

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 95 – August 2023

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## OPINION POLLS

### Is the UK a Christian country? Perceptions of the general public

Do we live in a Christian country? The question (or variants thereon) has been sporadically posed by pollsters in national surveys since 1965 (the findings are conveniently brought together in table 130 of Clive Field's *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970–2020*). Late on 29 August 2023, *The Times* published online the first tranche of results from its poll of Church of England priests, one of the questions being whether Britain could or could not be described as a Christian country (see the write-up under 'Faith Organization Studies', below). The publicity generated seems to have prompted YouGov to run a snap poll on 30 August among an online sample of 5,944 adult Britons, asking 'Do you think the UK is a Christian country?' In reply, 34% said that it is (the lowest proportion being 30% among women and Labour voters, and the highest 41% among Conservatives), with 46% overall clear that the UK is not a Christian country (peaking at 50% of Labour voters and the under-25s), and 20% unsure. Data are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/survey-results/daily/2023/08/30/a404f/2>

### YouGov trackers: influence of religion, belief in god(s), Sunday trading laws

YouGov continues to track public attitudes in Britain towards a select number of religion-related topics. The latest online polls are as follows (with breaks available for demographics in each case):

*Religion's influence on the world*, 2 August 2023, N = 2,002: the majority (56%) of Brits continues to believe that religion on the whole has a negative influence on the world, with just 21% thinking it has a positive influence, and 24% unsure or preferring not to say:

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

*Belief in god(s)*, 9 August 2023, N = 1,958: opinions remain fairly stable, with 29% believing there is a god or gods, 24% disbelieving in a god or gods but believing in some sort of spiritual greater power, 37% disbelieving in any kind of god(s) or spiritual greater power, and 11% undecided:

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

*Sunday trading laws*, 5–7 August 2023, N = 1,747: the majority (57%) of Brits still considers that, notwithstanding the restrictions laid down by legislation in 1994, shops should be allowed to open for as long as they want on Sundays in England and Wales, with only 26% in favour of adhering to the statutory upper limit of six hours, and even less (11%) opposed to any Sunday opening of shops at all:

- [https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/b5jsr68bkw/P\\_Main\\_Political\\_Tracker\\_Survey\\_Rotatio\\_n9\\_sr\\_21.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/b5jsr68bkw/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotatio_n9_sr_21.pdf)

### Utility of religious education in schools

'Britain wants personal finance lessons to replace religious studies on the school curriculum', according to one reading of the results of a OnePoll survey of 2,000 adults, conducted online

for Discounts for Teachers in June 2023. Moreover, 28% of respondents identified religious education as the least useful subject currently taught in schools, with 26% advocating its removal from the curriculum, albeit drama (13%) and psychology (10%) were even more popular candidates for replacement. English (49%) and mathematics (48%) were deemed the most useful subjects for adult life. Detailed information about this survey seems not to be available on the internet, and the findings above have been taken from a post on the Prolific North website at:

- <https://www.prolificnorth.co.uk/news/replace-religion-life-skills-school-curriculum-says-poll/>

### **Perceptions of the United States as more religious than other wealthy nations**

In a further release of data from Pew Research Center's Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey, the plurality (44%) of UK respondents considered the USA to be about as religious a place to live as other wealthy nations, compared with a global median of 41%. However, 36% in the UK judged the USA to be more religious than other wealthy nations, significantly above the global median of 23%, while 18% deemed it less religious (the median being 26%). In reality, the USA still outperforms other wealthy countries on several religious indicators, including the proportion of people rating religion as very important in their lives (41% in the USA and 21% in the UK). For further information, read the blog at:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/07/31/the-us-is-not-widely-seen-as-highly-religious/>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### ***The Times* survey of Church of England priests**

At the end of July, *The Times* launched an online survey of 5,000 Church of England priests with English addresses, whose names had been selected at random from *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. This was the first major poll of Anglican clergy opinion since YouGov's study on behalf of Linda Woodhead in 2014. *The Times* received 1,486 replies during the course of August (equivalent to a 29.7% response), although its analysis has focused on the 1,185 of them who were still actively serving as priests. Initially, no mention was made of whether the data had been weighted to reflect the profile of the whole population of Church of England priests (and thus help mitigate non-response bias).<sup>1</sup> The reporter in the *Church Times* (1 September 2023, pp. 2–3) also observed: 'there appeared to be no checks on who completed the survey.' Somewhat belatedly, *The Times* itself (2 September 2023, p. 34) explained that it 'worked closely with academics and polling experts to devise the survey' and that it 'followed the same methodology used by YouGov and the University of Lancaster for the last survey of Church of England priests in 2014 and received a similar number of responses. The age and sex of our respondents tallied extremely closely with the overall breakdown for the church's entire body of active priests'.

