

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 109 – October 2024

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OPINION POLLS

Reform of the House of Lords: should Church of England bishops keep their seats?

Reform of the House of Lords is in the air again, and, with it, the continued automatic presence of 26 senior Church of England bishops in the UK's second parliamentary chamber, reflecting the Church's established status in England. The National Secular Society has long campaigned vociferously against what it regards as an anomaly, but successive governments have shown little appetite to act on the Lords Spiritual, albeit the current government has put forward the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill, seeking to remove the remaining 92 hereditary peers from the chamber. At the Bill's second reading in the House of Commons, on 15 October 2024, several MPs questioned the continuance of episcopal seats and are likely to pursue their concerns again at the Bill's next stage, a Committee of the Whole House, with Sir Gavin Williamson MP planning to table an amendment on the bishops. Before all this, as part of a general canvass of opinion on preferences for reform of the House of Lords, YouGov had polled an online sample of 2,109 adult Britons on 6–9 September 2024, asking whether the House of Lords should continue to have places for Church of England bishops. A majority (52%) of respondents said it should not, rising to 60% of Labour voters, 63% of over-65s, 64% of Scots, and 64% of Green voters. Just over a fifth (22%) wanted the bishops to stay, the most enthusiastic being Conservative voters (31%), while 26% were undecided. Only 16% of the entire sample favoured the existing model of the House of Lords, which is largely made up of appointees, partly hereditary, and partly episcopal. Full data tables are available at:

- https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Internal_HouseofLords_240909.pdf

Anniversary of 7 October and aftermath: sympathies with Israel and Palestinians

This month has marked the first anniversary of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli military action in Gaza. As noted in previous editions of *Counting Religion in Britain*, YouGov has been monitoring British public opinion on the conflict from the beginning, and notably the extent of sympathy for each side. In Table 1, overleaf, we reproduce, in slightly truncated form (omitting some data points for space reasons), the principal findings, adding two new data points for 20–22 September 2024 and 1–2 October 2024. As has been the case throughout, the majority of Britons aligns with neither party or with both sides equally or are undecided. Of voters registering a commitment, the anniversary seems to have brought a small uptick in sympathy for Israel, but the proportion favouring the Palestinians still remains several points higher. Full tables (also covering other aspects of the conflict) from the two latest surveys can be found at:

- https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/SundayTimes_IP_Results_241002.pdf
- https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/Copy_of_Internal_IP_Results_240923_ExtraCBs.pdf

Savanta has also conducted a poll on the topic, online among 2,000 UK adults on 28–30 September 2024. Asked about their relative sympathy for Israel and Hamas, 20% sided with the Israelis and 23% with the Palestinians, 28% saying both equally and 28% don't know. Asked about their relative sympathy for Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, 21% sided with the

Israelis and 18% with the Lebanese [sic], 29% saying both equally and 32% don't know. Full tables can be found at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/press-and-polls/topical-poll-savanta-1-october-2024/>

Likewise, an online poll on the Israel-Palestine and wider Middle East conflict by More in Common among a sample of 2,023 Britons on 5–7 October 2024 revealed that the sympathies of 15% of respondents lay with the Israeli side and 19% with the Palestinian side, while 19% replied with both sides equally, 31% with neither side, and 16% were undecided. Other questions in the same survey of specifically religious interest concerned: perceptions of the UK as a safe place for Jews and Muslims; the seriousness in the UK of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Islamist terrorism, and divisions between people of different religions; the potential impacts of the conflict within the UK in terms of tensions between religious communities, a rise in anti-Semitism, the risk of radical Islamist extremist incidents, and a rise in anti-Muslim hatred; and perceptions of the ability of British Jews and British Muslims to live harmoniously together notwithstanding their differences over Israel-Palestine. Data tables are available at:

- <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/october-2024-polling-tables/>

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

% down	9/10	15/11	20/12	13/1	29/2	15/3	8/4	23/4	7/5	29/6	20/9	1/10
N =	2,046	2,007	2,085	1,751	2,073	4,061	3,874	2,100	2,072	1,788	2,132	2,183
Israeli side	21	19	16	19	15	15	16	16	16	17	19	19
Palestinian side	15	20	22	27	26	29	28	28	29	31	28	28
Both sides equally/ neither side	20	30	32	30	28	25	22	24	23	30	21	32
Don't know	45	31	29	24	31	31	34	31	31	22	33	20

