

# Counting Religion in Britain

## A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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### OPINION POLLS

#### 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 tended to diminish, the margin between the two having widened to 14 points in the latest study (which used slightly different wording for the response options), full data from which can be found at:

- [https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/P\\_Main\\_Political\\_Tracker\\_Survey\\_Rotation11\\_sr\\_20.pdf](https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation11_sr_20.pdf)

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

% down	9/10	15/11	20/12	13/1	12/2	29/2	7/3	15/3	8/4	23/4	7/5	29/6
N =	2,046	2,007	2,085	1,751	2,092	2,073	2,070	4,061	3,874	2,100	2,072	1,788
Israeli side	21	19	16	19	16	15	15	15	16	16	16	17
Palestinian side	15	20	22	27	28	26	28	29	28	28	29	31
Both sides equally	20	30	32	30	22	28	27	25	22	24	23	30
Don't know	45	31	29	24	34	31	30	31	34	31	31	22

Source: YouGov. Note: Dates represent the first day of fieldwork and month.

### FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

#### Charitable giving by UK Christians: Stewardship's *Generosity Report, 2024*

Christian charity Stewardship's 51-page *Generosity Report, 2024: Exploring Christian Giving in the UK* is principally based upon a survey commissioned from Whitestone Insight, for which 4,056 UK Christian adults were interviewed online on 9–16 November 2023. Data were weighted to be representative of religious self-identification in the 2021–22 censuses of population across the UK, and they were analysed by three groups: practising Christians (34.8%, who claimed to attend church at least once a month and to read the Bible at least once a month), churchgoing Christians (14.9%, who attended church at least once a month but read the Bible independently less than once a month), and cultural Christians (50.2%, who identified as Christians but attended church less than once a month). This quantitative strand of the research was complemented by 15 qualitative in-depth interviews with practising Christians by video call. A key finding was that the aggregate of Christians in the UK gave an average of £73 each a month, equating to 3.2% of their income after tax across all causes, including their churches, the range being from 1.17% for cultural Christians to 6.26% for practising Christians. This average is £8 more than the £65 per month that is reportedly given by UK citizens to all charities. However, Stewardship contends, were every Christian to adopt the biblical principle of tithing (defined here as 10% of income after tax), then total Christian giving to all causes would be an average of £232 each a month. Barriers to greater giving included respondents'

perceptions that they could not afford more and mistrust that charities might not use donations effectively. Eight factors were identified that would optimize the level of Christian giving, and detailed recommendations were made to charity leaders, church leaders, Christian workers, and donors. Nine data tables feature in an appendix. The report can be downloaded (after prior registration) from:

- <https://www.stewardship.org.uk/generosity-report>

### Male and female ministry in the Church of England

In response to questions posed at its July 2024 meeting of General Synod by Felicity Cooke, a lay canon of Ely Cathedral, the Church of England has just released data about the demographics of the Church’s diocesan ministry which were collected in 2022 but have not hitherto been published. They include a gender breakdown which is summarized in Table 2, below, but there is also a breakdown by age. The statistics as released contain minor internal inconsistencies which BRIN has done its best to reconcile. Details can be found at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/questions-14-15-noticeboard.pdf>

**Table 2: Church of England diocesan ministers by gender, 2022**

	Men	Women	Total	% women
<i>FULL-TIME</i>				
Senior staff	258	102	360	28.3
Incumbent	3,387	1,375	4,762	28.9
Assistant	885	634	1,519	41.7
Non-parochial	53	24	77	31.2
Sub-total	4,583	2,135	6,718	31.8
<i>PART-TIME</i>				
Senior staff	2	4	6	66.7
Incumbent	220	203	423	48.0
Assistant	71	122	193	63.2
Non-parochial	0	1	1	100.0
Sub-total	293	330	623	53.0
<i>TOTAL</i>	4,876	2,465	7,341	33.6

Source: Church of England General Synod.

