

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
Number 90 – March 2023

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OPINION POLLS

Religious beliefs around the world: Gallup International Association poll

To mark its 75th anniversary, the Gallup International Association (GIA) conducted a 61-nation poll, between August and October 2022, to measure the extent of religious beliefs. The UK was one of the countries surveyed, fieldwork being undertaken by ORB International among an online sample of 1,000 adults. Here we only report the UK toplines, extracted from a lengthy press release by the GIA, which also gives the equivalent data for the remaining sixty nations. Asked to self-define their religiosity, 30% of UK respondents identified as a religious person (almost half the 57% figure recorded by the European Values Survey in 1981), 49% as not a religious person, and 17% as an atheist (up from 4% in 1981). In terms of religious beliefs, the following answers were given by UK residents:

%	Believe	Do not believe	Not sure
God	39	38	22
Life after death	36	35	27
Heaven	34	39	24
Hell	26	48	23

GIA's press release can be found at:

- <https://www.gallup-international.bg/en/46964/more-prone-to-believe-in-god-than-identify-as-religious/>

Political leaders and their religious beliefs: fall-out from the SNP leadership contest

The contest to be leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), and thus First Minister of Scotland, following Nicola Sturgeon's resignation, may be over, and Kate Forbes may have lost out to Humza Yousaf (a Muslim), but, for a second month running, Forbes' conservative Christian standpoint, notably on same-sex marriage, has left the public wondering whether politicians should let their religious views influence their political decisions.

In Scotland, an Ipsos MORI poll for Channel 4 News asked an online sample of 1,503 adults aged 16 and over on 6–7 March 2023: 'How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel about politicians voting on policies that affect people's marriage and relationships according to their personal religious beliefs?' The majority, 57% of the entire sample and 61% of SNP voters, replied they were very or fairly *uncomfortable*, with just one in six comfortable and one in five undecided. For full breaks, see Table 30 of the results at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/forbes-leads-as-publics-preferred-next-first-minister-yousaf-forbes-neck-and-neck-among-snp-voters>

Across the UK, and on behalf of *The Express*, Techne UK interviewed a sample of 1,633 adults aged 18 and over on 29–30 March 2023 by a combination of telephone (55%) and online (45%). The question was at once more general but more targeted than in Scotland: 'Do you

think religious belief should be a bar for high political office such as Prime Minister of the UK or First Minister of Scotland and Wales?’ A plurality (45%) said ‘no’, with 37% indicating ‘yes’ and 18% undecided. In no demographic group was there a majority answering in the affirmative. The full table is at:

- <https://www.techneuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EXPRESS-2023-3-31-DATA.pdf>

Round-up of latest YouGov tracker polls

For a select number of religion-related topics, YouGov gathers periodic tracker data among samples of the adult population of Great Britain. Below we reproduce the latest topline results for each (with trend data available at the URL).

Influence of religion on the world (25 January 2023, N = 2,012): religion on the whole has a positive influence on the world, 21%; religion on the whole has a negative influence on the world, 55%; don’t know, 20%; prefer not to say, 4%.

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

Belief in God(s) (1 February 2023, N = 1,943): believe there is a God/there are gods, 29%; do not believe in a God/gods but do believe there is some sort of spiritual greater power, 23%; do not believe in any sort of God(s) or spiritual greater power, 37%; don’t know, 11%.

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

Sunday trading (11–13 February 2023, N = 1,767): shops should be allowed to open for as long as they want on Sundays, 54%; shops should only be allowed to open for six hours on Sundays, 26%; shops should not be allowed to open at all on Sundays, 13%; don’t know, 7%.

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/legal/trackers/sunday-opening-hours>

Importance of teaching Religious Studies at secondary school (18–20 March 2023, N = 1,769): very important, 9%; quite important, 28%; not very important, 33%; not at all important, 25%; don’t know, 5%.

