

# Counting Religion in Britain

## A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 103 – April 2024

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### OPINION POLLS

#### **Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: J. L. Partners opinion poll of Muslims and public**

On behalf of the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), J. L. Partners conducted an online poll of 1,000 UK Muslims aged 18 and over between 14 February and 12 March 2024, with a comparator survey of 2,013 members of the UK general public aged 18 and over on 4–6 March 2024. The sample mode was via online panel for the general public, with ‘river sampling’ used to recruit Muslims (this is a non-probability method that invites potential respondents while they are engaged on some other online activity, and who are then screened before admission to the survey). Quotas were set for both samples and data weighted to be representative of the British Muslim and overall British population, respectively. J. L. Partners have been undertaking online polling on political and other subjects since 2019 and are members of both the Market Research Society and British Polling Council. In this instance, at least, responsibility for the ‘field and tab’ work seems to have been outsourced to Number Cruncher.

The questionnaires for each sample were extensive and broadly similar, albeit not absolutely identical, and the running order of topics may have been somewhat different. The main themes explored were: voting behaviour and the issues determining it; belief in the trope that Jewish people exercise too much power in the world; attitudes to the current Israel-Palestine conflict; and desiderata for social changes in the UK over the next twenty years. A 50-page report on the study was released by the HJS on 8 April 2024 and can be found at:

- <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/HJS-Deck-200324-Final.pdf>

The full data tables are available at:

- <https://jlppartners.com/polling-results>

Commencing with an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* for 7 April 2024, most media interest has concentrated on the results for Muslims, only a selection of which can be given here. Notwithstanding expectations that the traditionally rock-solid Muslim support for the Labour Party may have collapsed in the face of the party’s stance on a ceasefire in the war in Gaza, 69% of Muslims voting Labour in the 2019 general election would still do so if a general election were to be held now. There was widespread subscription among Muslims to the trope that Jews have too much power, notably over US foreign policy (47%), over UK government policy (46%), over UK media (41%), and over the UK financial system (39%). Attitudes towards Israel were hostile: 80% accused Israel of genocide against Palestinians, 74% held a negative view of Israel, 72% described it as a racist endeavour, and 49% disputed Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish homeland. Almost half (46%) of UK Muslims said they sympathized with Hamas in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and 39% denied Hamas had committed murder and rape in Israel on 7 October 2023 (which had been the trigger for Israel’s war in Gaza). Asked about their aspirations for social change in the UK during the next two decades, 65% of UK Muslims desired Eid-al-Fitr being made a public holiday, 63% provision of rooms for public prayer in non-religious spaces, 57% making halal food compulsory in all schools and hospitals, 52% making it illegal to show a picture or cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed, 39% formation of a Muslim political party, 32% implementation of Sharia law, 32% declaration of Islam as ‘our national religion’, and 27% outlawing homosexuality.

Such findings inevitably created some pushback, including from Sunder Katwala, director of the British Future thinktank, who wrote a critique of the poll in a column for *Eastern Eye*, describing the survey as ‘a long fishing trip to exaggerate differences between Muslims and their fellow citizens’. Adverse reactions to polls of Muslim opinion are not unusual; ever since Harris undertook the first of them in 1989, it has been rare for them not to be greeted either by criticisms of methodology or claims of misrepresentation. Obtaining viable national cross-sections of minority populations (even of such a large minority as Muslims now are in this country) remains problematical. BRIN invites its readers to check the outputs mentioned above from J. L. Partners’ latest effort and decide for themselves whether this can be considered an accurate account of the UK Muslim worldview or a deliberately polarizing study. Questions BRIN readers should ponder include: Was ‘river sampling’ an acceptable mode of recruiting Muslim respondents (and, if not, then what would have been an appropriate alternative)? Was the wording of the questions sufficiently clear and balanced? Was the presentation of the data in the report fair and objective? Let us know what you think about these issues.

Regrettably, we have run out of space to cover the UK general public results in any detail. Interestingly, on the desiderata for social change over the next twenty years, there was sometimes less difference between Muslims and the wider population than one might have imagined. While, for example, it may come as no surprise that 40% of UK Muslims supported women taking a more traditional role in society, it may be less expected that 33% of the general public agreed with them. Likewise, there was good news for the beleaguered Church of England when it came to prospective disestablishment; relatively few Muslims (14%) or general public (19%) were in favour.

