

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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SPECIAL EDITION RELIGIOUS CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 2021



PART 1: TABLES AND COMMENTARY

Part 1 of this special edition of *Counting Religion in Britain* summarizes the first release (on 29 November 2022) of the religion data from the 2021 official census of population for England and Wales and provides comparative statistics from the 2001 and 2011 censuses. The question asked, which is voluntary, has been: ‘What is your religion?’

All figures for 2001 and 2011 were originally extracted from Table T53 (2001) and Table DC2107EW (2011) at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>, as reworked in the author’s *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970–2020: Secularization in Statistical Context* (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 303–6.

All figures for 2021 are taken from the suite of documentation and datasets made available by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion-census-2021-in-england-and-wales>. The three religion datasets comprise:

- England and Wales Census 2021 – TS030: Religion
- England and Wales Census 2021 – TS031: Religion (detailed)
- England and Wales Census 2021 – TS075: Multi Religion Households

It should be noted that the first release only contains topline data and disaggregations for higher level geographies. This fact restricts the degree of analysis and interpretation that can be offered at this stage.

Census arrangements in Scotland are now the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Executive took the decision to postpone the census of population planned for 2021 by one year, on account of the disruptive effects on census planning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although that census did include a question on religion, differently worded than in England and Wales, findings will not be available for quite some time.

The tables here present results separately for England (Tables 1A–C), Wales (Tables 2A–C), and England and Wales (Tables 3A–C). Results for English regions and local authorities can be extracted from the ONS datasets.

The A tables show the actual numbers for the major religious groups in 2001, 2011, and 2021; the B tables the percentage shares for each of the groups at the three censuses; and the C tables the net changes (in both percentages and numbers) between 2001 and 2011 and between 2011 and 2021.

Individuals ticking the ‘Any other religion’ box were invited to write in their religion, and the ONS dataset itemizes them separately (in 58 categories). The three largest other religions were Pagan (73,733), Alevi (25,672), and Jain (24,991). Responses mentioning a non-religion were reassigned to the ‘No religion’ category, including 32,114 agnostics, 13,848 atheists, and 10,246 humanists.

Overall, the market share of ‘no religion’ has significantly increased, from 14.8% in England and Wales in 2001 to 25.1% in 2011 and 37.2% in 2021 (Table 3B), but with a marked difference between England (36.7%, Table 1B) and Wales (46.6%, Table 2B) by 2021. Historically, Wales was the most religious of the three home nations in mainland Britain, thanks to the strength of Protestant Nonconformity, but – a bit like Presbyterian Scotland – it has secularized comparatively late and comparatively fast.

This shift towards no religion in England and Wales is entirely unsurprising, as recurrent sample surveys conducted between 2011 and 2021 had already indicated that religious nones were increasing by well over 1% per annum. However, the rate of growth in the census has slowed between 2001–11 and 2011–21, even in Wales (Tables 1C, 2C, and 3C), although the actual net gain in nones between 2011 and 2021 still surpassed 8,000,000.

Assuming a constant population, it would only take a 12.1% net increase in religious nones (or 2,800,000) between 2021 and 2031 for them to overtake professing Christians, and one of 34.5% (or 7,600,000) to transform them into an absolute majority in England and Wales (they are already fast approaching majority status in Wales alone). On today’s patterns, either of these scenarios seems perfectly feasible. The scale and speed of the advance of no religion since the millennium has been truly phenomenal.

No religion’s gain has mainly been at the expense of the Christian share, which has diminished in England and Wales, from 71.8% in 2001 to 59.3% in 2011 to 46.2% in 2021 (Table 3B), the pace of change (Table 3C) accelerating from 2001–11 (–11.0%) to 2011–21 (–17.2%). In absolute terms, there were almost 10,000,000 fewer Christians in England and Wales in 2021 than there were in 2001, again an unprecedented rate of change. Although Christians are not denominationally differentiated in the census in England and Wales, the suspicion remains that these losses disproportionately comprise Anglicans.

Partly, this decline will have arisen from the disaffiliation of Christians, subsequently joining the ranks of the nones for the most part, particularly among so-called ‘cultural Christians’ whose attachment to the faith stemmed primarily from heritage and tradition. In more substantial part, it will have derived from the death of Christians between the censuses; with a disproportionately elderly profile, they were most at risk of mortality, especially in a pandemic situation, such as occurred from 2020.

