

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS

Global poll: faith and wellbeing—Gallup/Radiant Foundation research

Kaya Burgess, religious affairs correspondent of *The Times*, posted an online article on the newspaper's website on 9 October 2023 entitled 'Non-believers happier than the faithful—but only in the UK'. A version of the article also appeared in the print edition (p. 11) of the newspaper the following day under the variant heading of 'British non-believers "are happier than the faithful"'. The articles partially reported on the findings of 2012–22 Gallup World Poll data from 152 nations and territories (including the UK, classified as a 'less religious' country), which sought to establish correlations between the strength of religion (defined by answers to a single question on the importance of religion in personal daily life) and scores on nine measures of wellbeing outcomes (positive experience index, social life index, optimism index, community basics index, local economic confidence index, personal health index, and so forth). The key finding in terms of the UK was that, in the words of Burgess, 'Non-religious people in the UK have a more "positive experience" of life and enjoy stronger social networks than those with a deep faith, bucking a global trend where the reverse is usually true'. A similar headline ('UK believers "less positive"') also appeared in the *Methodist Recorder's* subsequent coverage of the poll (20 October 2023, p. 2). The Gallup/Radiant Foundation report, *Faith and Wellness: The Worldwide Connection between Spirituality and Wellbeing*, which contains an appendix showing two of the correlations country by country (the remaining ones are not in the public domain and thus BRIN is unable either to confirm or contradict *The Times's* reading of the data), but which also draws upon an extensive literature review and in-depth interviews with experts and practitioners, is available at:

- <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/512216/religion-spirituality-tools-better-wellbeing.aspx>

Global poll: trustworthiness of clergy/priests and other professions

The Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index, 2023 derives from a 31-country survey conducted via the Ipsos Global Advisor online platform between 26 May and 9 June 2023. In Great Britain, approximately 1,000 adults aged 21–74 were interviewed. Respondents were asked about the trustworthiness of various professions and groups, including clergy and priests, whom (on a five-point scale) 32% of Britons rated as trustworthy and 32% as untrustworthy, the remaining 36% being neutral. These figures compared with a global average of 27% and 40%, respectively, Indonesia being most positive about clergy and priests (61%) and Poland most negative (63%). The three most trustworthy professions in Britain were considered to be doctors (62%), scientists (59%), and teachers (54%). Topline data only are available at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/politicians-least-trusted-profession-while-doctors-most-trustworthy>

Israel-Hamas conflict: perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as problems

As we report in the next section, there has been a surge in both anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents in the UK since the brutal incursion by fighters from Hamas (proscribed as a terrorist organization by the UK Government) into Israel on 7 October 2023, murdering 1,400 Israelis and others and taking more than 200 hostage, and the subsequent intensive retaliatory strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza by Israel, which have resulted in the deaths of thousands of Palestinian civilians. The heightened tensions between and against Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK, which have manifested themselves in these anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents, have yet to have a dramatic impact on Savanta’s monthly tracker of the public’s perceptions of these two forms of religious prejudice and hatred in the UK, albeit there has been more shift in the anti-Semitism measure than for Islamophobia. Toplines from the past four months are shown in Tables 1 and 2, below, with full data from the October tracker available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-savanta-19-october-2023/>

The relative stability (taking sampling error into account) to this point of the Savanta tracker may be explained in part by the closeness of the fieldwork dates for the most recent study (on 13–15 October 2023) to the commencement of this latest phase of the Israel-Hamas conflict on 7 October; this was arguably too short an interval for any marked impact on public opinion to have occurred. It could also be said that perceptions of both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia were already at a fairly high level, even before the conflict started. However, another factor may be at play, also—according to five online YouGov polls fielded between 9 and 26 October 2023, British sympathies are very divided about the conflict. The proportion of adults sympathizing with the Israeli side was 21% on 9 October, falling only marginally to 19% on 26 October; and with the Palestinian side growing from 15% to 18% over the same period. Sympathizers with both sides equally rose from 20% to 32%, while the undecided reduced from 45% to 30%. These polls can be found at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/overview/survey-results>

Table 1: Perceptions of anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK, July–October 2023

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Big problem	16	15	14	17
Somewhat a problem	34	35	37	37
Not really a problem	25	25	23	21
Not a problem at all	7	9	8	8
Don’t know	18	17	18	18
<i>A problem</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Not a problem</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>28</i>

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Table 2: Perceptions of Islamophobia as a problem in the UK, July–October 2023

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Big problem	20	21	22	20
Somewhat a problem	35	35	36	37
Not really a problem	21	21	19	19
Not a problem at all	9	9	10	9
Don’t know	15	14	13	14
<i>A problem</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Not a problem</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>28</i>

Source: Savanta political tracker.

