

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Coronation blues: can King Charles III still enthuse his people about his coronation?

We may not have witnessed one for seventy years, but the prospect of the King's coronation at Westminster Abbey on 6 May 2023 is not exciting everybody in Britain. This was revealed in a YouGov daily poll conducted among an online sample of 3,070 adults on 13 April 2023.

Respondents were asked two questions, the first being: 'How much do you care about the forthcoming coronation of King Charles?' Just 9% said 'a great deal', with a further 24% answering 'a fair amount'. However, almost two-thirds said either 'not very much' (35%) or 'not at all' (29%), with the proportion peaking at 75% among the under-25s and Labour voters, and 80% in Scotland. Full breaks by demographics are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/04/13/b7aff/1>

The sample was then asked: 'How likely are you to watch King Charles' coronation and/or take part in celebrations surrounding it?' Almost half (46%) replied that they were either very likely (19%) or fairly likely (27%) to do so, but the plurality still said they were either not very likely (20%) or not at all likely (28%) to be watching or otherwise celebrating. This plurality of 48% was transformed into a substantial majority with the under-25s (59%) and in Scotland (70%). Demographics can be viewed at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/04/13/b7aff/2>

The weakness of Scottish engagement with the coronation was further underlined in another YouGov study, undertaken among 1,032 adults in Scotland on 17–20 April 2023. Asked 'How much do you care about the forthcoming coronation of King Charles?', almost three-quarters of interviewees answered either 'not very much' (31%) or 'not at all' (41%), with one-quarter saying 'a great deal' (6%) or 'a fair amount' (19%). Data tables are at:

- https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/xfaufs6rcp/InternalResults_230420_Scotland_Royals.pdf

In a third YouGov survey, for which 4,246 Britons were interviewed online on 18 April 2023, the majority view (51%) was that the government should not fund the coronation, just 32% thinking it should, with 18% undecided. Demographics are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/entertainment/survey-results/daily/2023/04/18/25178/3>

As for other pollsters, according to the Savanta ComRes weekly omnibus, quoted in a blog on the agency's website on 27 April 2023, '41% of the UK plan to watch the Coronation live on TV and, of those watching, 82% plan to watch at home; 10% at a pub, bar or big screen location; and 8% at a street party—with 18–26s much more likely to be out in a public place.' A somewhat earlier investigation by Deltapoll, on behalf of *Mail Online*, for which 1,569 Britons were questioned on 24–27 March 2023, reported that 50% at that stage planned to watch the coronation on television, while 36% did not and 14% were unsure; full data tables are available at:

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

Mourning Queen Elizabeth II: Bible Society report derived from YouGov polling

The Bible Society has published *Mourning Elizabeth: Christianity and the Bible in the Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II*, by Rhiannon McAleer and Rob Barward-Symmons (2023, 103 pp., ISBN: 9780564034437, e-book, open access). It is mainly based on an online poll by YouGov among 3,035 adults aged 18 and over in England and Wales conducted on 18–28 October 2022, in the aftermath of the death and funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September that year. The report does not present an exhaustive analysis of the survey results, but quite a lot of data are included, both in the text and in the numerous charts. In terms of breaks by religion, it is revealed that favourability towards the monarchy and the late Queen was greater among Christians than religious nones (largely a function of the different age profiles of the two groups) and among churchgoers than non-churchgoers. Queen Elizabeth's Christian faith was notably influential on churchgoers, 56% of whom said her life positively affected how they saw Christianity, 48% how they saw the Church, and 41% how they saw the Bible. A sub-sample of 2,246 individuals who had engaged with the funeral events in some way was questioned about their perceptions of the Bible readings and the Christian language and imagery of the proceedings. More generally, the full sample was asked whether a state royal event, such as a wedding or funeral, should be wholly Christian, 31% agreeing, 21% disagreeing, and 48% being neutral or undecided, few wishing to see the incorporation of elements from other faiths (16%) or for it to be wholly secular (15%), albeit only 37% wanted it to feature the Bible. In terms of their own funeral, the plurality (44%) wished it to be fully secular, with only 12% desiring a fully Christian funeral and a further 18% one with some Christian elements. The report is available at:

- https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/news/news_articles/2023_april/queen_report_01.pdf

Necessity to believe in God to be moral and have good values? Most don't think so

Three-quarters (76%) of the UK population do not think that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, while only 23% deem it necessary. This is according to the latest release of findings from the Spring 2022 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, fielded by telephone in the UK among 1,313 adults aged 18 and over between 14 February and 15 April 2022. Even among the sub-sample of religiously affiliated individuals, the majority (63%) in the UK did not consider it necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, the proportion among religiously unaffiliated rising to 95%. The question was put to samples in seventeen other countries besides the UK. Toplines (including trend data) can be accessed via Pew's press release at:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/04/20/many-people-in-u-s-other-advanced-economies-say-its-not-necessary-to-believe-in-god-to-be-moral/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England attendance in October 2022