At the other end of the age spectrum, religious socialization into Christianity of the newest generations almost certainly crumbled further, as the parents of Millennials and Gen Z offspring chose not to pass on the faith to their children. Net levels of immigration may have further contributed to dwindling Christian numbers, especially after Brexit, when many European Union citizens formerly resident in the UK returned home (predominantly Catholic Poland or Orthodox Greece being obvious examples). At present, we simply lack sufficient detail from the 2021 religion census to be able to quantify the relative significance of each of these factors.

Non-Christian religions (including ‘any other religion’) have increased their aggregate share in England and Wales, but not dramatically, from 5.7% in 2001 to 8.4% in 2011 and 10.6% in 2021 (Table 3B). All the major non-Christian religions have notched up progress during these two decades, even the relatively small Jewish community (whose modest net gains are down to the greater fertility of the Strictly Orthodox *haredi* population), but the rate of advance has slowed between the 2000s and 2010s (Table 3B).

Muslims form the largest non-Christian group, their proportion of the population having risen in England and Wales from 3.0% in 2001 to 6.5% in 2021 (Table 3B), as a consequence of above-average (but diminishing) fertility and in-migration. Over the two decades, this represented a net gain of 2,300,000 Muslims. Non-Christians are generally less numerous in Wales (Tables 2A, B, and C) than in England (Tables 1A, B, and C). The substantive point, of course, one frequently made by Steve Bruce, is that the rise of non-Christians has been nowhere near large enough to ‘compensate’ for the shrinkage of the Christian constituency. The overall religious pie is becoming smaller.

Given that the census religion question is voluntary, the number of refusals is relatively small and has reduced over time in England and Wales, from 7.7% in 2001 to 7.2% in 2011 and 6.0% in 2021 (Table 3B), and with an absolute decrease of 11.0% between 2011 and 2021 (Table 3C) or 16.6% in Wales (Table 2C). Thus, we can be fairly confident that, however this non-responding group is redistributed in, or excluded from, any calculations made on the remaining religious groups, the overall religious landscape of England and Wales is unlikely to be seriously affected. Only at local geographies might it be a source of appreciable difference.

The 2021 religion census also offers insights into religious group composition within the 17,300,000 households in England and Wales that contained more than one person in 2021 (Table 3D), although the ONS statistical bulletin is slightly misleading in claiming this is the first time that this has happened in the census (see, on the contrary, the discussion of religious homogeneity in households in 2001 in ONS, *Focus on Ethnicity and Religion, 2006 Edition*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 12–14). It will be seen that a slim majority of all households in England and Wales (53.1%) were composed of individuals all of whom either professed the

same religion or professed no religion, and thus could be considered to be religiously homogeneous. The dataset from which Table 3D has been extracted will probably have greatest value at finer levels of granularity.

Table 3E moves from the religion question in the census to the ethnic group question. It demonstrates that the phenomenon of ‘cultural’ attachment to a religion is by no means confined to Christianity. In recent years, it has emerged as a significant factor in Judaism and Sikhism, also, with many Jews or Sikhs now defining their identity in ethnic rather than in religious terms, or in ethnic and religious jointly. The ethnic groups shown in Table 3E were the only four of a total of 288 ethnic categories that were explicitly qualified by a faith sub-identity.

One element of the UK Sikh constituency, the Sikh Federation (UK), fought a strenuous (but unsuccessful) legal battle against the ONS and the UK government to have a tick-box for Sikh added to the 2021 census question on ethnicity in England and Wales. The Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Institute for Jewish Policy Research have latterly begun to wonder whether the absence of a record of ethnically self-identifying Jews is leading to an underestimate of the Jewish community.

The statistics in Table 3E, which draw upon optional write-in answers to the ethnicity question given by respondents, are a start, but we do not yet know the extent of the overlap (and there is likely to be some) between ethnic and religious Jews/Sikhs. The fact that fewer than 3,000 Muslims defined themselves ethnically in the 2021 census illustrates how they overwhelmingly perceive themselves as a religious group, albeit comprising Muslims from multiple ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, a veritable community of communities.