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/trackers-how-important-is-it-to-teach-religious-studies-at-secondary-school>

Perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems in the UK

For the first time in quite a number of months, Savanta ComRes has run its module on perceptions of the extent of various forms of prejudice in one of its published political polls. When an online sample of 2,093 UK adults was asked on 10–13 March 2023 to what extent anti-Semitism was a problem in the UK, 14% replied a big problem, 35% somewhat a problem, 25% not really a problem, 8% not a problem at all, with 19% undecided. In the case of Islamophobia, 18% regarded it as a big problem, 37% as somewhat a problem, 20% as not really a problem, 9% as not a problem at all, with 17% unsure. In total, 48% viewed anti-Semitism as a problem, and 55% Islamophobia. Full tables by demographics can be found at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-savanta-15-march-2023/>

Attitudes of young Muslims in the UK and their non-Muslim peers

Hyphen, which describes itself as ‘a unique online destination, focusing on issues important to Muslims across the UK and Europe’, published a series of blogs in late March outlining the results of an online poll of 2,073 UK adults aged 16–24 (1,002 of them Muslims) that it had commissioned from Savanta ComRes between 6 and 21 February 2023. The most data-rich of

these is the blog entitled ‘Gen Z Muslims in the UK – the Figures’, which works through the answers to all thirteen questions. The most specifically religion-related topics were: British versus Muslim identity; experience of Islamophobia (in work, educational, or social settings); prayer and other religious practices; influence of religious leaders; accuracy of media coverage of Muslims in the UK; and time off work for Muslim employees to celebrate Eid. A headline finding from the blog entitled ‘Young, Optimistic, and Devout – Gen Z Muslims in the UK’ reads: ‘Burdened with personal debt, but bullish about their economic outlook and society’s ability to tackle the effects of [climate change](#), Gen Z Muslims in the UK share almost identical worldviews and experiences to their non-Muslim compatriots. However ... they diverge sharply on issues of personal religiosity.’ All the blogs can be accessed at:

- <https://hyphenonline.com/news/polls-data/>

The full computer tables from the survey, with separate datasets for the national and Muslim samples, are also available on the Savanta ComRes website at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/cultural-issues-poll-hyphen-30-march-2023/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England cathedral statistics, 2021

Cathedral Statistics, 2021 is the latest publication from Church of England Data Services, featuring a range of performance measures for the 42 mainland Church of England cathedrals and for Westminster Abbey. The statistics demonstrated the continuing negative impact of Covid-19 on cathedral life, with most indicators recovering only very slowly from 2020 and still well below pre-pandemic levels. In-person attendances at regular and festival services in 2021 were under half the 2019 total, and the same was true of visitor numbers. The 48-page report can be found at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Cathedral%20Statistics%202021.pdf>

Muslim women in sport: Muslim Census poll for Muslimah Sports Association

The Muslimah Sports Association, established in 2014, has published the *Muslim Women in Sport Report*, based on an online survey of 319 female Muslims in England aged 18–45 undertaken by Muslim Census. The survey topics included current sporting activities; sports that respondents had an interest in taking part in; motivations for participation; and barriers to participation. The easiest way to access the report is via the link embedded in the BBC Sport blog about the study at:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/64796465>

UK Jewish attitudes to the 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza

In the Institute for Jewish Policy Research’s latest report, David Graham and Jonathan Boyd explored *Conflict in Israel and Gaza: What Do Jews in the UK Think?* The underlying data derived from a self-selecting sample of 4,152 self-identifying Jews in the UK, interviewed online between 23 July and 1 September 2021. Respondents were asked a series of questions about the May 2021 war between Israel and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Although, overall, UK Jews endorsed Israel’s right to defend itself militarily, this support was not unqualified. The main predictor of feelings about the conflict was a person’s level of emotional

attachment to Israel. Beyond that, Jews who were younger or more secular, or politically leftist or university educated, were more likely to hold more critical views of Israel. The 12-page report is at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/conflict-israel-and-gaza-what-do-jews-uk-think>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Estimated suicide rates by religion in England and Wales, 2011–21