### Scottish Episcopal Church annual report and accounts, 2023

The 2024 meeting of the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church was held in Edinburgh recently, and one of the documents under consideration was the forty-first annual report and accounts, for the year ended 31 December 2023. This includes the annual diocesan statistics, comprising three indicators: membership (number of persons of all ages belonging to the congregation); communicants (number of persons on the communicants’ roll); and attendance (on the Sunday next before Advent, i.e. Christ the King or Stir-Up Sunday). The topline data for each indicator are shown in Table 3, overleaf, for each year back to 2018, 2018 and 2019 being the last ‘normal’ years before the Covid-19 pandemic struck. It will be seen that the number of members and communicants (both defined relatively impassively) has declined continuously throughout this six-year period, by 18.0 per cent and 16.9 per cent, respectively. The attendance measure has been more volatile in the face of the pandemic, with its associated lockdowns and restrictions on public worship; it was unreported in 2020, and when first reported again in 2021 stood 38.5 per cent lower than in 2018, since when it has steadily recovered (but in 2023 it still remained 29.1 per cent beneath the 2018 level). The latest annual report can be found at:

- <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/41st-Annual-Report.pdf>

**Table 3: Scottish Episcopal Church diocesan statistics, 2018–23**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Members	28,647	27,585	25,552	24,039	23,935	23,503
Communicants	19,983	19,784	18,753	17,132	16,823	16,605
Attendance	12,430	11,782	na	7,644	8,532	8,815

Source: Scottish Episcopal Church.

**Methodist Church statistics for mission, October 2023: preliminary data**

The Methodist Church of Great Britain has begun releasing its *Statistics for Mission* for October 2023, although the data seem still to be subject to final checks and are incomplete. Hence reports (disaggregated to circuit and chapel levels) are only currently available on a Methodist district basis, and there are no connexional totals. The completion rate of the 2023 schedules was 89%. Data have been gathered for the number of members, number of Methodist members in local ecumenical partnerships, sources of membership gains and losses, and number of pastoral others on the community roll. Since 2018, the annual October attendance count has no longer been required. These provisional statistics can be found at:

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

**Presbyterian Church of Wales statistics**

The Presbyterian Church of Wales, historically the powerhouse of Nonconformity in the Principality, no longer publishes a convenient digest of its pastoral statistics (in English, at least). However, it is possible to piece together the general situation. Its peak membership of 189,727 was in 1926 (Robert Currie *et al.*, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 1977, p. 159), since when there has been a fairly continuous decline, dropping below 100,000 in 1973, below 50,000 in 1996, and standing at 20,632 in 606 churches in 2016 (Clive Field, *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970–2020*, 2022, pp. 353–5). The Church’s most recent annual report, for the year ended 31 December 2022, available on the Charity Commission’s website, acknowledges the impact of Covid-19, some churches that closed for lockdown in March 2020 deciding not to reopen again, others merging with another congregation, with a consequential decline in membership (<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/4047295/accounts-and-annual-returns>). An ‘editor’s note’ appended to the press release for this month’s General Assembly of the Church in Aberystwyth (‘We Are in Good Spirits’, says the Moderator) records ‘some 14,000 members and around 475 churches’ (<https://www.ebcpcw.cymru/en/?s=>).

**UK general election, 2024: a clue to the religion of parliamentarians?**

Analysis by Humanists UK suggests that, on 4 July 2024, the UK elected ‘the most openly non-religious House of Commons in history’. The claim is based on the proportion of the 2024 intake of MPs who, during their swearing-in ceremony, chose to make a secular affirmation instead of the traditional religious oath to God. Excluding the 18 MPs who had yet to be sworn in at the time of the analysis, 40% of parliamentarians had made a secular affirmation (16 points more than after the 2019 general election), including 47% of Liberal Democrat and 47% of Labour MPs (the prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, and half his cabinet being among the latter). Just 9% of Conservative MPs had made a secular affirmation. As Humanists UK point out: ‘Although a small number of those affirming will have done so in spite of being religious or because their religion forbids taking oaths, the reverse is also true of those taking oaths. A large number of MPs typically swear on the Bible in spite of being non-religious, including some who have been public about the fact that they are not religious and don’t believe in any gods.’ The Humanists UK press release can be found at:

- <https://humanists.uk/2024/07/11/highest-number-of-mps-ever-take-secular-affirmation/>

## OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### **UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics, April 2024**

The Ministry of Defence has published a report and dataset on the latest (1 April 2024) biannual diversity statistics for the UK armed forces (both regular forces and Future Reserves 2020), including breaks by religious profession (a voluntary question but answered by 99.3% of the regulars and 98.8% of the reserves). Although the proportion of armed forces claiming no religion is continuing to increase steadily, to 39.4% among the regulars and 30.7% of reserves, it is lagging behind the population as a whole. The majority of armed forces personnel still self-identifies as Christian, 55.4% of regulars and 65.9% of reserves. There continue to be far fewer non-Christians in the armed forces relative to society at large. Report and data are available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-april-2024>

## ACADEMIC STUDIES

### **Revisiting English urban religion in the 1950s: three northern case studies**

Clive Field has revisited the debate about the condition of English religion in the 1950s, specifically the suggestion by Callum Brown that there was some kind of ‘religious revival’ during that decade, in his ‘A Secularizing Society? Case Studies of English Northern Industrial Towns in the 1950s’, which was published online as an advance article in *Historical Research* on 11 July 2024. The article presents the findings of three contemporaneous studies of religion in northern industrial towns: Rawmarsh and Scunthorpe (1954–56), Billingham (1957–59), and Bolton (1960). Sundry quantitative indicators are illuminated, including levels of churchgoing and the uptake of the three principal rites of passage. No support is found for the claim that the 1950s were a decade of ‘religious revival’. Mainstream Protestantism was at an increasingly low ebb in the three towns, and Catholicism was soon to feel the chill winds of secularization, also. The article can be read by subscribers of the journal at:

- <https://academic.oup.com/histres/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/hisres/htae014/7712149>

### **Church of England ministry in south-west England**

Andrew Village, ‘Church of England Ministry in the South-West Peninsular: Gaps and Priorities’, *Rural Theology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2024, pp. 30–43 reports on how a convenience sample of 92 parochial incumbents, 80 assistant clergy, and 94 readers in the dioceses of Exeter and Truro rated the importance of various tasks in their ministries, how well they felt equipped to do those tasks, and their priorities for ministry and training. Preaching, leading worship, and pastoral care were rated as most important, while management and administration, talking about giving and raising money, and speaking up on local issues were rated as least important. The largest gaps between importance of a task and being equipped for it were supporting personal wellbeing for incumbents, equipping disciples for assistant clergy, and bringing others to faith for readers. Top ministry priorities were equipping lay ministries, team working, and supporting evangelists; lowest priorities were remaining faithful to received traditions, maintaining the parish system, and developing digital ministries. Fieldwork was conducted online between 6 February and 13 March 2023. The article is freely available at:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14704994.2024.2327765>

APPENDIX: KEYWORDS/TAGS

1950s, Andrew Village, armed forces, Billingham, Bolton, charitable giving, Christians, church attendance, church membership, Church of England, Clive Field, Diocese of Exeter, Diocese of Truro, diversity, Felicity Cooke, General Synod, Hamas, Historical Research, Humanists UK, Israel, Members of Parliament, Methodist Church of Great Britain, ministry, Ministry of Defence, Palestinians, Presbyterian Church of Wales, Rawmarsh, religious profession, rites of passage, Rural Theology, Scottish Episcopal Church, Scunthorpe, secularization, Stewardship, swearing-in, tithing, urban religion, Whitestone Insight, women's ministry, YouGov