Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources
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OPINION POLLS

Depicting the ethnicity of Jesus Christ: what is acceptable?

According to an online survey of a national cross-section of 1,714 Britons on 14–15 December 2021, 58% of the public think Jesus Christ is usually depicted in images as a white person and just 22% as Middle Eastern. However, when asked which racial group he could be depicted as being from, 68% believed it acceptable to portray Him as Middle Eastern, 63% as white, 44% as black, 40% as South Asian, and 37% as East Asian. The questions were also put to a sample of 1,023 black, Asian, and minority ethnic adults on 8–16 December 2021, 60% of whom felt it acceptable to depict Jesus as Middle Eastern (and the same proportion even among a Christian sub-sample). Full data tables are available at:

https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/12/23/what-race-can-jesus-be

Ipsos MORI Veracity Index, 2021: trust in clergy and priests to tell the truth slightly up

Ipsos MORI have published their 2021 Veracity Index, based upon telephone interviews with 2,016 British adults aged 18 and over between 29 October and 10 November. Respondents were asked whether they generally trusted each of 30 different professions to tell the truth or not, in continuation of an annual series that commenced in 1983. Clergy and priests came mid-way in the rankings (in fifteenth place), as they have tended to be positioned in recent years; they were trusted by 58% of the public (up by 2% since 2020) and distrusted by 32%, with 9% undecided. The list was topped by nurses (on 94%), librarians (93% – as this is the former profession of the current blogger, perhaps he is entitled to a little ‘gloat’), and doctors (91%). Topline data, with breaks by educational attainment, gender, and party preference, are at:

https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-mori-veracity-index-trust-police-drops-second-year-row

Trust in the Church/organized religion and other institutions, as measured by YouGov

Just 24% of the 1,729 Britons interviewed online by YouGov on 9–10 November 2021 claimed to have any trust in the Church or organized religion (4% having a great deal of trust and 20% a fair amount). The figure did not exceed 34% (for the over-65s) in any demographic sub-group, although it had risen to 40% among a separate YouGov sample of 1,009 ethnic minority adults on 12–18 October 2021. Two-thirds of the national population either had not much (36%) or no trust (29%) in the Church or organized religion, peaking at 71% of Labour voters and 70% of men. Of the seven other institutions covered in the poll, the news media (79%), large corporations (78%), and the UK government (70%) had an even worse distrust rating than the Church or organized religion, with majorities trusting the armed forces, universities, the police, and the NHS. Full data tables are available at:

https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/12/15/trust-police-has-fallen-amongst-ethnic-minority-br

Non-stun slaughter of animals for religious reasons: the debate continues

The UK government has recently completed a public consultation on whether there should be compulsory labelling of meat and dairy products to reveal if they derive from animals reared in indoor factory farms and/or from those killed without pre-stunning. Two campaign groups have recently tested public opinion on this subject. Compassion in World Farming commissioned Opinium to survey 1,990 UK adults online, finding that 68% wanted such products to be labelled with their method of production. A study by Censuswide for the National Secular Society (NSS), among an online sample of 2,000, focused on attitudes towards the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning, an exemption from a legal requirement that is currently permitted (to address the dietary customs and preferences of Muslims and Jews). Almost three-quarters (72%) of the population considered that meat produced by non-stun methods should be clearly labelled, with 58% backing the removal of the religious exemption from animal slaughter without pre-stunning (and just 14% opposed, not all of whom could possibly have been Jews or Muslims). In both instances, only press releases are available in the public domain as yet, but hopefully the full data will be published soon. For the NSS poll, see the write-up at:

https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/12/public-backs-labelling-of-religious-non-stun-slaughter-meat

Extra-terrestrials, Ipsos MORI, and the public

Two recent online polls by Ipsos MORI have explored British attitudes towards extra-terrestrials.