The first tranche of findings was released in a series of article by Kaya Burgess (Religious Affairs Correspondent) and Ryan Watts published in *The Times* on 30 August 2023. The headlines of these articles in the newspaper's print edition<sup>2</sup> give some flavour of the outcomes:

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection, we may note the letter to the editor published in *The Times*, 1 September 2023, p. 24 from Tom Watts, a self-described ex-mathematician-turned-clergyman, and a respondent to the survey, who urged caution in interpreting the results. Alluding to the response rate, he affirmed: 'It is likely that your methodology favoured those with strongly held opinions, who were willing to dedicate more than 20 minutes to voicing them through the questionnaire.'

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that publication dates, headlines, and text may vary between online and print editions of newspapers, and headlines, text, and pagination between different print editions.

‘Britain isn’t a Christian nation now, say clergy’ (front page), ‘Clergy want to be allowed to marry same-sex couples’ (p. 8), ‘Slave-era statues “should stay but links must be explained”’ (p. 8), ‘A third have considered quitting’ (p. 9), ‘Eight in ten priests would back a woman becoming archbishop’ (p. 9), and – a leader article – ‘Behind the times’, referring to the Church of England (p. 27). Predictably, given that sexual ethics have divided Anglican views for decades past, there has been considerable media attention paid to attitudes expressed by priests on these matters, with 62.6% wanting the Church to drop its opposition to premarital sex and 64.5% rejecting the teaching that homosexual practice is incompatible with scripture. On other issues, a similar proportion (66.7%) thought that church attendance would continue to fall over the next ten years, while 62.9% favoured phasing out the system that allows parishes to reject women priests or the oversight of a female bishop.

The second tranche of results was published in three articles in *The Times* of 31 August 2023 (p. 14). It found that: 67.8% of clergy supported the government’s proposed ban on conversion therapy; a majority continued to oppose the legalization of assisted dying, although 35.5% were in favour; 60.1% endorsed some form of reform in the arrangements for the 26 seats for Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords, albeit only 6.7% wanted the seats abolished altogether; and 65.0% were not confident that the Church of England would achieve its goal of reaching net zero by 2030.

The third tranche of results, in *The Times* of 2 September 2023 (p. 34), comprised a single article by Burgess and two of the newspaper’s political reporters, headlined ‘Tories backed by only 13% of Anglican priests’, revealing that 36.1% of them would vote Labour in a general election tomorrow and 17.9% Liberal Democrat. In the 2016 referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union, 75.4% of respondents had voted ‘remain’ and just 18.8% ‘leave’. Four-fifths (80.8%) of priests were opposed to the government’s policy of deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda, with 89.2% deeming it appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury (Justin Welby) to publicly criticize government policies. In general, 62.0% considered Welby to be doing a good job and 34.0% a bad job.

### **Three recent reports from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research**

Staff at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) seemingly do not take much of a summer holiday, since they have recently published three important new reports in quick succession, as follows.

David Graham, *Assessment of the 2021 Census Data on Haredi (Strictly Orthodox) Jewish Children in England: Technical Paper* (21 July 2023, 10 pp.) compares the census with birth announcements and school census data:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/assessment-2021-census-data-haredi-strictly-orthodox-jewish-children-england>

Jonathan Boyd and Carli Lessof, *What Do Jews in the UK Think about Israel’s Leaders and its Future?* (1 August 2023, 6 pp.) summarizes opinions voiced in waves 3 (November-December 2022) and 4 (April-May 2023) of JPR’s online research panel:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/what-do-british-jews-think-about-israels-leaders-and-its-future>

Daniel Staetsky, *Intermarriage of Jews and Non-Jews: The Global Situation and its Meaning* (1 August 2023, 20 pp.) analyses data from twelve countries, including a 2016 survey in the UK:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/intermarriage-jews-and-non-jews-global-situation-and-its-meaning>

### **Anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, January–June 2023**

The Community Security Trust recorded 803 anti-Semitic incidents across the UK between January and June 2023, a decrease of 2.9% on the number for the equivalent period in 2022. There were more than one hundred incidents in each of the six months, and around 150 in May and June. Of these 803, 26.2% occurred online (two-thirds of them on Twitter) and the remainder offline. More than four-fifths (82.9%) of all incidents took the form of abusive behaviour, and 9.2% involved assault. The majority (55.7%) occurred in Greater London. The approximate age of the offender was noted in 415 cases, and in 24.8% of this sub-set it was a person under the age of eighteen years. The 32-page report, including (on p. 31) annual trend data back to 2012, can be found at:

- <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Antisemitic%20Incidents%20Report%20Jan-June%202023.1690818479.pdf>

