

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
Number 101 – February 2024

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OPINION POLLS

Religious attitudes to assisted dying: newly released YouGov/Theos data

Assisted dying is a topic that tends to rise up and down the public agenda. It has gained additional prominence recently with the revelation by Esther Rantzen, the celebrated television personality, that she has joined the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland. To inform debate on the issue, Theos has now released the spreadsheet for the assisted dying module in the YouGov poll it commissioned on 19–21 July 2023 among an online sample of 2,569 UK adults. The particular interest of the module from a BRIN perspective is that it included breaks by religious affiliation and claimed frequency of attendance at religious services (which many polls about assisted dying omit). Respondents were asked whether adults should be legally allowed to seek assistance to end their lives under nine different circumstances. For the purpose of illustration, we cite the affirmative answers given for just one of these scenarios, terminal illness, which was supported by: 78% of the whole sample; 68% of all religious, 87% of non-religious, 70% of Christians, 76% of Anglicans, 68% of Roman Catholics, and 58% of non-Christians (cell sizes for other denominations and faiths being too small to be reliable); 43% of frequent attenders at religious services, 77% of infrequent attenders, and 87% of non-attenders. The data tables can be accessed via the link in Madeleine Pennington's Theos blog at:

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2024/01/23/a-matter-of-life-and-death-theos-polling-on-assisted-dying>

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: anti-Semitism and the Labour Party

Allegations and perceptions of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party bedevilled it during Jeremy Corbyn's period as leader, but they have resurfaced in the wake of the Israel-Gaza conflict, not least because of disquiet among some party members about the Labour leadership's refusal to back the international call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The issue boiled over during week-commencing 12 February 2024 when the current Labour leader, Keir Starmer, had to intervene (albeit not without some dithering) to remove two Labour Parliamentary candidates for their anti-Semitic views, one due to stand for the party in the then imminent Rochdale by-election (which Labour subsequently lost).

On behalf of *The Times*, YouGov conducted an online poll of 2,030 adult Britons on 14–15 February 2024 to gauge the public mood on the topic. Only two-fifths (41%) knew a lot or a fair amount about the Rochdale case, with 59% considering they knew not very much or nothing at all. Just 29% felt Starmer had acted well in his response to the allegations of anti-Semitism made against the Rochdale candidate, 27% saying he had acted badly, and 45% undecided. More generally, a mere 3% believed that Starmer had successfully tackled anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, 26% judging he had made 'good progress' but still had work to do, and 23% that he had failed to tackle the problem; one in ten did not perceive anti-Semitism to be a problem in the Labour Party, with 38% uncertain. Full data tables are available at:

- https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/TheTimes_VI_AdHoc_Results_240215_W.pdf

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: political parties, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia

At about the same time (16-18 February 2024), a Savanta poll, seemingly conducted for the Labour Party, investigated problems that five Britain-wide political parties were perceived (by a sample of 2,217 UK adults) to be having with anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and transphobia. In respect of anti-Semitism, the Labour Party was most likely to be seen as having a problem with it, by 41%, followed by the Conservative Party on 24%, and Reform UK on 21%. Asked whether the Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, had done a good job in dealing with allegations of anti-Semitism in the party, public opinion was divided, 31% saying he had done a good job, 30% a bad job, and 25% neither good nor bad. When it came to Islamophobia, the problem was seen to lie with the Conservative Party (29%), followed by Reform UK (24%), with the Labour Party on 19%. Data tables, with full breaks by demographics, are available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/islamophobia-and-antisemitism-poll-savanta-24-february-2024/>

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: British Muslim voting intentions

With a general election in prospect before the end of 2024, there has been increasing attention paid to the potential impact of the Israel-Gaza conflict on domestic voting intentions, not least among British Muslims. The Muslim vote has traditionally been solidly Labour, but Muslim resentment has been building to the Labour Party's refusal to back international calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. On 30 January 2024, *The Guardian* reported that the Labour Party's leadership had become so worried about the possible collapse in the Muslim vote for Labour over the party's Middle East stance that it had begun polling and focus groups among Muslims. This month, these internal studies have been somewhat pre-empted by the release of a Survation poll for the Labour Muslim Network, undertaken (primarily by telephone interview) among 682 British Muslims between 18 January and 3 February 2024.