Hopefully, these tables and commentary will help BRIN readers get beyond some of the ‘ding-dong’ descriptions, deductions, and rhetorical declarations that characterize some of the media responses featured in Part 2 of this special edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*. We encourage BRIN users to explore the underlying datasets for themselves. We will post additional summaries of statistics and analysis as more ONS census releases pertaining to religion come to hand.

Table 1A Religion question, England, 2001–21

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	7,171,332	13,114,232	20,715,664
Christian	35,251,244	31,479,876	26,167,899
Buddhist	139,046	238,626	262,433
Hindu	546,982	806,199	1,020,533
Jewish	257,671	261,282	269,283
Muslim	1,524,887	2,660,116	3,801,186
Sikh	327,343	420,196	520,092
Other religion	143,811	227,825	332,410
Not stated	3,776,515	3,804,104	3,400,548
<i>Total</i>	<i>49,138,831</i>	<i>53,012,456</i>	<i>56,490,048</i>

**Table 1B Religion question, England, 2001–21
(percentage share)**

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	14.59	24.74	36.67
Christian	71.74	59.38	46.32
Buddhist	0.28	0.45	0.46
Hindu	1.11	1.52	1.81
Jewish	0.52	0.49	0.48
Muslim	3.10	5.02	6.73
Sikh	0.67	0.79	0.92
Other religion	0.29	0.43	0.59
Not stated	7.69	7.18	6.02

**Table 1C Religion question, England, 2001–21
(net changes)**

	%	%	Number	Number
	2001–11	2011–21	2001–11	2011–21
No religion	+82.87	+57.96	+5,942,900	+7,601,432
Christian	-10.70	-16.87	-3,771,368	-5,311,977
Buddhist	+71.62	+9.98	+99,580	+23,807
Hindu	+47.39	+26.59	+259,217	+214,334
Jewish	+1.40	+3.06	+3,611	+8,001
Muslim	+74.45	+42.90	+1,135,229	+1,141,070
Sikh	+28.37	+23.77	+92,853	+99,896
Other religion	+58.42	+45.91	+84,014	+104,585
Not stated	+0.73	-10.61	+27,589	-403,556

Table 2A Religion question, Wales, 2001–21

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	537,935	982,997	1,446,398
Christian	2,087,242	1,763,299	1,354,773
Buddhist	5,407	9,117	10,075
Hindu	5,439	10,434	12,242
Jewish	2,256	2,064	2,044
Muslim	21,739	45,950	66,947
Sikh	2,015	2,962	4,048
Other religion	6,909	12,705	15,926
Not stated	234,143	233,928	195,041
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,903,085</i>	<i>3,063,456</i>	<i>3,107,494</i>

**Table 2B Religion question, Wales, 2001–21
(percentage share)**

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	18.53	32.09	46.55
Christian	71.90	57.56	43.60
Buddhist	0.19	0.30	0.32
Hindu	0.19	0.34	0.39
Jewish	0.08	0.07	0.07
Muslim	0.75	1.50	2.15
Sikh	0.07	0.10	0.13
Other religion	0.24	0.41	0.51
Not stated	8.07	7.64	6.28

**Table 2C Religion question, Wales, 2001–21
(net changes)**

	%	%	Number	Number
	2001–11	2011–21	2001–11	2011–21
No religion	+82.74	+47.14	+445,062	+463,401
Christian	-15.52	-23.17	-323,943	-408,526
Buddhist	+68.61	+10.51	+3,710	+958
Hindu	+91.84	+17.33	+4,995	+1,808
Jewish	-8.51	-0.97	-192	-20
Muslim	+111.37	+45.70	+24,211	+20,997
Sikh	+47.00	+36.66	+947	+1,086
Other religion	+83.89	+25.35	+5,796	+3,221
Not stated	-0.09	-16.62	-215	-38,887

Table 3A Religion question, England and Wales, 2001–21

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	7,709,267	14,097,229	22,162,062
Christian	37,338,486	33,243,175	27,522,672
Buddhist	144,453	247,743	272,508
Hindu	552,421	816,633	1,032,775
Jewish	259,927	263,346	271,327
Muslim	1,546,626	2,706,066	3,868,133
Sikh	329,358	423,158	524,140
Other religion	150,720	240,530	348,334
Not stated	4,010,658	4,038,032	3,595,589
<i>Total</i>	<i>52,041,916</i>	<i>56,075,912</i>	<i>59,597,540</i>