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

Observance of, and attitudes to, Halloween in Britain

The nominally Christian (All Hallows's Eve) but now secularized and commercialized autumnal festival of Halloween splits Britain into three camps, according to an online poll by YouGov conducted a fortnight before this year's Halloween (fieldwork took place among 2,121 adults on 16–17 October 2024). Only 34% overall expressed a positive opinion of Halloween, although the proportion was higher with the younger generations (54% of 18–24s and 43% of 25–49s); a further 34% were neutral while 31% held a negative opinion. In general, 44% said they preferred Bonfire or Guy Fawkes Night on 5 November to Halloween on 31 October, with just 16% preferring Halloween, 15% liking both events equally, 21% disliking both, and 5% undecided. Asked whether they planned to celebrate Halloween in 2024 in any way, 28% replied that they would, rising to 39% of those aged 25–49 (the cohort with the greatest likelihood of having young children at home), but 66% had no intention of celebrating Halloween, the remaining 7% being unsure. Despite the majority of under-25s regarding Halloween in a positive light, far fewer (35%) anticipated celebrating it in practice themselves. In the full sample, giving treats to trick-or-treaters, carving pumpkins, and watching scary films were expected to be the commonest forms of celebration. According to YouGov's AI language model, hardly anybody cited their religious beliefs as the reason for not celebrating Halloween. Analysis and data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/50833-how-do-britons-feel-about-halloween>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Economic value of church provided health and wellbeing activities

The National Churches Trust (NCT) has published *The House of Good: Health*, written by Jasmine Kazantzis, Allan Little, and Will Watt, celebrating the contribution that the UK's 38,500 places of Christian worship make to the health and wellbeing of their communities and to our collective health, while at the same time pitching for their financial support. From a research perspective, the core of the report (pp. 10–13 and technical annex at pp. 29–33) explains the methodology and outcomes of the brief given by the NCT to economists at State of Life to calculate the economic value of UK churches, chapels, and meeting houses to improving the nation's mental and physical health, thereby reducing the cost burdens on the National Health Service (NHS). Based on four church provided activities only (youth clubs, drug and alcohol support, mental health counselling, and foodbanks), the conservative valuation is that 'it would cost the NHS an extra £8.4 billion a year to deliver health benefits and wellbeing impacts on the scale currently provided by churches', a sum equivalent to 4% of UK public health spending. Hopefully, the report will be picked up by other health economists who can reality-check the calculations and question any doubtful assumptions. Churches (and other faith communities not mentioned here) have rightly been regarded as an important source of social capital, but whether they in isolation constitute 'the UK's National Help Service' (as claimed here) is perhaps a matter of debate. The report is available at:

- <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/our-research>

Anniversary of 7 October and aftermath: British Jewish views

Jonathan Boyd's 36-page report (with 36 figures) for the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) on *A Year After October 7: British Jewish Views on Israel, Antisemitism, and Jewish Life* is mainly based on findings from the Jewish Current Affairs Survey (completed online by 4,641 Jewish respondents between 14 June and 14 July 2024) but also supplemented by data from many other JPR surveys from the 2010s and early 2020s. There are three sections: Israel's political and military conduct during the war; Britain – antisemitism, security, and the place of Jews in wider society; and connections with Israel and the Jewish community. Like other JPR reports, it is very empirically grounded, well referenced, and reasoned in argumentation, but non-Jewish readers may sometimes find themselves disoriented by lack of an abstract, disadvantaged by their unfamiliarity with the context, and/or overwhelmed by the sheer amount of detail. On this particular occasion, they will be exceedingly grateful to the author for including a fine and reflective substantial summary and conclusions (pp. 31–3) from which we quote this last paragraph as a taster: 'In the final analysis, while British Jews are in no way monolithic, the events of October 7, the war in Gaza and all of its repercussions in Britain and around the world, have unquestionably left a scar on the vast majority. Whilst many express criticism of how the Israeli government has prosecuted the war and handled the hostage crisis, there is also a sense that for most, Israel matters more to them now than it did prior to October 7. Due in large part to the ways in which Israel, the war and the wider conflict have been reported, represented and discussed in public forums, many British Jews feel somewhat under siege – that they are living in a country that feels like a more hostile, less understanding and accommodating place than most have ever previously experienced. As a result, they are turning inwards – seeking out the solidarity that comes from Jewish friends and community. A mood change has occurred, and whilst few are likely to emigrate, many feel rattled – more anxious, unsettled, wary and cautious of being themselves for fear of what animosity it may bring. It's not a comfortable feeling.' The report can be found at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/year-after-october-7-british-jewish-views-israel-antisemitism-and-jewish-life>