Focusing on results potentially impacting the Labour Party, it was found that: 49% of British Muslims claimed to identify with it, 48% were favourable towards it, and 43% were prepared to vote for it in a general election 'tomorrow' (rising to 60% if undecided and refused are removed from the base, a big drop from the 86% recorded at the 2019 general election). However, only 29% were favourable (and 40% unfavourable) towards the Labour leader, Keir Starmer. Given a list of eighteen issues potentially affecting how they would vote in a forthcoming general election, just 15% of British Muslims chose 'Israel-Gaza' amongst their most important, but, asked in isolation whether the position of British political leaders on the Israel-Palestine conflict would be a significant factor in determining how they would vote in the general election, 85% replied in the affirmative. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://www.survation.com/https-www-survation-com-archive-2024-2/>

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: where do British public sympathies lie?

British public opinion towards the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas, initially confined to Israel and Gaza but now spreading more widely in the Middle East, has been tracked by YouGov since it erupted on 7 October 2023. Online samples of adults have been asked on which side their sympathies mostly lie. The principal data points are shown in Table 1, overleaf. It will be seen that, in all instances, the majority of respondents (three-fifths to two-thirds in most polls) has sided with neither side against the other. However, support for the Palestinians has clearly grown over time, while that for the Israelis has diminished. The full data table for the latest study (12-13 February 2024), which also includes a raft of other questions about the Israel-Gaza conflict, can be found at:

- https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov_-_Israel_Palestine_13_Feb_2024.pdf

Table 1: British public’s sympathies in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 2023–24

| % down | 9/10 | 16/10 | 19/10 | 25/10 | 1/11 | 7/11 | 15/11 | 20/12 | 13/1 | 12/2 |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| N = | 2,046 | 2,574 | 2,052 | 2,064 | 2,045 | 2,080 | 2,007 | 2,085 | 1,751 | 2,092 |
| Israeli side | 21 | 21 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 16 | 19 | <u>16</u> |
| Palestinian side | 15 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 21 | 20 | 22 | 27 | 28 |
| Both sides equally | 20 | 29 | 32 | 32 | 31 | 32 | 30 | 32 | 30 | 22 |
| Don’t know | 45 | 33 | 32 | 30 | 31 | 28 | 31 | 29 | 24 | <u>34</u> |

Source: YouGov.

Notes: Dates represent the first day of fieldwork and month. In the January 2024 survey, the response option ‘both sides equally’ was replaced by ‘neither’.

It should be remembered that, in parallel with the above series, YouGov also has a more longstanding tracker question asking British and foreign publics whether they have a favourable or unfavourable view of Israel (and other countries). The majority of Britons in recent years has held an unfavourable opinion of Israel. In the most recent poll, fielded among 2,186 Britons as part of a Eurotrack survey on 15–16 February 2024, 34% felt very unfavourable towards Israel, 27% fairly unfavourable, 16% fairly favourable, 4% very favourable, with 20% undecided. Topline data tables are available at:

- [https://d3nk13psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Topline Eurotrack Feb24 W.pdf](https://d3nk13psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Topline_Eurotrack_Feb24_W.pdf)

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: perceptions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

Below, we have extended by another month the two tables about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia being perceived as problems in the UK that we published in the October 2023–January 2024 editions (Nos. 97–100) of *Counting Religion in Britain*. This latest Savanta political tracker was undertaken online on 16–18 February 2024, the degree to which anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are perceived as problems having increased, by 4% and 5%, respectively, within the past month, the proportion having reached three-fifths for (so far as is known) the first time. This latest dataset is available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-savanta-22-february-2024/>

Table 2: Perceptions of anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK, July 2023–February 2024

| % down | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb |
|----------------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|
| Big problem | 16 | 15 | 14 | 17 | 22 | 21 | <u>16</u> | 21 |
| Somewhat a problem | 34 | 35 | 37 | 37 | 35 | 36 | <u>41</u> | 38 |
| Not really a problem | 25 | 25 | 23 | 21 | 18 | 21 | <u>22</u> | 19 |
| Not a problem at all | 7 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Don’t know | 18 | 17 | 18 | 18 | 17 | 14 | <u>15</u> | 15 |
| <i>A problem</i> | 50 | 49 | 51 | 53 | 57 | 57 | <u>56</u> | 60 |
| <i>Not a problem</i> | 32 | 33 | 31 | 28 | 25 | 29 | <u>27</u> | 25 |

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Table 3: Perceptions of Islamophobia as a problem in the UK, July 2023–February 2024

| % down | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb |
|----------------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|
| Big problem | 20 | 21 | 22 | 20 | 23 | 21 | <u>19</u> | 22 |
| Somewhat a problem | 35 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 36 | 37 | <u>37</u> | 39 |
| Not really a problem | 21 | 21 | 19 | 19 | 18 | 21 | <u>20</u> | 18 |
| Not a problem at all | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | <u>10</u> | 8 |
| Don’t know | 15 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 12 | <u>13</u> | 13 |
| <i>A problem</i> | 55 | 56 | 58 | 57 | 59 | 58 | <u>56</u> | 61 |
| <i>Not a problem</i> | 30 | 30 | 29 | 28 | 28 | 30 | <u>30</u> | 26 |