The Church of England Diocese of Oxford has published a 16-page report by Bev Botting, Ken Eames, and Bob Jackson, *Church Attendance in October 2022: Post-Covid-19 Trends, Patterns, and Possibilities*. It is based on the Statistics for Mission attendance data for 1,139 churches in the Dioceses of Canterbury, Chester, Guildford, Oxford, and Leeds in October 2019 and October 2022, equivalent to 7.5% of all churches in the Church of England. Onsite

average weekly attendance in October 2022 had recovered to 78% of the pre-pandemic (October 2019) level, a modest improvement on the 71% figure for 2021 (in 2020, it was only 38%). Factoring in attendance at online services provided by parish churches raised the 2022 proportion to 89% of the 2019 level, which was lower than the 93% achieved in 2021 (reflecting diminishing provision of online services). A small addition for attendance at online services provided by cathedrals and other major places of worship may have lifted the overall attendance to just over 90% of the 2019 statistic. Nine explanations are advanced for why a full recovery to pre-Covid attendance has not yet happened (pp. 7–11). The report is at:

- <https://oxford.anglican.org/post-covid-19-trends-patterns-and-possibilities.php>

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England cathedral statistics, 2022

Last month (*Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 90), we reported on the Church of England's official *Cathedral Statistics* for 2021, noting a relatively slow recovery in attendances and visitor numbers from the depths of the pandemic in 2020. This month, there are grounds for 'cautious optimism' in respect of visitors for 2022, according to data collated by the Association of English Cathedrals, albeit covering only twenty-four Anglican cathedrals and Westminster Abbey. These suggest a growth of 197% in cathedral visitors, from 2.9m in 2021 to 5.7m in 2022, with Westminster Abbey climbing from 3m to 6.8m (up by 220%). The Association's press release can be viewed at:

- <https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/visitor-numbers-on-the-rise/>

Death and dying in the UK: new report from Theos and Susanna Wesley Foundation

Ashes to Ashes: Beliefs, Trends, and Practices in Dying, Death, and the Afterlife, by Marianne Rozario and Lia Shimada (London: Theos, 2023, 90 pp., ISBN: 9781838255954, open access e-book) is the result of a research collaboration between Theos and the Susanna Wesley Foundation. It is based upon a literature review, analysis of pre-existing polling data, and interviews with thirty-three experts and thirty-one participants in six focus groups between June and November 2022. Polling data are dispersed throughout the report, but BRIN readers may be especially interested in chapter 4 on 'Afterlife' (pp. 60–8), which juxtaposes poll findings with qualitative data from the interviews. Chapter 5 (pp. 69–83) concerns the role of Churches and faith communities in death and dying. The report can be downloaded via the link embedded in the Theos press release at:

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2023/04/12/ashes-to-ashes-beliefs-trends-and-practices-in-dying-death-and-the-afterlife>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Census, 2021, England and Wales: new reports and data

The Office for National Statistics has published three further sets of results from the 2021 population census of England and Wales, each of which includes breaks by religious affiliation.

Profile of the Older Population Living in England and Wales in 2021 and Changes since 2011 includes data on older people (sub-divided 65–74, 75–84, and 85+) by religion at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/profile-of-the-older-population-living-in-england-and-wales-in-2021-and-changes-since-2011>

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data Combining Multiple Variables, England and Wales: Census, 2021 includes data for gender identity by religion and sexual orientation by religion at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-data-combined-multiple-variables-england-and-wales-census-2021>

Unpaid Care and Protected Characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021 includes data on the incidence of unpaid care by religious affiliation at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/unpaid-care-and-protected-characteristics-england-and-wales-census-2021>

Meanwhile, with one eye on the imminent local elections on 4 May 2023 and on a general election in 2024, we should note that the House of Commons Library has published a new data dashboard, *Constituency Data: Religion, 2021 Census* at:

- <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-religion/>

Government engagement with faith: publication of *The Bloom Review*

In October 2019, the Government announced the appointment of an Independent Faith Engagement Adviser (Colin Bloom) to make recommendations to the then Secretary of State for Communities on how government should engage with faith groups. A call for evidence was launched in November 2020, which received more than 21,000 responses (not necessarily statistically representative of the faith landscape of the UK), which were analysed by the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion at the University of Birmingham. The process has now culminated in the publication of *The Bloom Review: Does Government 'Do God?' An Independent Review into how Government Engages with Faith* (extending to 159 pp. or approximately 60,000 words). The topics covered are: faith literacy in government; faith in education; faith in prison and on probation; faith in the UK armed forces; faith-based extremism; faith-based exploitation; and religious marriage. The report is not substantively quantitative in nature but draws upon a range of statistics collected and published by government and non-governmental research agencies (all meticulously footnoted) or derived from the responses to the consultation. Among the headline findings from the latter were that 84% of respondents had a positive opinion of the role of faith and religion in society but that 53% believed that freedom of religion or belief is under threat in the UK, this view being disproportionately articulated by Christians (68%). The impartiality of the review has been questioned by secularists and humanists, while even Bloom himself acknowledged that 'the qualitative and anecdotal nature of the evidence often represents opinion rather than fact' and 'is therefore not infallible' (p. 16). The review, which makes twenty-two recommendations to government, can be accessed at:

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Three recent open access publications

An increasing proportion of academic research on religion is now being published on an open access basis. Recent examples include the following:

Racism and Ethnic Inequality in a Time of Crisis: Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey, edited by Nissa Finney, James Nazroo, Laia Bécaries, Dharmi Kapadia, and Natalie Shlomo (Bristol: Policy Press, 2023, xiv + 234 pp., including 55 figures and 24 tables, ISBN: 9781447368861, e-book open access); drawing on the ESRC-funded EVENS survey, conducted online and by telephone between February and November 2021 (when the shadow of Covid-19 still loomed large), the book compares the experiences of a non-probability sample of 14,221 adults aged 18 and over from twenty ethnic minority groups (including Jewish) in Britain and white British people, in relation to ethnic identities, racism and racial discrimination, health and wellbeing, housing and place, work and employment, socio-economic circumstances, and political participation and Black Lives Matter, and with some reference to religious variables (summarized on pp. 42–6):

- <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/display/book/9781447368861/9781447368861.xml>

Ryan McKay, Will Gervais, and Colin Davis, “‘So Help Me God’? Does Oath Swearing in Courtroom Scenarios Impact Trial Outcomes?’, *British Journal of Psychology* [early view], 3 April 2023, 24 pp.; the authors reported on three studies of British citizens and residents, with a combined total of 3,177 participants, revealing that jurors in mock trials who themselves had sworn a religious oath to give truthful evidence discriminated against defendants who took the secular option of affirmation:

- <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjop.12651>

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, ‘Lockdown Worship in the Church of England: Predicting Affect Responses to Leading or Accessing Online and in-Church Services’, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2023, pp. 280–96; drawing on data supplied by 2,017 self-selecting Anglicans (clergy and laity) from the online ‘Covid-19 and Church-21’ survey, the authors explored the experiences of those leading and those accessing online (pre-recorded and live-streamed) and in-church services in the Church of England between January and July 2021, concluding that online worship was less rewarding than in-church worship, both for those leading and those accessing worship, and that pre-recorded services were especially poorly received:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2022.2101087>

NEW DATASET

UK Data Service, SN 9072: British Social Attitudes Survey, 2021

The British Social Attitudes Survey has been conducted annually, except for two years, since 1983, and until 2019 always by means of face-to-face interviews, supplemented by self-completion questionnaire. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a switch to online and (opt-in) telephone interviewing in 2020 and 2021, with a consequential substantial reduction in the household response rate (estimated at 14.2% in 2021). However, the traditional religion questions (on self-assigned religious affiliation and self-reported attendance at religious services) have been retained. The sample comprised 6,250 adults aged 18 and over living in private households in Britain, who were interviewed by NatCen Social Research between 16 September and 31 October 2021. For a description of the dataset, including a link to the interview schedule, see the catalogue entry at:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9072>

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Afterlife, Andrew Village, Association of English Cathedrals, Bev Botting, Bible, Bible Society, Bloom Review, Bob Jackson, British Journal of Psychology, British Social Attitudes Survey, cathedrals, census of population, Christian faith, church attendance, Church of England, Colin Bloom, Colin Davis, coronation, coronavirus, Covid-19, death, Deltapoll, Dharmi Kapadia, dying, England and Wales, ethnic inequality, EVENS, Evidence for Equality National Survey, funerals, gender identity, God, government engagement with faith, House of Commons Library, Independent Faith Engagement Adviser, James Nazroo, Jews, Journal of Beliefs and Values, Ken Eames, King Charles III, Laia Bécarea, Leslie Francis, Lia Shimada, Marianne Rozario, monarchy, morality and good values, Natalie Shlomo, NatCen Social Research, Nissa Finney, Office for National Statistics, older population, online services, parliamentary constituencies, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Center, Policy Press, Queen Elizabeth II, racism, religious affiliation, Rhiannon McAleer, rites of passage, Rob Barward-Symmons, Ryan McKay, Savanta ComRes, Scotland, sexual orientation, state royal events, Susanna Wesley Foundation, swearing of oaths, Theos, trials, UK Data Service, unpaid care, visitors, Will Gervais, YouGov