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

British public opinion towards the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas 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. Recent data points are shown in Table 1, below. It will be seen that, in all instances, including the don’t knows, the majority of respondents continues to sympathize with neither side against the other. However, support for the Palestinians has clearly grown, while that for the Israelis has diminished, even if the gap between them has narrowed a little in the latest study, the data for which can be found at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2024/04/08/badb6/1>

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

% down	9/10	7/11	15/11	20/12	13/1	12/2	29/2	7/3	15/3	8/4
N =	2,046	2,080	2,007	2,085	1,751	2,092	2,073	2,070	4,061	3,874
Israeli side	21	19	19	16	19	16	15	15	15	16
Palestinian side	15	21	20	22	27	28	26	28	29	28
Both sides equally	20	32	30	32	30	22	28	27	25	22
Don’t know	45	28	31	29	24	34	31	30	31	34

Source: YouGov.

Notes: Dates represent the first day of fieldwork and month.

### 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 and subsequent editions of *Counting Religion in Britain*. This latest Savanta political tracker was undertaken online on 19–21 April 2024, the degree to which anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are perceived as problems having fallen ever so slightly this month, to below three-fifths. This latest dataset is available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-daily-telegraph-23-april-2024/>

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

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Big problem	16	15	14	17	22	21	<u>16</u>	21	21	20
Somewhat a problem	34	35	37	37	35	36	<u>41</u>	38	40	38
Not really a problem	25	25	23	21	18	21	<u>22</u>	19	18	19
Not a problem at all	7	9	8	8	7	7	7	6	7	7
Don't know	18	17	18	18	17	14	<u>15</u>	15	15	16
<i>A problem</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Not a problem</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>26</i>

Source: Savanta political tracker.

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

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Big problem	20	21	22	20	23	21	<u>19</u>	22	23	21
Somewhat a problem	35	35	36	37	36	37	<u>37</u>	39	37	37
Not really a problem	21	21	19	19	18	21	<u>20</u>	18	19	18
Not a problem at all	9	9	10	9	10	10	<u>10</u>	8	9	10
Don't know	15	14	13	14	14	12	<u>13</u>	13	12	13
<i>A problem</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Not a problem</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>29</i>

Source: Savanta political tracker.

### Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: concerns about religious extremism

The domestic fall-out from the Israel-Hamas conflict, including public protests and other forms of popular intervention in Britain in support of one side or the other, seems to have driven concern about religious extremism up the electoral agenda. The topic has aired in two recent opinion polls.

An Ipsos survey, conducted among an online panel of 1,089 adult Britons aged 16–75 on 8–11 March 2024, asked respondents about issues of current concern. Two-thirds (65%, including 78% of over-55s and 79% of Conservatives) said that they were very or fairly concerned about the rise of religious extremism in Britain, with 24% unconcerned, and 11% undecided. The data table is available at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/majority-of-britons-think-it-is-unacceptable-to-protest-outside-homes-of-mps>

A poll by More in Common, undertaken among an online panel of 2,016 adult Britons aged 18 and over on 12–14 April 2024, focused on the biggest threats to the UK and other Western countries over the next ten years. Twelve threats were listed, including Islamism, which 45% regarded as a big threat, 32% as a small threat, and 22% as not a threat at all. The data table is available at:

- <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/>

### Fixing the date for Easter: YouGov poll of preferences among the British public

The date of Easter Sunday is a moveable feast. According to the Gregorian calendar, it can range between 22 March and 25 April. Plans for a fixed date for Easter were enshrined in the Easter Act 1928, but the statute has never been brought into force, by an Order in Council, and following resolutions of both Houses of Parliament, pending agreement within the Churches about the change (which has yet to happen). This year, Easter Sunday was relatively early (31 March), prompting familiar concerns among the tourism and gardening/DIY sectors, feeling they are commercially disadvantaged by an early Easter because the weather has traditionally been better on a later Easter (potentially boosting consumer demand). These concerns have, to some extent, been shared by the general public, although, it has to be said, on account of climate

change, the likelihood of better weather on a later Easter is by no means certain any longer. YouGov decided to put the matter to the test by asking 4,035 Britons online on 2 April 2024 what their preferences were. Overall, the majority (54%) wanted to keep the current system, whereby the date for Easter changes annually, Londoners (62%) feeling this most strongly and Scots (46%) the least. Only 27%, and no more than 33% in any demographic sub-group, opted for a fixed date for Easter, with 19% undecided. The data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/entertainment/survey-results/daily/2024/04/02/83547/1>