### **British Muslims' charitable giving**

Muslims give an estimated £500m per annum to charity in the UK according to Lukman Ali and Baris Varli, *British Muslims Charitable Giving Report: Observing Trends and Behaviours, 2021–2022* (London: Muslim Charities Forum, 2023, 28 pp.). The report's findings derive from data collated during the month of Ramadan over the past two years, this being the time when Muslims usually increase their charitable giving. It is acknowledged (p. 7) that, while the methodology (two online surveys of self-selecting samples of a total of just 249 respondents, described on p. 9) 'does not offer an analysis that is fully representative of the British Muslim population, it provides an informative, preliminary evidence base which can be used to inform practice and further research in this field'. The report can be downloaded from:

- <https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/resources/british-muslims-charitable-giving-report/>

Meanwhile, the National Zakat Foundation UK's 60-page *Impact Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2022* has revealed that, during that period, £5.57m in Zakat was distributed to 17,131 people in need across the UK, 86% of it through the hardship fund and lesser amounts through the housing and work fund and education fund. In the eleven years since the Foundation began, it has supported over 59,000 people and distributed £31.7m in Zakat. Zakat or almsgiving is one of the five pillars of Islam and thus mandatory for Muslims. The report is available at:

- <https://nzf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A200-NZF-Annual-Report-and-Financial-Statements-31-December-2022-Charity-Commission-Signatures-removed.pdf>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **Extremism in Scotland: new evidence of public attitudes**

The 111–page report *Understanding Extremism in Scotland: Public Perceptions and Experiences* was prepared for the Scottish Government by Diffley Partnership and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. It is based upon a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, the former comprising an online and telephone survey by Survation of 2,071 residents of Scotland aged 16 and over between 9 and 25 May 2022, and the latter five online focus groups between 24 June and 2 July 2022. A wide interpretation of 'extremism' was permitted, including religion and sectarianism, although 'Islamism' was not specifically referenced in the questionnaire. Some answers were cross-tabulated by religious belonging. The report (one of a series of seven

released on 27 July 2023 and designed to improve understanding of extremism and Prevent delivery in Scotland) is available at:

- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/understanding-extremism-scotland-public-perceptions-experiences/>

### **Religion of civil servants**

The Cabinet Office has published a dataset on *Civil Service Employment by Religion or Belief, Department, Responsibility Level, and Region*, as at 31 March 2023. It covers civil servants in England as well as those in the Welsh Government, Scottish Government, and Northern Ireland Office. Of the total headcount of 519,780 civil servants, 367,140 had declared a religion or belief. Of the latter, 44.3% professed to be Christians, 0.4% Buddhists, 1.8% Hindus, 0.3% Jews, 5.0% Muslims, 1.2% Sikhs, 4.6% of another religion, and 42.4% of no religion or belief. The dataset comprises two tables, each showing religious allegiance for civil servants in each government department, table 1 being arranged by responsibility level and table 2 by region. The dataset is available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/civil-service-employment-by-religion-or-belief-department-responsibility-level-and-region-2023>

### **Census 2021, England and Wales: overcrowding and under-occupancy by religion**

The latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) report and dataset for the 2021 census of England and Wales concerned *Overcrowding and Under-Occupancy by Household Characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021*. In England, 22.5% of households where all people who answered the religion question identified as Muslim were overcrowded, which was more than five times more likely than all households (4.4%). In Wales, the number of overcrowded Muslim households was 14.8%, which was more than six times than for all households. By contrast, the highest proportions of households living in under-occupied accommodation in England were found among Jews (75.4%) and Christians (75.1%); in Wales, the figures for these two sets of religious households were, respectively, 80.6% and 83.8%. As the ONS observes, occupancy patterns may be influenced by the differing age profiles of religious groups. Indeed, their relatively elderly profiles is probably the single most important explanation of the Christian and Jewish results. For further information, go to:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/overcrowding-and-under-occupancy-by-household-characteristics-england-and-wales-census-2021>

### **Public examination results in Religious Studies, June 2023: A Levels and GCSEs**

The Joint Council for Qualifications has released provisional results from the June 2023 round of public examinations for secondary school students. Grades are not strictly comparable year on year, arising from methodological adjustments made as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, therefore, we report solely on the overall number of entries for Religious Studies (RS) in England and Wales (the examination regime is different in Scotland). At A Level, there were 15,438 entries for RS, a decline of 4.7% on 2022 (and of 23.8% in Wales), even though entries for all subjects rose by 2.2%, meaning that RS lost market share. Additionally, 1,943 students sat for AS Level RS across England and Wales, substantially (6.8%) less than in 2022. For the GCSE Full Course in RS, the absolute number of entrants was fairly stable, at 232,049 in 2023 (of which only 9,637 were in Wales), albeit this represented a fall of 0.14% since 2022 in the share of entries for all subjects. Full 2023 results can be found at:

- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### Recent articles by Leslie Francis and his research network

The research output of Leslie Francis continues to be so prolific that it is almost impossible to keep up with him. BRIN makes no claim to recording a full bibliography of his publications. Here we list a selection of recent journal articles and chapters that he has authored in collaboration with members of his research network.