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Unite investigation into the wellbeing of faith workers

Faith workers across various denominations and religions are bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis, with 24% struggling to pay utility bills, 21% cancelling holiday plans, and 21% relying upon friends and family for support. So claims Unite, Britain and Ireland's largest trades union, on the basis of a survey into the wellbeing of 932 of its members who are employed as faith workers. Three-quarters (76%) of respondents also said they were regularly working more than their agreed/contracted hours, with 41% reporting they worked fifty hours or more a week, and 35% looking to leave their roles within the next year or two. Nine-tenths suffered from stress at work, and 76% from sleeplessness and continual tiredness arising from their work. Although the sample is unlikely to be representative of the entire population of UK faith workers, and was certainly disproportionately (72%) comprised of Church of England clergy, it does echo some of the findings about workloads and stress that have emerged from other, more scientific, studies among religious professionals in recent years. Unite's press release, with a link to the full report on its survey, can be found at:

- <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/october/faith-workers-bearing-the-brunt-of-cost-of-living-crisis>

Chinese Christianity in Britain: Bible Society report

The first significant Chinese Christian congregation was apparently established in Britain as recently as 1950, but Chinese Christianity has expanded rapidly in very recent years, largely in consequence of the influx of migrants from Hong Kong following the UK Government's introduction of a new immigration route for British National Overseas (BNO) status holders from the former colony on 31 January 2021. It is expected that, by the end of 2023, between 150,000 and 200,000 BNO visa holders from Hong Kong will have settled in the UK, many of whom will be Christians. In an excellent 62-page publication from the Bible Society, Yinxuan Huang provides a quantitative overview of *Chinese Christianity in Britain: A Booklet of Ten Vignettes*. This is based on research for a project, undertaken in partnership between the Bible Society and the London School of Theology, on 'The Bible and the Chinese Community in Britain'. The fieldwork comprised: a survey of 1,179 Chinese people in Britain, 54 interviews with leaders of Chinese Christian churches, and focus groups with Christian and non-Christian Chinese. Among other things, it has been found that the Chinese Christian community in Britain has increased by more than 25,000, or by 28.8%, from 2021 to 2023, making it, the booklet claims, by far the fastest growing sector of the UK Church. Although three-quarters of all Chinese Christians in Britain worship in Chinese churches, the post-2021 wave from Hong Kong is more likely to join non-Chinese churches, Methodist and Elim being especially favoured in terms of denominational churches. Chinese Christians are particularly active in church life and in private devotions (for example, 87% attend services weekly), and even a high proportion (a third to just under half) of the 65% of religiously unaffiliated Chinese in Britain believe in supernatural phenomena. The Bible Society press release, with embedded link to the report, is at:

- <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/chinese-church-is-the-fastest-growing-in-the-uk-report-finds/>

Israel-Hamas conflict: Institute for Jewish Policy Research briefings

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) has published a series of briefings and reflections that explore some of the ramifications for the UK Jewish community of the latest and most extensive phase of conflict between Israel and Hamas (proscribed as a terrorist

organization by the UK Government), which began on 7 October with a murderous Hamas incursion into Israel. Two of the four JPR papers have statistical interest.

Jonathan Boyd's 'How the Conflict in Israel and Gaza Affects Jews in the UK' examines trends in anti-Semitic incidents (showing they are most likely to occur during flare-ups in Gaza), the heightened sense of anxiety and insecurity among UK Jewry arising from such conflict, and the persistence of anti-Semitic attitudes and tropes. It is available to download at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/how-conflict-israel-and-gaza-affects-jews-uk-and-what-you-can-do-about-it>

In 'The Ties that Bind Jews in the UK to Israel', Carli Lessof reveals that, according to JPR's Jewish panel study in April-May 2023, 71% of UK Jews have family or relatives in Israel, giving breaks for sub-groups within the Jewish community. It can be found at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/insights/ties-bind-jews-uk-israel>

Israel-Hamas conflict: sudden and steep rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the UK

The Community Security Trust (CST) is providing regular updates on its blog page of the number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the UK since the widespread attacks on Israel launched on 7 October 2023 by Hamas, proscribed as a terrorist organization by the UK Government, within Israel, and since Israel inaugurated an intensive counter-offensive against Hamas targets in the Gaza strip. A terrible loss of life has ensued on both sides. CST's most recent blog post, dated 31 October 2023, recorded at least 893 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK since 7 October 2023, far more than the 803 in the first half of the year, 78% involving abusive behaviour but also including 94 direct threats and 40 assaults. The post can be found at:

- <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2023/10/31/antisemitic-incidents-31-october-update>

Israel-Hamas conflict: Islamophobic incidents in the UK

Tell MAMA has also been tracking on its website the increase in Islamophobic incidents in the UK since the renewed outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict on 7 October 2023. An initiative of Faith Matters, Tell MAMA was founded in 2012 to provide a not dissimilar reporting, monitoring, verification, support, and analytical service to that provided to the Jewish population by the Community Security Trust since 1984. Tell MAMA's most recent statement, recording 515 anti-Muslim incidents in the UK (247 offline and 268 online) between 7 and 29 October 2023, being a seven-fold increase over the same period in 2022, can be found at:

- <https://tellmamauk.org/515-anti-muslim-cases-reported-to-tell-mama-between-oct-7-29/>

Mention should also be made of Tell MAMA's recent book, published before the latest Israel-Hamas conflict. This is a veritable virtual tome of 168 double-column pages, *A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate: Tell MAMA Report*. This comprises: (1) a substantial executive summary (pp. 7–46); (2) a literature review (pp. 47–65); (3) a survey of anti-Muslim hate prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2012–19 (pp. 66–84); (4) a survey of anti-Muslim hate post-pandemic, 2020–21 (pp. 85–115); and (5) an overview of manifestations of anti-Muslim hate online (pp. 116–65). In chapters 3 and 4, there are numerous figures showing the growth in the number of verified offline or street-based anti-Muslim hate cases year-on-year to 2021, giving both totals and sundry disaggregations, but quantitative data about discrimination online are distributed throughout the text of chapter 5, without much visualization. The trajectory of verified cases, both offline and online, has been upwards over time, with then current peaks for offline in 2017 and online in 2013–14 (closely followed by 2020), but at least some of the growth will have reflected increasing awareness of Tell MAMA among the Muslim public and the greater

willingness to report cases. All in all, this is a somewhat dense work, and a shorter and snappier executive summary, with a couple of pages of key statistics appended, might have enabled Tell MAMA to get its key findings and recommendations across more effectively to a non-Muslim readership. The book is available for free download at:

- <https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/A-Decade-of-Anti-Muslim-Hate-TellMAMAREport.pdf>

Israel-Hamas conflict: impact on Muslim voting intentions in the UK

‘Complete rubbish’ and ‘a self-selected convenience sample gathered entirely through social media’ is how electoral expert Rob Ford summed up on Twitter/X the attempt by Muslim Census and MEND to ascertain the voting intentions of Muslims in the UK following the outbreak of the latest phase in the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Muslim Census poll, launched on 17 October 2023, was particularly designed to gauge the likely effect on the UK Muslim vote of the stances taken by the Conservative and Labour parties to the Israel-Hamas conflict that had erupted on 7 October, both political parties being perceived to have adopted a pro-Israel position. Muslim Census received over 30,000 responses, from Muslims in 580 of the UK’s 650 parliamentary constituencies. According to the results, the traditional Muslim vote for Labour had collapsed among the ‘sample’ since the 2019 general election, from 71% to 5%, with the Conservative vote also down from 9% to less than 1%. Overwhelmingly, the shift in voting intention away from the two main political parties was attributed to reactions to current events in Israel and Palestine. Independent candidates and the Green Party were beneficiaries of the changed political mindset of Muslims, but fully two-fifths were inclined not to vote at all in a general election ‘tomorrow’. Muslim Census has predicted ‘a watershed moment in British Muslim voting history’, but Ford has urged Muslim Census to take down its published data about the survey, on the grounds that they were not informative and were potentially harmful to political debate. However, at BRIN’s time of writing, the Muslim Census press release of 26 October 2023 was still publicly available to view and read at:

- <https://muslimcensus.co.uk/labour-losing-muslim-vote/>

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Police-recorded hate crimes in England and Wales, 2022–23

The Home Office has released a bulletin and dataset on *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023*. There were 145,214 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall, whose police force has implemented a new IT system), representing a 5.4% decrease on 2021–22. More than two-thirds of all hate crimes were racially motivated. At 9,387, the number of religious hate crimes in 2022–23 was a relatively small proportion of the total, but it had risen by 9.1% since 2021–22 and stood at its highest level since the time series was inaugurated in 2011–12. The perceived religion of the victim was given in approximately four-fifths of offences in 2022–23, Muslims (38.8%) and Jews (17.0%) being the likeliest targets. Full information is available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023>

NEW DATASET

Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Spring 2022

The survey was undertaken by Pew Research Center in eighteen countries including the UK, where 1,313 adults aged 18 and over were interviewed by mobile or landline telephone between 14 February and 15 April 2022. The questionnaire was relatively short, religion-related topics comprising: the importance of attending religious services regularly to being a good member of society; the necessity to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values; and the importance of religion in respondents' lives. Toplines and dataset are available at:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/dataset/spring-2022-survey-data/>

APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, Bible Society, Carli Lessof, Chinese Christianity, clergy and priests, Community Security Trust, faith workers, family ties with Israel, Gallup, Gallup World Poll, Gaza, Hamas, hate crimes, Home Office, Hong Kong, immigration, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index, Islamophobia, Islamophobic incidents, Israel, Israel-Hamas conflict, Israelis, Jonathan Boyd, Kaya Burgess, London School of Theology, MEND, Muslim Census, Muslims, Palestinians, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Center, police, politics, Radiant Foundation, religious prejudice, Rob Ford, Savanta ComRes, stress, Tell MAMA, terrorist organization, The Times, trustworthiness, Unite the union, voting intention, wellbeing, Yinxuan Huang, YouGov