**Table 3B Religion question, England and Wales, 2001–21
(percentage share)**

	2001	2011	2021
No religion	14.81	25.14	37.19
Christian	71.75	59.28	46.18
Buddhist	0.28	0.44	0.46
Hindu	1.06	1.46	1.73
Jewish	0.50	0.47	0.46
Muslim	2.97	4.83	6.49
Sikh	0.63	0.75	0.88
Other religion	0.29	0.43	0.58
Not stated	7.71	7.20	6.03

**Table 3C Religion question, England and Wales, 2001–21
(net changes)**

	%	%	Number	Number
	2001–11	2011–21	2001–11	2011–21
No religion	+82.86	+57.21	+6,387,962	+8,064,833
Christian	-10.97	-17.21	-4,095,311	-5,720,503
Buddhist	+71.50	+10.00	+103,290	+24,765
Hindu	+47.83	+26.47	+264,212	+216,142
Jewish	+1.32	+3.03	+3,419	+7,981
Muslim	+74.97	+42.94	+1,159,440	+1,162,067
Sikh	+28.48	+23.86	+93,800	+100,982
Other religion	+59.59	+44.82	+89,810	+107,804
Not stated	+0.68	-10.96	+27,374	-442,443

**Table 3D Religion question, England and Wales, 2021
(multiple religions in households)**

	N =	%
One-person household	7,481,788	30.19
Multi-person household: no people stated their religion	459,865	1.86
Multi-person household: same religion (at least one person has stated a religion but the household may include people who did not state their religion)	8,111,759	32.73
Multi-person household: no religion (household may include people who did not state their religion)	5,054,408	20.39
Multi-person household: same religion and no religion (household may include people who did not state their religion)	3,390,395	13.68
Multi-person household: at least two different religions stated (household may include people with no religion and who did not state their religion)	284,984	1.15
Total	24,783,199	100.00

**Table 3E Ethnicity question, England and Wales, 2021
(numbers of ethnic Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs)**

	Jews	Muslims	Sikhs
Asian British or Asian Welsh			22,814
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2,595		
White	34,105		
Other ethnic group	31,284	2,969	76,535
<i>Total</i>	<i>67,984</i>	<i>2,969</i>	<i>99,349</i>

PART 2: SELECT MEDIA COVERAGE

The following entries represent a selection only of stories that have appeared in the print and online media (excluding social media) since the first release of the 2021 religious census results on 29 November 2022. Omitted are references to articles that just summarized the ONS statistical bulletin. Articles that simply rehearsed the old arguments in denial of or in favour of secularization are covered only sparingly. Some Christian advocates seem to have been especially vociferous in defending their territory in the face of what was palpably bad news from the census about dwindling adherence to their religion. Additional articles deemed of significance will be referenced in future editions of *Counting Religion in Britain*. Public domain URLs are cited in so far as this has been practicable, but some paywalls may still be encountered when clicking on the links.

Reactions in the secular media

‘End of an Era for Christian Britain’ was the headline in *The Times* (30 November, p. 7), the census findings being said to confirm that ‘England and Wales are among the least religious nations on Earth’, with a fifth of households having nobody of faith living in them; a second leader (p. 31) underlined the ‘soul-searching’ to which this ‘loss of faith’ had given rise.

Responding to the previous day’s reporting, **Ian Bradley** sent a letter to the editor of *The Times* (1 December, p. 30): ‘What the statistics in the census fail to indicate is the proportion of the population who while rejecting identification as Christians still retain a latent spiritual sense ... spirituality, with its more intuitive, emotional, free-wheeling character, is on the rise.’

In his comment column in the same issue of *The Times* (1 December, p. 27), **David Aaronovitch**, once ‘a junior conscript into Christ’s army’ but now an atheist and potential ethnic Jew, voiced mixed feelings about the census results, fearing for what would replace ‘the communal function of declining religion’.