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Round-up of other YouGov polls: church discos, religious studies, and extremist threats

In a poll of 4,016 British adults on 20 February 2024, 59% agreed it was appropriate for churches and cathedrals to host discos, silent discos, and similar events in their buildings, and a good way of getting people into church who would not normally enter. The proportion was lowest in London (50%) and highest (66%) among Liberal Democrats. One in five deemed it ‘inappropriate and disrespectful to use churches in this way’, rising to 29% in London and falling to 15% in Scotland. The data are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/survey-results/daily/2024/02/20/3c4ae/3>

Religious Studies (RS) remains one of the least important subjects to teach at secondary schools, according to the latest tracker among 1,770 British adults on 24–26 February 2024. A majority (56%) thought it either not at all important (27%) or not very important (29%) to teach RS, with a further 29% saying quite important and 11% very important (but no more than 19% in any demographic sub-group), with 4% undecided. Unsurprisingly, English (96%) and mathematics (95%) topped the rankings for perceived importance. The data are available at:

- https://d3nk13psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation11_sr_2.pdf

In a poll of 2,088 adult Britons on 23–26 February 2024, 76% deemed Islamic [sic] extremists to be either a big threat (53%) or a moderate threat (23%), 4% fewer than in a comparable survey in 2021 but still far more than viewed right-wing extremists to be a threat (59%) or left-wing extremists (45%) or Irish Republican extremists (41%). Asked to choose which of the four groups posed the biggest threat of all, 50% chose Islamic extremists (73% of Conservatives), 23% right-wing extremists, with 22% undecided. The data are available at:

- https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov_-_Extremist_threats_Feb_2024.pdf

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

News from the Church of England: cathedral statistics and clergy survey

The Church of England Data Services Team has published a 47-page report on *Cathedral Statistics, 2022*, compiled by Avery Bazemore and Ken Eames, incorporating 19 figures and 19 tables. The overarching conclusion is that ‘2022 was another year of post-pandemic bounce-back. By most measures, levels of attendance and participation in 2022 were higher than in 2021 while remaining lower than in 2019.’ Data relate to the Church of England’s 42 cathedrals and to Westminster Abbey (a Royal Peculiar). The report is available at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/cathedral-statistics-2022.pdf>

Fiona Tweedie and Liz Graveling, *Holding Things Together: Church of England Clergy in Changing Times* (London: Church of England Ministry Development Team, 2024, 67 pp.) presents the results of wave 4 of the Living Ministry longitudinal online panel survey, which was launched in 2017. Wave 4, undertaken in March 2023, was completed by 486 active clergy who had been ordained in 2006, 2011, and 2015 or who had entered training in 2016. The study captured information about current ministry, wellbeing, change management, and demographics, through a combination of questions asked in previous waves and new topics introduced for wave 4 (specifically, on the cost-of-living crisis, social class, and culture and psychological wellbeing). The report is available at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/living-ministry-w4-panel-survey-report-holding-things-together-1.pdf>

National Jewish Identity Survey, 2022

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) has published David Graham and Jonathan Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today: Key Findings from the JPR National Jewish Identity Survey*, in 119 pages. The survey was undertaken, mostly online, between 16 November and 23 December 2022 among a convenience sample (self-selecting panel) of 4,891 self-identifying Jews aged 16 and over and living in the UK, the results being weighted in line with UK census data and Jewish community data on synagogue membership. For further information about methodology, see the detailed note by Carli Lessof on pp. 109–19. The markers of Jewish identity are summarized thus: ‘British Jews are most likely to say that remembering the Holocaust, combating antisemitism, feeling part of the Jewish people, and strong moral and ethical behaviour are the most important aspects of how they see themselves Jewishly; they are least likely to point to studying religious texts, prayer, keeping kosher or socialising in predominantly Jewish groups.’ The authors counsel that Jewish identities may have shifted somewhat (even if only temporarily) in the wake of the murderous incursion by Hamas into Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing Israeli military intervention in Gaza, events which have triggered a growth in anti-Semitism in the UK. The report is available at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/jews-uk-today-key-findings-jpr-national-jewish-identity-survey>

Muslim Council of Britain report on Muslims in the 2021 census of England and Wales