The Office for National Statistics has published a report and dataset on *Sociodemographic Inequalities in Suicides in England and Wales: 2011 to 2021*, which includes a calculation of suicide rates per 100,000 people (differentiated by gender) by the principal religious groups, the evidence deriving from the 2011 population census and death registration data linked by NHS number. Suicide rates were generally lower for persons affiliating to a religion than not. Within faith communities, the lowest rates of suicide were among Muslims and the highest with Buddhists. Full details are available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sociodemographic-inequalities-in-suicides-in-england-and-wales-2011-to-2021>

Census, 2021, England and Wales: religion by housing, health, employment, education

The Office for National Statistics has published a report and four datasets (housing; general health, disability, and unpaid care; economic activity status and occupation; highest qualification level) on *Religion by Housing, Health, Employment, and Education, England and Wales: Census, 2021*. Three of the five ‘main points’ in the report concerned Muslims, who: were nearly four times more likely to live in overcrowded homes than the overall population; were much less likely to live in households that were owner occupied than the overall population (45.6% compared with 62.8%); and had the lowest proportion of people aged 16–64 in employment (51.4% compared with 70.9% of the overall population). Among other findings, Hindus had the largest proportion recording very good or good health and attaining the highest level of educational qualifications. Much more information is available at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/religionbyeducationemploymenthealthandhousingenglandandwalescensus2021>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Psychological type profiles of the UK’s non-Anglican ministries

Among other articles, the most recent issue of *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* (Vol. 25, No. 9, 2022) includes a series of four studies of the psychological type profiles of denomination-specific samples of non-Anglican ministers, with consideration of the implications of the data for leadership and pastoral care. The articles, all open access, comprise:

- Tomos ap Sion and Leslie Francis, ‘The Psychological Type Profile of Salvation Army Officers Working within the United Kingdom: Diversity, Strengths, and Weaknesses in Ministry’, pp. 842–59 (study of 165 male and 269 female Salvation Army officers attending a Salvation Army conference in 2018):

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.1884211>

- Gareth Garland and Andrew Village, ‘Psychological Type Profiles and Temperaments of Ministers in the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB)’, pp. 860–74 (study of 232 male and 51 female Baptist ministers in 2019):
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.1908974>
- Leslie Francis and Andrew Village, ‘Psychological Type Profile and Temperament of Catholic Priests Serving in England, Wales, and Ireland’, pp. 884–96 (study of 190 Catholic priests in England, Wales, and Ireland who completed the ‘Coronavirus, Church, and You’ survey in 2020):
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2021.2017420>
- Christopher Alan Lewis, John Hopkins Burgess, and Leslie Francis, ‘Psychological Type Profile of Ministers of Word and Sacrament within the United Reformed Church (URC)’, pp. 927–30 (study of 93 URC ministers):
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2022.2037536>

Other recent open access articles in academic journals

The following open access articles have also been noted:

- Nadia Beider, ‘Religious Residue: The Impact of Childhood Religious Socialization on the Religiosity of Nones in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden’, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 74, No. 1, January 2023, pp. 51–70; drawing on data from the 1998, 2008, and 2018 International Social Survey Program religion modules, the author compares lifelong nones (who were never religiously affiliated) with disaffiliates (raised in a religious tradition they subsequently rejected), finding the latter exhibit more religiosity (measured on four indicators) than the former due to ‘religious residue’ from childhood, and predicting (in consequence) that secularization will gather momentum:
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-4446.12982> [open access]
- Humeyra Guleryuz Erken, Leslie Francis, and Ursula McKenna, ‘Love for Allah and Love for Self: Exploring the Connection between Religious Affect and Self-Esteem among Muslim Adolescents in England’, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2023, pp. 99–109; the authors demonstrate that, after controlling for personal and psychological factors, there was a significant positive association between religious affect and self-esteem among 919 self-identified Muslim adolescents aged 11–14 attending secondary schools in England:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2021.2018215> [open access]
- Steve Bruce and David Voas, ‘Secularization Vindicated’, *Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 3, March 2023, article 301, 13 pp.; a concise and robust restatement of the evidence for secularization, covering the UK, the rest of Europe, and the USA, and with special reference to quantitative data:
<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/3/301> [open access]