In *The Sunday Times* for 4 December, another columnist, **Matthew Syed**, combined census data and personal testimony to ponder: ‘Britain is Losing its Religion: What Will Fill the Void?’ – ‘the UK is following the Nordic nations in moving away from institutionalised religion, with non-belief the fastest growing demographic, with the US following behind’.

- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/britain-is-losing-its-religion-what-will-fill-the-void-qwctpb3gb?shareToken=3fa7888ef88b86e315987712d52a10b6>

Coverage of the census release in *The Guardian* of 30 November began on the front page (‘Census Puts Church’s Role in the Spotlight’) but was mainly on pp. 12–13, where several interviewees, including veteran constitutionalist **Vernon Bogdanor**, raised the implications of the findings for the continuance of the Church of England as an established Church.

The Daily Telegraph’s main census feature was on 30 November, p. 4, spanning religion, ethnicity, national identity, and language; but there was a complementary comment piece by **Madeline Grant** on p. 15 (‘Secular Britain Worships Destructive New Gods’): ‘As Christianity retreats, we are left with atomisation, faux-communities and cult-like devotion to fads’.

The front page headline of the *i* newspaper on 30 November was ‘UK Christians in Minority for First Time since the Dark Ages’; however, on p. 3 the paper’s assistant editor anticipated ‘it will be some time before Christianity ceases to have a major influence on our society’, while on p. 4 sundry academics advanced reasons for thinking why this might be so. See also:

- <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/christianity-in-the-uk-is-in-decline-but-its-influence-is-not-and-thats-a-real-problem-2000872>

The religion census also made the front page of *The Express*, with the headline ‘Less than Half of Population is Christian’; a full report on the religion, ethnicity, and language data was on pp. 6–7, with comment by the Bishop of Lancaster (‘a growing appetite for the Christian faith’), and editorial advice on p. 12: ‘Keep Faith in Religion ... Our Rock in Tough Times’.

- <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1702914/christianity-uk-census-fewer-than-half-christian>

Coverage in the *Daily Mail* on 30 November was relegated to p. 4 and was mainly factual, space for comment given over to Humanists UK and the National Secular Society; a brief editorial (p. 14) warned of the consequences of losing a common morality, while columnist **Sarah Vine** (p. 15) lambasted the Church of England for the malaise. *Mail Online* is at:

- <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11481941/godless-Britain-England-Wales-majority-non-believers-TEN-YEARS.html>

Reactions from faith communities and religious media

The **Religion Media Centre** hosted a briefing on the census results on 29 November, with **Ruth Peacock** chairing a panel discussion involving six experts drawn from a mix of academic and professional religious backgrounds. A short report of the proceedings, including a link to the recording of the event now available on Youtube, can be found at:

- <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/2021-census-shows-christian-decline-in-england-and-wales/>

On 2 December, the religious census, and its potential policy implications (for example, for the future of religious education in schools or the disestablishment of the Church of England), was also the main theme in one of the **Religion Media Centre**’s regular podcasts, in which the Centre’s regular journalists discuss the past week’s religious news with expert guests.

- <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/podcast/episode-20/>

The theme of the **Bible Society**’s census press release was that ‘religion is still mainstream’, extensively quoting the organization’s head of research, **Rhiannon McAleer**, and referencing its unpublished YouGov polling in 2022; the census showed, she suggested, that people were shedding labels: ‘It’s not necessarily that they have lost a genuine and heart-felt faith.’

- <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/census-results-religion-is-still-mainstream/>

In an opinion piece for *Premier Christianity*, **Mike Royal**, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, argued that ‘Nominal Christianity does the Church no favours’, fuelling

Christian nationalism. Rather he encouraged Christians to embrace the opportunities presented by the emergence of ‘minority majority’ cities such as London, Birmingham, and Leicester.

- <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/the-religious-and-ethnic-makeup-of-britain-is-changing-lets-embrace-the-opportunities-ahead-of-us-14445.article>

The **Evangelical Alliance UK** press release argued that, despite the (unsurprising) census findings, ‘Christianity can flourish in the margins of society’, affording Evangelicals with ‘a great opportunity to speak up for Christianity as a positive force for public life’, as well as to make Jesus Christ known; being a minority has largely been the norm for Christians in history.