Two papers report fresh findings from the ‘Covid-19 and Church-21’ survey, undertaken among a self-selecting sample in January-July 2021:

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, ‘God is in His Heaven, All’s Right with the World: Psychological Well-Being and Belief in Divine Control during the Third Covid-19 Lockdown among Anglican Clergy and Laity in England’, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 51, No. 2, June 2023, pp. 263–77, based upon a self-selecting sub-set of 1,841 Anglicans (laity and clergy) living in England:

- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00916471221149027> [open access]

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis, ‘The Effects of Spiritual Wellbeing on Self-Perceived Health Changes among Members of the Church of England during the Covid-19 Pandemic in England’, *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 62, No. 4, August 2023, pp. 2899–2915, based upon a self-selecting sub-set of 1,878 Anglicans (laity and clergy) living in England:

- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-023-01790-y> [open access]

Two other chapters and one article stem from fresh analysis of what are acknowledged to be ‘ageing data’, John Haley’s postal survey of British Methodist circuit ministers in May 2008: Leslie Francis, Andrew Village, and John Haley, ‘The Francis Burnout Inventory: Testing the Balanced Affect Model among Methodist Circuit Ministers in Great Britain’, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 33, 2023, pp. 90–101, based upon 803 respondents.

Leslie Francis, John Haley, and Ursula McKenna, ‘Psychological Type Profile of Methodist Ministers in Britain: Contributing to the Atlas of Clergy Type Tables’, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 33, 2023, pp. 102–25, based upon 931 respondents, reporting separately on male and female presbyters.

Leslie Francis, John Haley, and Ursula McKenna, ‘Work-Related Psychological Wellbeing and Conservative Christian Belief among Methodist Circuit Ministers in Britain: Distinguishing between Emotional Exhaustion and Satisfaction in Ministry’, *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 62, No. 3, June 2023, pp. 1636–1657, based upon 803 respondents:

- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-022-01637-y> [open access]

## NEW DATASET

### European Social Survey: release of CRONOS-2 dataset

The European Social Survey (ESS) has recently released the dataset for the CROss-National Online Survey-2 (CRONOS-2), which ESS describes as ‘the world’s first large scale, cross-national, probability-based input-harmonised web panel’. Funding was provided by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Fieldwork was conducted in twelve countries, including the UK, between November 2021 and March 2023, across six waves, two of which were country-specific in focus and four cross-national. One of the latter, wave 2 (fielded in the UK in October-November 2022, with 490 respondents),

contained a short module (questions 68–69) on religion, the results of which Ben Clements has kindly analysed for BRIN in Tables 1 and 2, below. Further information is available at:

- <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/singlenew.html?a=/about/news/essnews0161.html>

**Table 1 Importance of God in respondent’s life, UK, 2022**

Scale point	Weighted %	Unweighted N
0 - not at all important	34.9	157
1	7.2	32
2	6.6	34
3	7.2	38
4	4.8	24
5	9.3	45
6	4.0	15
7	3.9	22
8	5.8	31
9	1.7	9
10 - very important	14.4	64

Source: CROss-National Online Survey-2.

**Table 2 Truth in religion, UK, 2022**

Statement	Weighted %	Unweighted N
There is very little or no truth in any religion	32.7	136
There are some truths in many religions	50.5	261
There is truth only in one religion	2.9	11
Can't choose	13.9	62

Source: CROss-National Online Survey-2.

#### APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Andrew Village, anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, Archbishop of Canterbury, assisted dying, asylum seekers, Baris Varli, belief in god(s), Brexit, Cabinet Office, Carli Lessof, census of population, charitable giving, Christian country, church attendance, Church of England, civil servants, clergy, Community Security Trust, conversion therapy, coronavirus, Covid-19, Covid-19 and Church-21, CROss-National Online Survey-2, Daniel Staetsky, David Graham, Diffley Partnership, Discounts for Teachers, European Social Survey, extremism, Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, Haredi Jewish children, House of Lords, importance of God, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, intermarriage, Israel, John Haley, Joint Council for Qualifications, Jonathan Boyd, Journal of Psychology and Theology, Journal of Religion and Health, Justin Welby, Kaya Burgess, Leslie Francis, Lords Spiritual, Lukman Ali, Methodist Church, Methodist circuit ministers, Muslim Charities Forum, Muslims, National Zakat Foundation UK, net zero, Office for National Statistics, OnePoll, overcrowding, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Center, public examinations, religion’s influence on the world, religious affiliation, religious census, religious education, religious prejudice, Religious Studies, Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, same-sex marriage, Scotland, sectarianism, Sunday trading laws, Survation, The Times, truth in religion, under-occupancy, United States of America, Ursula McKenna, voting intention, wellbeing, YouGov, Zakat