NEW DATASETS

Religion and politics: two UK home nation election datasets, 2021

The UK Data Service has released datasets for the election studies conducted for elections to the devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales in 2021, each containing a question about

religious affiliation that can be utilized to calculate religious breaks for political and more general questions covered by the surveys. Details are as follows:

- SN 9062: Scottish Election Study, 2021, for which 4,524 adults aged 16 and over in Scotland were interviewed online by YouGov between 7 April and 27 May 2021, in two waves, before and after the Scottish Parliament election on 5 May 2021; <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9062>
- SN 9063: Welsh Election Study, 2021, for which 4,937 adults aged 18 and over in Wales were interviewed online by YouGov between 19 March and 23 May 2021, in three waves (pre-election, campaign, and post-election) relating to the Senedd election on 6 May 2021; <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9063>

Release of World Values Survey wave 7 (2017–22) datasets

The final version (5.0) of the World Values Survey wave 7 datasets and documentation has been released, embracing 94,278 respondents aged 16 and over in 64 countries and territories between 2017 and 2022. There are separate datasets for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, where fieldwork (overseen by Ipsos MORI) was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, eventually taking place between 1 March and 7 September 2022 (with disruptions), by a combination of face-to-face, online, postal, and video interview. In total, 2,609 interviews were achieved in Britain (representing a 32% response) and 447 in Northern Ireland. The questionnaire covered numerous topics relating to religion or morality, the specifically religion-related ones asked in Britain (further questions were sometimes asked in other countries) being:

Q6	Importance of religion in respondent's life
Q15	Importance of children being encouraged to learn religious faith at home
Q23	Dislike for people of a different religion as neighbours
Q62	Trust for people of another religion
Q64	Confidence in the Churches
Q94	Active/inactive membership of church or religious organizations
Q160	Agreement that we depend too much on science and not enough on faith
Q164	Importance of God in respondent's life
Q165	Belief in God
Q166	Belief in life after death
Q167	Belief in hell
Q168	Belief in heaven
Q169	Agreement that, whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right
Q170	Agreement that the only acceptable religion is the respondent's religion
Q171	Frequency of attendance at religious services
Q172	Frequency of prayer
Q173	Self-assessed religiosity
Q289	Religious denomination

Access to all datasets (in a variety of formats) and world and country-specific documentation is available at:

- <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>

Thanks are due to Ben Clements for alerting BRIN colleagues to this release.

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Village, anti-Semitism, attendance at religious services, Baptist Union of Great Britain, British Journal of Sociology, British versus Muslim identity, cathedrals, census of population, Channel 4, Christopher Alan Lewis, Church of England, confidence in Churches, coronavirus, Covid-19, David Graham, David Voas, education, elections, employment, England and Wales, First Minister of Scotland, First Minister of Wales, Gallup International Association, Gareth Garland, Gaza, Gen Z, God, health, heaven, hell, housing, Humeyra Guleryuz Erken, Hyphen, importance of religion in life, importance of teaching Religious Studies, influence of religion on world, influence of religious leaders, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, International Social Survey Program, Ipsos MORI, Islamophobia, Israel, Jews, John Hopkins Burgess, Jonathan Boyd, Journal of Beliefs and Values, Kate Forbes, Leslie Francis, life after death, media coverage of Muslims, Mental Health Religion and Culture, Muslim Census, Muslim women, Muslimah Sports Association, Muslims, Nadia Beider, Office for National Statistics, ORB International, ordained ministry, politicians voting according to personal religious beliefs, prayer, Prime Minister, psychological type profile, religion and politics, Religions, religious affiliation, religious belief as bar to high political office, religious census, religious festivals, religious nones, religious prejudice, religious socialization, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, Savanta ComRes, science and religion, Scotland, Scottish National Party, Scottish Parliament, secularization, self-assessed religiosity, self-esteem, sport, Senedd, Steve Bruce, suicide, Sunday trading, Techne UK, The Express, time-off to celebrate Eid, Tomos ap Sion, UK Data Service, United Reformed Church, Ursula McKenna, Wales, World Values Survey, YouGov