- <https://www.eauk.org/news-and-views/census-figures-we-are-not-but-there-is-work-to-do>

Nick Spencer, Senior Fellow at **Theos** think tank, contributed a characteristically thoughtful blog when he sought to answer the question ‘Census 2021: And the Winner Is ...’; he advocated that ‘We need to learn to live with difference. For the foreseeable future, the UK will be a mosaic of religious beliefs, commitments, and cultures, with no single affiliation hegemonic.’

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2022/11/29/census-2021-and-the-winner-is>

Paul Woolley, formerly of Theos but now CEO of the **London Institute for Contemporary Christianity**, advised that Christians should neither be shocked nor panic about the census results: ‘This is not the first time that Christians have been a minority. That is the norm ... if we can be a truly faithful presence, we might yet see the growth of the church in our lifetimes.’

- <https://licc.org.uk/resources/the-census-results-should-we-panic/>

On behalf of the **Church of England**, the Archbishop of York, **Stephen Cottrell**, reflected: ‘It’s not a great surprise that the Census shows fewer people in this country identifying as Christian than in the past, but it still throws down a challenge to us not only to trust that God will build his kingdom on Earth but also to play our part in making Christ known.’

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/we-are-here-you-archbishop-responds-census-findings>

Cottrell also wrote for the *Sunday Telegraph* (4 December), the census there viewed as one source among ‘contrasting statistical snapshots’; ‘for Christians ... the story that defines our identity has never been one of overwhelming numerical growth nor fear of extinction’, even Christ’s own story being ‘notable for the absence of success by the world’s usual standards’.

- <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/hope-started-census>
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/12/03/christianity-not-terminal-decline-britain-whatever-census-might/>

After noting competing interpretations of the meaning of the census results, a leader in the *Church Times* of 2 December (p. 10) was clear about one thing: there was a need to revise the Anglican Communion’s own statistics in the light of the census, its claimed membership of 26 million Anglicans in England and half a million in Wales now being hard to accept.

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/2-december/comment/leader-comment/leader-comment-census-reality>

Responding to the census coverage in the *Church Times* on 2 December, **Fraser Watts** had a letter to the editor published on 9 December (p. 12). He urged the Church of England to ‘face facts, and stop pretending that things are better than they really are’. He also suggested that the Church had lost the nation and needed to behave with greater humility and less self-importance.

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

In the same issue of the *Church Times* (p. 11), columnist **Angela Tilby** underscored what the census revealed: ‘Rather than seek personal identity in belonging to something bigger than ourselves, we now believe that it is the subjective inner self that counts, its choice of identity that now carries sacred meaning’. The loss of Christianity amounted to ‘a loss of societal flow’.

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/9-december/comment/columnists/angela-tilby-when-we-lose-religion-we-turn-inwards>

Although the **Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales** issued a statement about the 2011 religion census, it has yet to make one about the 2021 religion census (at least it is not visible on the CBCEW website). However, a couple of Catholic bishops have commented upon the census findings as individuals, and as reported in the *Catholic Herald* (30 November).

- <https://catholicherald.co.uk/beware-risk-of-dangerous-ideologies-warns-bishop-as-christians-become-minority-in-britain/>

The **Methodist Church** issued a press release on 29 November, arguing that the number of professing Christians in the census ‘may not indicate a decline in those seeking answers to questions around faith and spirituality’.

- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/news/latest-news/all-news/response-to-census-showing-people-who-identify-as-christian-is-now-462-of-the-population/>

Commenting on the scale of Christian decline in the census, **Father Andrew**, in his blog of 2 December for the **Orthodox England** website, forecast: ‘We would fully expect a drop of at least another 13% in ten years’ time, bringing the number of nominal Christians down to 33% and in thirty years’ time the figure for Christians could well reach 7% of the population.’

- <https://www.events.orthodoxengland.org.uk>

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research** published a 9-page report by **David Graham** and **Jonathan Boyd**, *Jews in Britain in 2021: First Results from the Census of England and Wales*, which noted the answers, not simply to the religion question in the census (to which 271,327 persons self-identified as Jewish), but also to the ethnicity question (to which 67,984 self-reported as Jewish in 2021, double the number who did so in 2011).