The first study was undertaken among a sample of 1,008 adults aged 16 and over across the UK between 13 and 19 May 2021, as part of a broader investigation of subscription to 11 conspiracy theories, one of them being: 'Governments hide the presence of extra-terrestrial unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and alien visitors'. Half the respondents (53%) claimed to be familiar with this conspiracy theory and 47% were curious about it, 27% having looked at information about it and 18% admitting they had talked to other people about it. Television (47%), social media (42%), and tabloid newspapers (32%) were cited as the main sources of their knowledge. One-quarter considered the theory to be plausible, only 31% actively disagreeing. Although 29% sensed the theory was not strictly accurate, they deemed it an acceptable challenge to official explanations. Topline results can be found in the report at:

https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/tackling-conspiracy-theories

The second poll was a 33-nation study of predictions for 2022, for which 1,000 adults aged 16–74 in Great Britain were interviewed during global fieldwork between 22 October and 5 November 2021. One of the predictions concerned the possibility that aliens would visit Earth in the forthcoming year. Just 10% of Britons thought this was likely, somewhat below the global country average of 14%, with 78% considering it unlikely. Residents of India (30%) and Saudi Arabia (28%) were most confident that aliens would be paying us a visit. Topline results are in the charts at:

https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-global-predictions-2022

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: Evangelical Alliance's latest survey on Changing Church

An online survey by the Evangelical Alliance UK, completed by a self-selecting and overwhelmingly evangelical sample of 552 church leaders and 1,676 church members between 14 and 24 October 2021, gives some insights into the impact of eighteen months of the Covid-19 pandemic on organized Christianity in this country. Although the vast majority (95%) of churches have now resumed in-person services, levels of churchgoing were well down on pre-Covid levels, by 31% according to church leaders (taking the average) and by 25% (taking the median). The number of church members claiming to be in the pews on a weekly basis has dropped from 92% to 68% during the pandemic, or by one-quarter. It is suggested that the decline 'is largely due to people attending less regularly and is potentially offset by a rise in people attending online'. Additionally, three-fifths of church leaders have observed a decrease in volunteering at church and a similar proportion a diminution in congregational giving. Of places of worship offering children's ministry before the onset of Covid-19, 17% no longer did so, the figure being 24% in the case of youth ministry. *Changing Church, Autumn 2021 Survey: Research Report* is available at:

https://www.eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Changing-Church-Autumn-2021-Research-Report.pdf

Coronavirus chronicles: Church of England Statistics for Mission, 2020

Statistics for Mission, 2020, by Ken Eames, is the Church of England's second report on the quantitative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its religious ministry (the first report, on *Church at Home, 2020*, was considered in the October 2021 edition of *Counting Religion in Britain*). Coronavirus lockdowns, other restrictions, and consequential disruptions to organized religion inevitably had a negative effect on the Church of England and also limited its ability to gather the full pre-pandemic range of data. Such comparable statistics as it was possible to collect for 2020 typically exhibited decline over 2019, especially in relation to activities normally requiring in-person attendance. For example, although almost all churches offered face-to-face services during the census month of October 2020, adult average weekly congregations were 57% lower than a year before, and child ones were down by 77%. Advent and Christmas attendance shrank by more than three-quarters between 2019 and 2020. Factoring in regular Church at Home participants reduced the scale of decline in the overall worshipping community to a more modest 7%, while the electoral roll membership fell by just 1%. Baptisms and thanksgivings slumped by 81% and marriages and services of prayer and dedication by 71%. By contrast, there were only 4% fewer funerals, albeit net numbers were solely kept up by 48% growth in funerals conducted in crematoria and cemeteries. As there were more deaths in 2020 (both Covid-related and excess), the Church of England's market share of funerals must still have fallen. The 25-page report is available at:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/2020StatisticsForMission.pdf

Coronavirus chronicles: Christmas special events in churches, 2020 and 2021

On behalf of Ecclesiastical Insurance, the Bible Society (presumably via the Resonate panel) surveyed more than 1,000 churches in November 2021 (before the arrival in the UK of the Omicron variant of the virus) regarding their plans for hosting carol services and nativity plays

during the forthcoming Christmastide. On both indicators, there was a semblance of a return to normality in 2021. Thus, 87% of churches intended to host a carol service in 2021, whereas just 59% said the same in 2020; in pre-pandemic times, the proportion was 96%. Similarly for nativity plays, planned by 52% in 2021 against 38% in 2020. At the time of writing, no press release had appeared on the websites of either the Bible Society or Ecclesiastical Insurance, and these results are quoted from news items in the *Church Times* for 17/24 December 2021, p. 8 and *Methodist Recorder* for 24/31 December 2021, p. 2.