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has published a useful (if unofficial) 24-page briefing on *British Muslims, Striving for Fairness: 2021 Census Findings with a Focus on Social Mobility*, including 13 tables and a lengthy reflection on ‘ways forward’. The MCB’s overarching assessment of the census data is: ‘a continuing story of life in deprived neighbourhoods with opportunities limited to lower-tier albeit essential jobs. Given the strides made by the community in higher education and the commitment to a British identity, the need of the hour is a fair deal to overcome entrenched inequalities.’ The six specific key points made are: ‘(1) The proportion of Muslims in England and Wales aged under 16 is almost double that of the overall population. The majority of Muslims in England and Wales (51%) are British born, most identify as British (75%) and for over 90% of Muslims, English is their main language or spoken fluently. (2) The Muslim population is ethnically diverse, whilst the largest numbers draw from South Asian and African ethnicities, it is spread across all ethnic groups including the Roma and Traveller communities. (3) Educational attainment is rising, with 32.3% of Muslims having a degree level qualification in 2021, up from 24.0% in 2011. This increase is driven largely by greater numbers of Muslim women participating in higher education. (4) A Muslim newborn baby has almost three times the chance to be born into the most deprived (10%) local authorities in England and less than a quarter of the chance to live in the most affluent (10%) local authorities in England as compared to other newborns. (5) On measures of social mobility such as occupational classification, Muslims have not progressed at the same rate as the general population over the past decade ... (6) The Muslim population is largely concentrated in deprived parts of urban centres ...’ The report is available at:

- <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MCB-Striving-For-Fairness-Full-Report.pdf>

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents

The Community Security Trust (CST) has published a 55-page report on *Antisemitic Incidents, 2023*, its lead writer being Yoni Gordon-Teller. There were 4,103 such incidents logged and validated by the CST during 2023, an increase of 146.9% over the 2022 figure, and the highest total ever recorded by the CST in a single calendar year (being 81.5% greater than the previous record in 2021). Moreover, for the first time ever, there were incidents in every single police

region in the UK in 2023. Two-thirds (65.8%) of all incidents occurred on or after 7 October 2023, the day that Hamas launched its murderous incursion into Israel, triggering massive retaliatory strikes by Israel on Gaza. Abusive behaviour (81.1%) was the commonest form of incident in 2023. The report is available at:

- https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf

In parallel to the CST, Tell MAMA has been monitoring the growth of Islamophobic incidents in the UK since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict on 7 October 2023. On 21 February 2024, Tell MAMA issued interim data suggesting there had been a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hate cases in the four months since 7 October, compared with the equivalent period in 2022/23. Of the 2,010 cases, 45% occurred offline and 55% online; and in two-thirds of cases, women were targeted. The statement can be found at:

- <https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Recent academic studies

- Caitriona McCartney, *The Sunday School Movement in Britain, 1900–1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2023, xv + 208 pp., ISBN: 9781783277650, £80.00, hardback, e-book option also available @ £24.99), offering an optimistic reading of the fortunes of the movement during these four decades, based on an impressive range of archival and printed primary sources, and including (pp. 26–8, 57–62, 113–23) a review of Sunday school statistics.
- Stephen Jones and Amy Unsworth, ‘Two Islamophobias? Racism and Religion as Distinct but Mutually Supportive Dimensions of Anti-Muslim Prejudice’, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 75, no. 1, January 2024, pp. 5–22, reporting regression models from an online YouGov poll of 1,667 Britons on 20–21 July 2021, differentiating between racial prejudice against Muslims and religious prejudice against Islam: open access text available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-4446.13049>

APPENDIX KEYWORDS/TAGS

Amy Unsworth, anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, assisted dying, Avery Bazemore, Boydell Press, British Journal of Sociology, Caitriona McCartney, cathedrals, census of population, church discos, Church of England, Community Security Trust, Conservative Party, David Graham, extremist threats, Fiona Tweedie, Gaza, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Islamic extremists, Islamophobia, Islamophobic incidents, Israel, Israel-Hamas conflict, Jewish identity, Jonathan Boyd, Keir Starmer, Ken Eames, Labour Muslim Network, Labour Party, Living Ministry, Liz Graveling, Madeleine Pennington, Muslim Council of Britain, Muslims, National Jewish Identity Survey, Palestinians, racism, religious prejudice, Religious Studies, Rochdale by-election, Savanta, Stephen Jones, Sunday schools, Survation, Tell MAMA, terminal illness, The Times, Theos, voting intentions, wellbeing, Yoni Gordon-Teller, YouGov