Anniversary of 7 October and aftermath: JPR analysis of anti-Semitism post-7 October

A slightly earlier and equally valuable 38-page report by JPR's Jonathan Boyd had explored *Antisemitism in the Aftermath of October 7: What Do the Data Tell Us, and What More Do We Still Need to Know?* The following ten points are covered, disproportionately with reference to UK content: (1) We conduct a detailed assessment of data on antisemitism in the UK and Europe since the attacks on Israel on October 7 2023, to determine how the situation in Israel, Gaza, and the wider Middle East is affecting Jewish life. (2) We probe the data on reported antisemitic incidents from several countries to compare international trends and find clear evidence of a common and dramatic spike in the final quarter of 2023. (3) We assess the accuracy of antisemitic incident data and demonstrate how the figures most commonly quoted significantly underestimate the number of incidents happening in reality. (4) We demonstrate that more stable research methods are needed to determine whether overall levels of antisemitism and specific manifestations of it are increasing, decreasing or stable over time. (5) We draw on key Jewish population survey data from JPR and the European Union to show how levels of concern about antisemitism are increasing over time among Jews and show which parts of the Jewish population are most affected by it. (6) We introduce the concept of 'ambient antisemitism' into our analysis to demonstrate that Jews are sensing that the contexts in which they live have become more alienating and hostile since October 7, even if they have not personally experienced an antisemitic incident themselves. (7) We explore how social and political attitudes about Israelis and Palestinians have evolved in the past years. We also identify critical distinctions by age and political leaning, which we anticipate will play a significant role in shaping public discourse about Israel in the coming years. (8) We argue that much better research methods are required to accurately assess the general population's attitudes to Jews and Israel and Jewish people's perceptions and experiences of antisemitism. (9) We explain that major research initiatives of these kinds are now well-established and funded across the European Union. However, since the United Kingdom withdrew from the EU, it is no longer included in this work. We call on the UK Government and philanthropic community to plug this critical gap as a matter of urgency. (10) We highlight the importance of other key areas of research required today, including the impact of traditional and social media on attitudes towards Jews and the efficacy of educational initiatives designed to combat antisemitism. The report (with summary and conclusions on pp. 35–7) is available at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/antisemitism-aftermath-october-7-what-do-data-tell-us-and-what-more-do-we-still-need-know>

Anniversary of 7 October and aftermath: anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents

The Community Security Trust (CST) said in a press release (not on its website and not seen by BRIN but reposted by several media outlets on 2 October 2024) that it had been notified about and verified 5,583 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK between 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched its deadly attack on Israel, killing 1,200 and taking 230 hostages, and 30 September 2024. This is by far the largest number of such incidents ever recorded by the CST in a twelve-month period and 204% more than in the previous year. The majority (4,583) of incidents took the form of abusive behaviour. Most occurred in London (3,167) and Greater Manchester (729), where Jews are especially concentrated.

Tell MAMA, the equivalent agency for Islamophobic incidents, issued a brief statement on 7 October 2024, commencing: 'A year on from the Hamas terror attacks of 7 October and the war on Gaza, Tell MAMA recorded 4,971 cases, a level of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia – unlike anything we recorded in over a decade of our work.' The rest of the statement can be found at:

- <https://tellmamauk.org/tell-mama-recorded-almost-5000-anti-muslim-cases-a-year-on-from-7-october/>

Core Jewish population of Great Britain

The core Jewish population of Great Britain (defined as people who identify as Jews and/or sons and daughters of at least one Jewish parent, and who are not members of another religion) stood at 313,000 as at January 2024, according to research by Sergio della Pergola on behalf of the *American Jewish Yearbook*. There are 15.8 million Jews worldwide, 7.3 million of whom live in Israel and 6.3 million in the USA.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Religious and other hate crimes, 2023–24