### **Attitudes to assisted dying in Scotland: Opinium Research poll for Dignity in Dying**

In the March 2024 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*, we noted a UK-wide opinion poll into assisted dying conducted by Opinium Research on behalf of Dignity in Dying. The same pollster has now undertaken an online survey in Scotland on the same topic on behalf of the same client, 4,132 Scottish adults aged 18 and over being interviewed online between 9 February and 15 March 2024. Eleven questions were posed on the subject, each of which was analysed by a full range of demographic variables, including religious profession. The first (and most general) question asked was: ‘To what extent would you support or oppose making it legal for someone to seek “assisted dying” in the UK, and how strong is your view?’ Among religious groups with sufficiently viable cell sizes, support was expressed by 78% of all Scottish adults, 86% of those without a religion, 67% with a religion, 67% of Christians, and 66% of Catholics. Only 15% of all respondents were opposed but almost one-quarter of the religious (including the same proportion of Catholics). Data tables are available at:

- <https://www.opinium.com/polling-tables-archive/>

### **Would you consider having your fortune told?**

In an online YouGov poll on 30 April 2024, 3,030 adult Britons were asked: ‘Would you consider having your fortune told (e.g. by a psychic or tarot card reader)?’ In reply, 14% admitted that they already had had their fortune told, the biggest proportions (19%) being among women and persons aged 50–64. A further 22% said they would consider having their fortune told, women (29%) and 18–24s (30%) having the highest proportions. The majority (56%) of the sample did not want their fortune told, peaking at 70% of men and Liberal Democrats, while 8% were undecided. Full results are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/survey-results/daily/2024/04/30/89ff7/3>

## FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

### **Launch of ‘The Church-24 Survey’ by York St John University**

York St John University has announced the launch of ‘The Church-24 Survey’, directed by Andrew Village as principal investigator but working in collaboration with Leslie Francis and in partnership with a wide range of participating churches in the UK and Republic of Ireland (for which countries it is mainly intended), but also (not really explained) in the USA. It builds upon the *Church Times* readership surveys of 2001 and 2013; and two more broadly based surveys run during the Covid-19 pandemic (‘Coronavirus, Church, and You’ in 2020 and ‘Covid-19 and Church 21’ in 2021), which have generated numerous formal and informal publications, the majority of which have been covered on the BRIN website—for a detailed list, see <https://www.yorksja.ac.uk/coronavirus-church-and-you/>. Like all four preceding projects, ‘The Church-24 Survey’ will rely upon opportunity (self-selecting) samples of churchgoers (laity and clergy), ‘of any denomination or none’, who will be reached via a mixture of channels, including publicity in religious newspapers, but will also rely on snowballing. Respondents will have to complete the anonymous questionnaire online (via computer, tablet, or smartphone), and the link will be live for ‘several months’ during 2024.

The methodology naturally has the distinct advantage of relative cheapness to capture and process the data; however, it cannot ensure the representativeness that a cross-sectional sample survey would have achieved. ‘The Church-24 Survey’ (which replicates some questions from the 2001 and 2013 studies; asks about new topics such as AI, assisted dying, and climate change; and explores how churches are coping with the legacy of Covid-19) can be taken at:

- <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/the-church-24-survey/>

### **Two new outputs from the National Jewish Identity Survey, 2022**

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) has published two new outputs by David Graham from its November–December 2022 National Jewish Identity Survey, which was completed online by 4,900 members of JPR’s self-selecting research panel of self-identifying Jews.

*Belonging without Believing: British Jewish Identity and God* revealed that ‘Only a third of Jews living in the UK have faith in God, as described in the Bible, yet “non-believers” make up more than half of paid-up synagogue memberships’. Read more at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/insights/belonging-without-believing-british-jewish-identity-and-god>

*Why this Night is Different: How Do Jews in the UK Celebrate Passover?* discovered that ‘Four in five British Jews said they attended a Passover seder in 2022. Even among secular Jews, most still say they attend a seder every year.’ Read more at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/why-night-different-how-do-jews-uk-celebrate-passover>

### **British Muslim charitable giving: insights from Blue State**

Blue State, a US-based consultancy with a London office, has published a 42-page report on *British Muslim Giving Behaviours: What We Know about the Most Generous Group of UK Donors*. It is based on an in-depth online survey, conducted on 8–21 February 2024, of the attitudes to charitable giving of 1,003 self-identifying UK Muslims aged 18 and over, alongside a national cross-section of 2,010 UK adults interviewed online on 8–11 February 2024 for Blue State’s annual UK Giving Tracker. The methodology notes on p. 40 of *British Muslim Giving Behaviours* are somewhat light, to say the least. The mode of recruiting the Muslim sample is not explained. The name of the agency that undertook the fieldwork is not given. Nor is that of any client on whose behalf Blue State acted (unless the study was on Blue State’s own initiative and paid for by Blue State funds). Additionally, there is an inherent weakness with surveys of self-reported charitable giving that respondents often misremember the precise chronology of their donations or give aspirational answers.

