces, lost connections and opportunities, and lost certainty about the future.’ But it also notes some positive effects, ‘including accounts of survival, adaptability, and new growth’. Given the relative dearth of quantitative data about

religion and Covid-19 in Scotland, the document provides some useful interim insights. It is available at:

- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-covid-19-conversations-faith-communities/documents/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: more analyses by Village and Francis of their 2020–21 surveys

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis continue to report on the findings of the two online surveys that they conducted during Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 ('Coronavirus, Church, and You' study) and 2021 ('Covid-19 and Church-21'), completed by self-selecting (opportunity) samples of practising Christians, disproportionately from the Church of England (unsurprisingly since the readership of the *Church Times* was the principal conduit of the research). Although these two samples were not nationally representative, even of the denominations from which they were drawn, nevertheless they do serve a valuable illustrative and indicative purpose, especially showcased through the sophisticated socio-psychological tools deployed by the investigators. This month, there are three further academic journal articles to note.

In 'Spiritual Awakening among Church Members during the Pandemic: An Empirical Study in England and Wales' (*Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 35, No. 1, October 2022, pp. 47–75), Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and Christopher Alan Lewis analyse the replies of 3,673 Anglican and Catholic lay churchgoers during the first (2020) lockdown, demonstrating, through calculation of 'Lewis Index of Spiritual Awakening' scores, that 'more participants experienced a sense of spiritual awakening than a spiritual decline' in the early stages of Covid-19, notably so among Roman Catholics. The full text of the article can be found at:

- https://brill.com/view/journals/jet/35/1/article-p47_3.xml

The 2021 survey was the basis for Andrew Village's 'Attitude toward Virtual Communion in Relation to Church Tradition during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the United Kingdom' (*Journal of Empirical Theology*, Vol. 35, No. 1, October 2022, pp. 95–117), for which 3,300 Anglican, Free Church, and Catholic clergy and laity completed a newly-devised six-item Scale of Attitude toward Virtual Communion, a highly complex pattern of opinions emerging from a series of bivariate associations and multiple regressions, albeit Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics were the least positive and Anglican Evangelicals and Free Churches most positive, while younger respondents were less supportive of online Communion than older ones. The full text of the article can be found at:

- https://brill.com/view/journals/jet/35/1/article-p95_5.xml

Reverting to the 2020 sample, Leslie Francis and Andrew Village have been 'Reading the Church of England's Response to the Covid-19 Crisis: The Diverging Views of Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical Clergy' (*Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, November 2022, pp. 185–97), comparing the views of 263 Anglo-Catholic clergy and 140 Evangelical clergy, all involved in full-time stipendiary parish ministry. The former were found to be significantly less enthusiastic than the latter about the provision of online worship, the closure of church buildings by lockdown, and the notion of virtual rather than geographical communities. The journal issue can be found at:

- <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-anglican-studies/issue/6D7B29049BE6A711496760A9114C4B3E>

Meatless Fridays, Roman Catholics, and mitigating climate change

The potential for religious dietary proscriptions to help in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and thus enhance environmental sustainability, has been investigated in a case study of UK Catholics, which has recently been published as a research paper: Shaun Larcom, Luca Panzone, and Po-Wen She, 'Food for the Soul and the Planet: Measuring the Impact of the Return of Meatless Fridays for (Some) UK Catholics'. On 16 September 2011, the Catholic Church in England and Wales reinstated, after a 26-year hiatus, the traditional obligation on the faithful not to eat meat on Fridays, primarily as a penance. Between July and September 2021, the authors commissioned Dynata to conduct online interviews with 489 self-identifying Catholics drawn in two waves from nationally representative samples of the UK population. Of the 413 English and Welsh Catholics, 28% recalled that the reinstatement of the obligation had caused them to change their dietary habits, with 55% of this sub-group reducing meat consumption on Fridays and 41% abstaining from meat altogether on Fridays. That left almost three-quarters (72%) of English and Welsh Catholics not changing their dietary behaviour, of whom 59% could be considered as non-compliant with the obligation (since 13% had already forsaken Friday meat before 2011). This level of non-compliance is unsurprising, as we know from other research (for instance, by Ben Clements) that there is a high degree of disagreement with and/or disregard of their Church's teaching on certain socio-moral issues by Catholics in Britain. Notwithstanding, considering that reduced meat consumption on Fridays was not matched by a commensurate increase in fish consumption on that day, nor by increased meat consumption on other days, the environmental impact of even this minority of Catholics reducing their meat consumption was not insignificant – 46 million fewer meat meals per year, equivalent to 0.013% of annual CO² emissions, according to a calculation by the authors. Were the Pope to reintroduce the meat free Friday obligation across the global Catholic Church, they speculate, the benefits in terms of climate change mitigation would be many magnitudes greater, and all achieved at low cost or no cost. The paper has been made available in the social science preprint repository *SSRN* at:

- https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4237616

APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Village, Ann Casson, atheism, attendance at religious services, Barna Group, Ben Cavanagh, Bible, British citizenship, census of population, Christopher Alan Lewis, church buildings, Church of England, clergy and priests, climate change, community assets, contact with local churches, coronavirus, Coronavirus Church and You, cost of living crisis, Covid-19, Covid-19 and Church-21, Diocese of Ely, Dynata, England and Wales, families, Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Geoffrey Hunter, good member of society, Hannah Waite, Helen Haugh, Hinduism, Holy Communion, hymnology, Ipsos MORI, Ipsos MORI Veracity Index, Islamic State, Jesus Christ, Journal of Anglican Studies, Journal of Empirical Theology, Judge Business School, justice, Leslie Francis, Luca Panzone, meatless Fridays, Methodist Church, Methodist Recorder, Muslim Census, Muslims, Naomi Prince, National Institute for Christian Education Research, national security risk, nones, Office for National Statistics, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Po-Wen She, prayer, Prime Minister, REACH Ely, religious affiliation, religious census, Rishi Sunak, Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholics, Sarah Holmes, Savanta ComRes, Scotland, Shamima Begum, Shaun Larcom, spiritual awakening, spirituality, SSRN, teenagers, Theos, Timur Alexandrov, trustworthiness, truth, YouGov