The Home Office has published a statistical bulletin and dataset on *Hate Crime, England and Wales, Year Ending March 2024*. During that year, there were 140,561 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, a decrease of 4.8% on 2022–23, over two thirds of which were racially motivated. However, the number of religious hate crimes within that overall figure actually rose by 25.3%, from 8,370 in 2022–23 to 10,484 in 2023–24, the highest annual total in this category since recording of hate crime began in 2011–12. This increase was driven by growth in hate crimes against Jewish people and, to a lesser extent, Muslims since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict stemming from the events of 7 October 2023. The number of religious hate crimes targeting Jewish people in 2023–24 was 3,282, more than double the previous year, while there were 3,866 offences targeting Muslims, 12.6% more than in 2022–23. Christians were the next most targeted category (702), and in 428 cases no information on the targeted religion was provided. Full details are available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

English and Welsh Catholic attitudes to child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church

Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies has published *Attitudes of Catholics in England and Wales to Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Quantitative Report from the Boundary Breaking Project* by Marcus Pound and Gregory Ryan. It is based upon the results of an online survey by YouGov of 3,120 self-identifying Catholics aged 18 and over in England and Wales between 29 June and 26 July 2022. The questionnaire covered awareness of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and its impact on respondents' religious practice. Seven key findings are highlighted in the 80-page report: (1) Regular Mass-goers (attending at least once a month) are better informed about the Church's handling of child sexual abuse cases, hold significantly more positive attitudes regarding the Church's response to the crisis, and are more likely to view the extent of abuse in the Church to be of similar levels to other parts of society than self-identifying Catholics who attend less often or not at all. (2) A majority of Catholics view child sexual abuse as an ongoing issue for the Church; only a quarter believe it to be a thing of the past. More than three quarters think that the Church must change a great deal to prevent further cases in the future. (3) Around half of all Catholics consider the Church to have experienced a similar level of child sexual abuse to other parts of society, or don't know. However, among those believing there to be a difference, it is perceived as more common in the Catholic Church. (4) Most Catholics received their information about child sexual abuse in the Church from mainstream media such as television, radio, and newspapers, with social media a significant but less widespread source for younger age groups. (5) Initiatives by Pope Francis to handle child sexual abuse cases are better known and viewed

more favourably than handling of cases by the local diocesan bishop, or the bishops of England and Wales as a whole. (6) As a result of child sexual abuse in the Church, a third of Catholics who previously attended Mass reduced their Mass attendance or stopped attending Mass altogether. This figure is echoed in a reduction in financial donations to parish or diocese giving by a third of Catholics who previously donated. (7) Despite low levels of awareness and/or participation to date, there is a widespread desire for a Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse, especially among younger Catholics. The report is available at:

- <https://www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research-/research-centres/catholic-studies-centre-for-ccs/Boundary-Breaking-Quantitative-Report.pdf>

and a press release at:

- <https://www.dur.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/catholic-studies/about-us/news/abuse-crisis-in-catholic-church-has-led-to-drop-in-mass-attendance/>

Political, social, economic, and religious perspectives of ethnic minority Britons

Academic think tank UK in a Changing Europe at King's College London has published *Minorities Report: The Attitudes of Britain's Ethnic Minority Population*, based upon an online non-probability survey of 4,000 ethnic minority respondents in the UK conducted by Focaldata between 6 June and 29 September 2023 using a blend of research panels and sources (see p. 72 for description of methodology). The report includes chapters on the 2024 general election; political views and values; identity; being 'British'; discrimination and prejudice; and economic preferences and social values. Some comparisons are made with a sample of white Britons. For example, non-white respondents tended to show higher levels of religiosity than those who were white, and they were more likely to see being part of a religious community as an important part of their identity (see pp. 33–5 for the section on religious identity). Very few ethnic minorities (7%) or whites (6%) thought being a Christian was important to being 'truly British'. Being religious did not make an ethnic minority respondent more socially conservative; while Christian and Muslim respondents tended to be more socially authoritarian, those who were Hindu or Sikh were often more socially liberal than those with no religious affiliation. The report is available at:

- <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/reports/minorities-report-the-attitudes-of-britains-ethnic-minority-population/>

although the link to the dataset (p. 76) did not work when BRIN tried.