Jewish children in Jewish schools: Institute for Jewish Policy Research's latest report

In the latest published output from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), Brigitta Horup, Carli Lessof, and Jonathan Boyd explore *Numbers of Jewish Children in Jewish Schools: Statistical Bulletin for 2018/19 to 2020/21*. They document an increase of 1.5% per annum in the number of such pupils since the 2017/18 academic year, most of the growth being in the strictly Orthodox sector (where 60% of Jewish pupils in Jewish schools are to be found). The 15-page report is available at:

https://jpr.org/uk/publication?id=17933to 2020/21.

Estimating the level of anti-Semitism on Twitter in the UK

The Community Security Trust (CST) and the Antisemitism Policy Trust have jointly published a 14-page report estimating the extent of anti-Semitism on Twitter in the UK, based upon data analysis by the Woolf Institute, and deploying two different social media research tools. According to the first tool (Mozdeh), there are up to 1,350 explicitly anti-Semitic tweets in English, newly posted and available to UK users, every day in the UK. This is equivalent to 495,000 explicitly anti-Semitic tweets per year made viewable to UK users or nearly two such tweets for every Jew living in the UK. The second tool (Pulsar Platform) suggested that there are 100 explicitly anti-Semitic tweets in English from UK-based users every day. Discrepancies between the two estimating methods are discussed. A list of anti-Semitism search terms is appended. *Twitter: The Extent and Nature of Antisemitism on Twitter in the UK* can be accessed via the link in the CST press release at:

https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2021/12/10/new-uk-report-estimates-almost-half-a-million-explicitly-antisemitic-tweets-per-year

Jewish perceptions of Labour Party membership: still more to do?

A new study by the Fabian Society has revealed that, of all the Labour Party's constituent groups, Jewish members still report the worst experiences of the party. For example, 65% of Jewish members disagreed that everyone in their local party was friendly and welcoming, while 73% disagreed that people in the local party set aside their political differences and worked together. The data derive from an online survey of a self-selecting, and thus potentially unrepresentative, sample of 2,890 Labour Party members (2% of them professing Jews) interviewed during the summer of 2021. Further information is available in Ben Cooper and Andrew Harrop, *More to Do: Unequal Experiences of Labour Party Membership* at:

https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/More-to-do-Fabian-report-v2.pdf

A more upbeat note emerged from the results of a survey of 363 Jewish members of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM), equivalent to 15% of the total, conducted online between 29 October and 12 November 2021, roughly one year after the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that the Labour Party had unlawfully discriminated against its Jewish members. The headline finding was that the party has become a safer space for Jewish people and has made progress in tackling anti-Jewish racism since Sir Keir Starmer replaced Jeremy Corbyn as its leader, with 91% of Jewish JLM members trusting that Starmer is genuinely trying to root out anti-Semitism in the party, and 88% agreeing that, over the past twelve months, the party has made positive changes to its policies, processes, rules, and culture in relation to anti-Semitism. For the JLM press release, with a link to an eight-page summary of the survey, see:

https://www.jewishlabour.uk/jlm_membership_survey_a_year_on_from_the_ehrc_report

Recent reports from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education

The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) has published two reports about religious education provision in English secondary schools which may be of interest to BRIN readers.

The first comprised analyses of the Department for Education's school workforce census of November 2020, revealing that the number of schools reporting zero hours of religious education decreased significantly between 2019 and 2020 in all types of school:

https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/School%20workforce%20survey%20Nov%202020%20national%20level%20(Released%20Aut%202021).pdf

https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/School%20workforce%20survey%20Nov%202020%20national%20level%20(Released%20Aut%202021).pdf

NATRE's second report analysed the results of an online survey, conducted during the spring term of 2021, of a self-selecting sample of 335 teachers of religious education about the impact of government policy on the subject, including accountability measures and the English Baccalaureate, and student opportunity to pursue a GCSE in Religious Studies:

https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-a-survey-of-teachers-on-the-impact-of-government-policy-on-student-opportunity-to-study-gcse-rs/

