

# Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources  
Number 96 – September 2023

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## OPINION POLLS

### **Majority of people of faith supportive of assisted dying according to two YouGov polls**

The majority (69%) of people of faith in England and Wales supports assisted dying becoming a legal option for terminally ill persons, according to the results of a YouGov poll of 1,844 adults aged 18 and over on 26–27 July 2023, commissioned by Dignity in Dying in connection with its new report *Time for Choice: The Truth about the UK's Ban on Assisted Dying*. The proportion in favour of assisted dying rose to 78% among respondents who described themselves as Church of England, Anglican, or Episcopal and was even 68% for Roman Catholics. Moreover, 58% of all self-identifying religious individuals said that they knew a loved one who had suffered at the end of life, with 38% believing the loved one would have considered assisted dying, had that option been legal and available in the UK. The Dignity in Dying press release can be found at:

- <https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/news/7-in-10-people-of-faith-would-support-legalising-assisted-dying/>

At the time of writing, full data tables from the England and Wales survey are not yet in the public domain, but hopefully they will be soon. However, the tables for the parallel poll in Scotland (also undertaken for Dignity in Dying among 1,084 adults on 25–31 July 2023) have already been posted to the YouGov website. In Scotland, 77% of people were in favour of assisted dying becoming legal in the country, including 84% of religious nones, 73% of Presbyterians/Church of Scotland, 61% of Roman Catholics, and 64% of all religious groups. The tables for this and the four other questions asked in the survey are available at:

- [https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/DignityInDying\\_Results\\_July23\\_Scotland\\_W\\_wltp5P.pdf](https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/DignityInDying_Results_July23_Scotland_W_wltp5P.pdf)

### **Importance of teaching Religious Studies at secondary school**

Religious Studies (RS) continues to be perceived as one of the least important subjects to teach at secondary school, according to YouGov's latest six-monthly tracker on the topic, undertaken among an online sample of 1,733 adult Britons on 9–11 September 2023. Just 8% of the public regarded it as very important to teach RS, peaking at 15% among Londoners, with a further 27% deeming it to be quite important. By contrast, three-fifths of respondents said that it was either not very important (33%) or not at all important (28%) to teach RS. Predictably, English (97%), mathematics (96%), and science (94%) topped the importance rankings by a wide margin. Full data tables are available at:

- [https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/z2f71lyf02/P\\_Main\\_Political\\_Tracker\\_Survey\\_Rotation\\_10\\_sr\\_2.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/z2f71lyf02/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation_10_sr_2.pdf)

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

Savanta's monthly poll on Westminster voting intentions and political attitudes continues to include a module on the public perception of various phobias as problems in the UK. Asked in the latest survey, conducted online across the UK on 15–17 September 2023, 14% of 2,255 adults regarded anti-Semitism as a big problem in the UK, 37% somewhat a problem, 23% not

really a problem, 8% not a problem at all, with 18% undecided. In the case of Islamophobia, 22% regarded it as a big problem, 36% as somewhat a problem, 19% as not really a problem, 10% as not a problem at all, with 13% unsure. In total, 51% viewed anti-Semitism as a problem, and 58% Islamophobia, both figures up by three points from when BRIN last reported on this tracker in March 2023. Full tables by demographics can be found at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-savanta-21-september-2023/>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### ***The Times* survey of Church of England priests (continuation)**

Further to the report in our last edition of *Counting Religion in Britain* (No. 95, August 2023), *The Times* has released some additional findings from its online poll of 1,486 Church of England priests in August 2023, its analysis focusing on the 1,185 of them who were still active. In *The Times* for 4 September 2023 (p. 10), readers were informed that: 71.0% of priests supported churches and cathedrals hosting more community events outside of service times, while 60.5% were confident that the Church of England's safeguarding system and policies were adequate.

*The Times* was very slow to publish details of the methodology used for the poll, and this left it open to some criticism, notably by Ian Paul on his *Psephizo* blog on 31 August 2023 at:

- <https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/what-do-anglican-clergy-think-about-christian-britain-sexuality-and-clergy-morale/>

At the eleventh hour, arguably even beyond it, Kaya Burgess, the journalist behind the project, posted on *The Times* website at 4 pm on 8 September an article entitled: 'How *The Times* Surveyed Church of England Priests', which provided some methodological enlightenment. Appended to this explanation were the topline results for all the questions included in the poll. Regrettably, neither the methodological detail nor the topline seem to have made it to print editions of the newspaper.

### **Evaluation of the Transforming Wigan project in the Church of England**

The Church of England's Diocese of Liverpool has recently published the report of an independent evaluation of the Transforming Wigan change management project, which was written by Kate Hutton of Intergras Consulting in May 2023 on the basis of a review of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. The project, supported by the Church Commissioners' Strategic Development Fund, ran from 2014 until 2021 (its final stages obviously disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic) and has now evolved into a team benefice called Church Wigan. It entailed a radical reorganization of the Deanery of Wigan, dissolving existing parishes and parochial church councils, resulting in some disaffection among existing church members and worshippers. The report acknowledges the various positive outcomes that have emerged from the project (for example, in enhancing team-working, establishing new worship communities, and engaging people in 'missional activities') but notes that it has failed to turn Church Wigan's finances around and to stem the decline in church attendance. The executive summary and full report are available via the links in the Diocese of Liverpool's press release at:

- <https://www.liverpool.anglican.org/we-publish-the-independent-review-into-the-transforming-wigan-project.php>

### **Methodist Church Statistics for Mission, 2022**

Further to the preliminary notification in *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 93 (June 2023), the Methodist Church of Great Britain has recently released the full set of reports for its 2022

membership statistics. Data are available at connexional, district, circuit, and individual church levels for: Methodist membership (2021, 2022); local ecumenical partnership membership (Methodists, total members); community roll (members, pastoral others, total); and recorded gains and losses (new members, other gains, in transfers, out transfers, other losses, deaths). No figures are reported for estimated average attendance at a typical Sunday or mid-week service; they were last published in detail for 2019. The 2022 reports can be found at:

- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/statistics-for-mission/2022-statistics-reports/>

### Church of Scotland enhances capacity for research and analysis

Dedicated positions in church statistics and research are few and far between in the UK. So, it is pleasing to report that the Church of Scotland is in the process of appointing a full-time and permanent research officer in the Office of Assembly Trustees in Edinburgh, in order to support the work of the Church Statistician (Fiona Tweedie) and the Head of Analysis and Programme Development (Catherine Skinner) across a variety of business streams. The closing date for applications was 19 September 2023.

### Pastoral statistics of the Catholic Church in Scotland

The *Catholic Directory for Scotland*, published for the Scottish Catholic hierarchy at the beginning of each calendar year by Burns Publishers of Glasgow, is the principal public domain source of statistical information about the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Table 1, below, summarizes some of the key performance indicators for the last four years, as recorded in the 2020–23 editions of the *Directory*.

**Table 1: Pastoral statistics of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, 2019–22**

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
Priests	605	592	569	569
Parishes	390	390	388	387
Churches and Mass centres	501	500	495	495
Mass attendance in November	127,003	38,356	72,724	
Estimated Catholic population	705,500	705,500	705,500	704,200

Source: *Catholic Directory for Scotland*.

Note: Mass attendance in 2020 was only returned for six of the eight dioceses in Scotland, and then not for all parishes.

### Latest publications from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) has recently published four research papers, the first two of them on UK Jews and education.

In an 11-page factsheet, Jonathan Boyd investigates *A Jewish or a Non-Jewish School: What Lies behind Parents' Decisions about how to Educate their Children?* at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/jewish-or-non-jewish-school-what-lies-behind-parents-decisions-about-how-educate-their>

Meanwhile, in a 'short read' entitled *And the Religious Group with the Highest Level of Educational Degree in England and Wales is ...*, David Graham unveils data from the 2021 census, indicating that 'Jews no longer lead the table of higher education achievers, even though the percentage of Jews achieving higher degrees continues to rise', at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/insights/and-religious-group-highest-level-educational-degree-england-and-wales>

The third paper (17 pp.) is by David Graham and Jonathan Boyd on *Conflict in Israel and Gaza: Heightened Feelings of Insecurity among Jews in the UK*, which is JPR's second report on the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, drawing upon data from the 2021 round (23 July-

1 September) of the JPR's own research panel of self-selecting and self-identifying Jews, and revealing that 73% of UK Jews believed they were being held responsible in some way by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government during the conflict; the report is available at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/conflict-israel-and-gaza-heightened-feelings-insecurity-among-jews-living-uk>

Finally, Carli Lessof has written another 'short read' on *Apples and Honey: Did the Jewish Community Bounce Back From Covis-19?*, drawing on successive waves of the JPR's research panel to investigate UK Jewish engagement with Rosh Hashana (the Jewish new year), and demonstrating that claimed in-person synagogue attendance at new year recovered from the low of 28.1% in 2020 to 58.1% in 2022 but remained below the pre-pandemic norm of 71.5%; the blog is available at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/insights/apples-and-honey-did-jewish-community-bounce-back-covid-19>

## OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

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

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has recently published a dataset of *Social Characteristics of International Migrants Living in England and Wales: Census 2021*, including (in worksheet 19) breaks by country of birth and religion (has a religious affiliation, no religion, and not answered) at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/socialcharacteristicsofinternationalmigrants>

A statistical bulletin and dataset have also been published by ONS for *Small Populations, England and Wales: Census 2021*, covering 43 such groups (albeit Alevis are the only population defined by religion thus far) at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/smallpopulationsenglandandwales/census2021>

## APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Alevis, anti-Semitism, assisted dying, Carli Lessof, Catholic Directory for Scotland, census of population, Church Commissioners' Strategic Development Fund, Church membership, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Church Wigan, clergy, coronavirus, Covid-19, David Graham, Deanery of Wigan, degree qualifications, Dignity in Dying, Diocese of Liverpool, feelings of insecurity, Gaza, Ian Paul, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Intergras Consulting, international migrants, Islamophobia, Israel, Jews, Jonathan Boyd, Kate Hutton, Kaya Burgess, Methodist Church, Muslims, Office for National Statistics, Psephizo, religious prejudice, Religious Studies, Roman Catholic Church, Rosh Hashana, Savanta ComRes, Scotland, secondary school subjects, small populations, Statistics for Mission, synagogue attendance, The Times, Transforming Wigan, YouGov