Longitudinal study of churchgoing in Edinburgh and Leith

In the ongoing scholarly debate about the secularization of Scottish (and British) society, churchgoing is one of the few metrics for which longitudinal data exist, albeit fragmentarily. Clive Field's 'Churchgoing in Edinburgh and Leith, 1836–2016: the Statistical Record', *Scottish Church History*, Vol. 53, No. 2, October 2024, pp. 79–102 assembles and analyses the evidence about levels of church attendance in Scotland's capital (and second largest) city during the nineteenth to early twenty-first centuries. It draws upon quantitative data (nine religious censuses, with varying methodologies, in 1836, 1851, 1882, and between 1980 and 2016) and qualitative sources (chiefly local newspapers). Relative to population, churchgoing in Edinburgh and Leith appears to have declined continuously since the mid-nineteenth century, in-person attendance standing at an estimated 3.59 per cent of the city's residents on an average Sunday in 2022–23, somewhat lower than in Glasgow. Possible explanations for this decrease are briefly explored. The article is freely available at:

- [https://www.eupublishing.com/toc/sch/53/2](https://www.euppublishing.com/toc/sch/53/2)

Religion in English northern industrial towns during the 1950s

Clive Field's 'A Secularizing Society? Case Studies of English Northern Industrial Towns in the 1950s' has already been noted in *Counting Religion in Britain* when it was released online as an advance access article on 11 July 2024. It has now been published in *Historical Research*, Vol. 97, No. 278, November 2024, pp. 550–72. The abstract reads: 'The religious historiography of Britain during the 1950s remains underdeveloped. Such scholarship as there is has drawn disproportionately upon national church statistics and opinion polls. In this article, we present the findings of three contemporaneous studies of religion in northern industrial towns: Rawmarsh and Scunthorpe (1954–56), Billingham (1957–59), and Bolton (1960). Sundry indicators are illuminated, including churchgoing and 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, and Catholicism was soon to feel the chill winds of secularization, also.' The text is available on an open access basis at:

- <https://academic.oup.com/histres/article/97/278/550/7712149>

Paganism in numbers

Suzanne Owen and Angela Puca (eds), *Pagan Religions in Five Minutes*, Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2024, xix + 232p., ISBN: 9781800505254, £22.95, paperback comprises 70 short chapters on aspects of paganism in Britain and worldwide. The fifth of these, by Vivianne Crowley, asks and briefly answers the foundational question 'How Many Pagans Are There?' (pp. 18–20), observing: 'Estimating the number of Pagans worldwide is complex due to the diversity of Pagan practices. While millions engage in practices that could be classified as Pagan, many do not identify with the term. In the UK and the US, census data shows a gradual increase in Pagans. Paganism in each country varies with its history. However, not everyone practising Pagan rituals considers Paganism their religion.' The book's webpage (with full contents list) is at:

- <https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/pagan-religions5m/>

APPENDIX: KEYWORDS/TAGS

Allan Little, Angela Puca, anti-Semitic incidents, anti-Semitism, Billingham, Bolton, Bonfire Night, Centre for Catholic Studies, child sexual abuse, church attendance, Church of England bishops, Clive Field, Community Security Trust, divisions between different religions, Durham University, economic value of churches, Edinburgh and Leith, Edinburgh University Press, Equinox Publishing, ethnic minorities, Focaldata, Gaza, Gregory Ryan, Halloween, Hamas, hate crimes, health and wellbeing, Hezbollah, Historical Research, Home Office, House of Lords, identity, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Islamist terrorism, Islamophobia, Islamophobic incidents, Israel, Israel-Palestine conflict, Jasmine Kazantzis, Jewish Current Affairs Survey, Jews, Jonathan Boyd, King's College London, Lebanon, Marcus Pound, Middle East, More in Common, Muslims, National Churches Trust, National Health Service, northern industrial towns, pagans, Palestinians, police, politics, radical Islamist extremist incidents, [Rawmarsh](#), religious hate crimes, religious prejudice, rites of passage, Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholics, safe place, Savanta, Scotland, Scottish Church History, Scunthorpe, secularization, Sergio della Pergola, social capital, State of Life, Suzanne Owen, sympathy, Tell MAMA, UK in a Changing Europe, Vivianne Crowley, Will Watt, YouGov