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/jews-britain-2021-first-results-census-england-and-wales>

The **Board of Deputies of British Jews** issued a statement on 30 November: ‘These Census results ... raise the question on whether the continued narrow focus of the Census recognising Jewish status as a religion with the exclusion of considering Jewish ethnicity explicitly is appropriate ... We are concerned that ... many Jewish citizens will not feel fully counted.’

- <https://bod.org.uk/bod-news/board-of-deputies-reacts-to-national-census-figures-on-number-of-jews-in-england-and-wales/>

The **Muslim Council of Britain** published a 16-page report *Census 2021: First Look*, noting that Muslims accounted for one-third of the population growth of England and Wales between 2011 and 2021, and that 40% of Muslims resided in the most deprived fifth of local authority districts with just under 6% living in the most affluent fifth of districts.

- https://mcusercontent.com/4efd81e7012b9e8ff1197ab2c/files/f858ad4b-0d15-54fe-65e8-da9b07c93816/MCB_Census_2021_First_Look_1_.pdf

On 5 December, **Preet Gill**, MP for Edgbaston and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Sikhs, wrote an open letter to the National Statistician, highlighting the relative invisibility of Sikhs to public bodies on account of inadequate coverage of Sikhs in the census of population, and not least because of the absence of a tick-box ethnicity option for Sikhs.

- <https://twitter.com/PreetKGillMP/status/1600545268524630019>

In parallel, **Gill** had tabled a parliamentary written question to the Cabinet Office along the same lines, which was answered in a written reply by the **National Statistician (Ian Diamond)** on 2 December. He indicated that more information about the Sikh population in 2021, including bespoke analysis, would be made available as part of future releases of census data.

- <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-29/98820/>

The **National Secular Society** used its press release on the census results to renew its call to separate Church and State; as its CEO, **Stephen Evans**, put it, ‘We need fundamental reforms to become a true secular democracy – one that reflects the reality of our irreligious and diverse people and is fit for the 21st century.’

- <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/11/census-england-and-wales-less-than-half-the-population-christian>

‘It’s official: England and Wales are among the least religious countries in the world, according to 2021 Census data.’ That was the unequivocal message from **Humanists UK**, even without any allowance for the alleged bias in wording of the census question; the organization then proceeds to draw out the policy implications of the census findings and need for action thereon.

- <https://humanists.uk/2022/11/29/non-religious-surge-37-tick-no-religion-in-2021-census-uk-among-least-religious-countries-in-the-world/>

In a supplementary news release (6 December), **Humanists UK** hit back at claims that: those ticking ‘no religion’ are often religious or spiritual; the religious share of the population is becoming *more* religious; the UK risks becoming an immoral wasteland without religion; society’s good moral values today are Judeo-Christian; and there are only 10,000 humanists.

- <https://humanists.uk/2022/12/06/setting-the-record-straight-on-census-2021/>

Andrew Brown devoted his weekly column in the *Church Times* for 2 December (p. 22) to an overview of press coverage of the religious census but, within it, he majored on statements by humanists, with their ‘sublime confidence that they speak for all decent and right-thinking people’ and ‘their constant burbling on about prayers in Parliament or bishops in the Lords’.

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/2-december/comment/columnists/press-what-the-census-tells-us-about-faith>

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Brown, Angela Tilby, Bible Society, Board of Deputies of British Jews, Buddhists, Catholic Herald, census of population, Christianity, Christians, Church of England, Church Times, Daily Mail, Daily Telegraph, David Aaronovitch, David Graham, England, England and Wales, ethnic group, Evangelical Alliance UK, Father Andrew, Fraser Watts, Hindus, Humanists UK, i, Ian Bradley, Ian Diamond, immigration, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Jews, Jonathan Boyd, London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, Madeline Grant, Matthew Syed, Methodist Church, Mike Royal, Muslim Council of Britain, Muslims, National Secular Society, Nick Spencer, nones, Office for National Statistics, Orthodox England, Paul Woolley, Preet Gill, Premier Christianity, Religion Media Centre, religious affiliation, religious census, religious nones, religious socialization, Rhiannon McAleer, Ruth Peacock, Sarah Vine, Sikhs, Stephen Cottrell, Stephen Evans, Sunday Telegraph, The Express, The Guardian, The Sunday Times, The Times, Theos, Vernon Bogdanor, Wales