The report includes a lot of fascinating and potentially valuable detail about the philanthropic attitudes and behaviours of UK Muslims, which there is no space to summarize here. However, three points stand out from the comparison of self-reported claims made by the UK Muslim sample and the UK national cross-section. First, over the last twelve months, UK Muslims appear to have given £708 each to deserving/charitable causes, 4.3 times the national average of £165, despite the fact that UK Muslims are more concerned about their personal financial stability than UK adults generally. Second, UK Muslims are more focused on giving to international organizations than is the UK population as a whole (85% against 48%); also, in particular, 73% of Muslim donors have already given to aid civilians impacted by the war in Gaza. Third, UK Muslims seem twice as likely as the UK population to have taken action towards leaving a legacy gift. The report (with its overblown sub-title – since it is not evident that any other specific group of UK donors has been investigated in depth) is available at:



- [https://www.bluestate.co/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Blue State Muslim Giving Behaviours Report April 2024.pdf](https://www.bluestate.co/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Blue-State-Muslim-Giving-Behaviours-Report-April-2024.pdf)

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### Round-up of three recent academic publications

- Ahmed Topkev, *A Democratic Approach to Religion News: Christianity and Islam in the British and Turkish Press* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, xxii + 420 pp., including 118 tables, ISBN 9783031495182, £109.99, hardback): a comparative study of the reporting of religion in general and Christianity and Islam in particular in the UK (where Islam is the minority religion) and Turkey (where Christianity is the minority religion), strongly focused on theory and methodology, but with an empirical element, analysing 1,022 news articles on religion in the British and Turkish national press during three distinct weeks in 2014, the book's webpage being at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-49519-9>
- Lukasz Kiszkiel, Piotr Pawel Laskowski, David Voas, Rachel Bacon, Wesley Wildman, Ivan Puga-Gonzalez, LeRon Shults, and Konrad Talmont-Kaminski, 'Dataset of Integrated Measures of Religion (DIM-R): Harmonization of Religiosity Data from Selected International Multiwave Surveys', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 2024; DIM-R integrates four variables often used to measure religious commitment (self-declared religiosity, religious attendance, prayer, and affiliation/denominational affiliation), transforming them to a consistent categorization and scaling, drawn from four repeated cross-sectional international surveys, all of which include the UK/Great Britain (European Social Survey, International Social Survey Programme, European Values Study, and World Values Survey), full text freely available on open access at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2153599X.2024.2305447>
- Joonmo Son, 'Religious Service Attendance and Religious and Secular Organizational Engagement in the United Kingdom', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 1, March 2024, pp. 42–61; empirical tests on the 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001 waves of the British Household Panel Survey dataset confirmed that 'a synergistic reciprocal relationship is established between religious service attendance and religious organizational engagement, and that religious service attendance increases secular organizational engagement. However, secular organizational engagement does not make a bidirectional contribution to religious service attendance', full text freely available on open access at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jssr.12878>

## APPENDIX: KEYWORDS/TAGS

Ahmed Topkev, alternative beliefs, Andrew Village, anti-Semitism, assisted dying, Blue State, British Household Panel Survey, charitable giving, Church-24 Survey, Covid-19, Dataset of Integrated Measures of Religion, David Graham, David Voas, desiderata for social changes, Dignity in Dying, DIM-R, Easter, European Social Survey, European Values Study, fortune telling, God, Hamas, Henry Jackson Society, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, International Social Survey Programme, Ipsos, Islamism, Islamophobia, Israel, Israel-Palestine conflict, Ivan Puga-Gonzalez, Jews, J. L. Partners, Joonmo Son, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Konrad Talmont-Kaminski, LeRon Shults, Leslie Francis, Lukasz Kiszkiel, More in Common, Muslims, National Jewish Identity Survey, Number Cruncher, Opinion Research, Palestinians, Passover, Piotr Pawel Laskowski, Rachel Bacon, Religion Brain and Behavior, religious and secular organizational engagement, religious extremism, religious festivals, religious prejudice, religious service attendance, representations of Christianity and Islam in the press, Savanta, Scotland, Sunder Katwala, threats to the UK, trope that Jews exercise too much power in the world, Turkey, voting behaviour, Wesley Wildman, World Values Survey, YouGov