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Population estimates by religion, England and Wales, 2019

When the earliest results are released, many commentators expect that the census of population in England and Wales, undertaken in March 2021, will reveal that the proportion of professing Christians has dropped below half. To whet their users' appetites, and to gain their feedback in developing a post-census measure, the Office for National Statistics has published a new article, *Population Estimates by Ethnic Group and Religion, England and Wales, 2019*. The figures therein are heavily influenced by a three-year pooled dataset of the Annual Population Survey for 2017–19, with a combined sample of 550,000 respondents. During this triennium, 51.0% of the country reported their religion as Christian, a decrease of 8.3% since the 2011

census. The number claiming to have no religion (including religion not stated) rose by 6.1% over the same period, to 38.4% in 2019 (albeit the middle year of the triennium is, of course, 2018). The article, with a link to the underlying spreadsheet (giving breaks by region, age, and gender), can be found at:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/popultionestimatesbyethnicgroupandreligionenglandandwales/2019

Coronavirus chronicles: vaccination rates among the over-50s by religion

The Office for National Statistics has also recently published a statistical bulletin and associated dataset updating Covid-19 vaccination rates: *Coronavirus and Vaccination Rates in People Aged 50 Years and over by Socio-Demographic Characteristic, England: 8 December 2020 to 12 December 2021*. Data relate to individuals enumerated at the 2011 population census and registered with a GP in 2019. In terms of religious groups (as defined by census categories), the lowest third dose and booster vaccination coverage was found among those identifying as Muslim (46.3%, against a national average for the age band of 74.7%). Muslims also had the lowest coverage for third vaccinations among those who had received two vaccinations by 12 September 2021 (55.2%, against a national average of 79.4%). Of 18,640,509 persons aged 50 years and above in England, 4.9% were still completely unvaccinated by 12 December 2021; 56.6% of these were Christians and 23.4% professed no religion. Full data are available at:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/coronavirusandvaccinationratesinpeopleaged50yearsandoverbysociodemographiccharacteristicengland8december2020to12december2021

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Counting religion in Britain, 1970–2020: new analysis and compendium of data tables

Clive Field's *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970–2020: Secularization in Statistical Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, xxiv + 464 pp., ISBN: 978–0–192–84932–8, £110, hardback) is the fourth volume in the author's chronological history of British secularization. It sheds significant new light on the nature, scale, and timing of religious change in Britain during the past half-century, with particular reference to quantitative sources. Adopting a key performance indicators approach, twenty-one facets of personal religious belonging, behaving, and believing are examined, offering a much wider range of lenses through which the health of religion can be viewed and appraised than most contemporary scholarship (which is typically confined to one or two measures). Summative analysis of these indicators, by means of a secularization dashboard, leads to a reaffirmation of the validity of secularization (in its descriptive sense) as the dominant narrative and direction of travel since 1970, while acknowledging that it is an incomplete process and without endorsing all aspects of the paradigmatic expression of secularization as a by-product of modernization. The appendix of 173 tables, a discrete statistical reference work in its own right, besides supporting (and being cross-referenced in) the main text, is designed as an extension to 2020 of the appendix of tables to 1970 in the acclaimed 1977 Clarendon Press volume *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, by Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, and Lee Horsley. As well as covering statistics generated by faith communities and the state, as did the

1977 book, the appendix to *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970–2020* includes a wide variety of time series from national sample surveys. Further information is available at:

https://global.oup.com/academic/product/counting-religion-in-britain-1970-2020-9780192849328

Chapter abstracts and keywords can be found at:

https://clivedfield.wordpress.com/publications-british-religious-history-2/counting-religion-in-britain/

Other academic outputs:

- Leslie Francis and David Lankshear, eds., *The Science of Congregation Studies: Searching for Signs of Growth* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021, xviii + 352 pp., ISBN: 978–3–030–76106–6, £109.99, hardback); qualitative and quantitative exploration of the Signs of Growth Survey in the Church of England Diocese of Southwark in 2009–12, in which over 31,000 churchgoers participated, identifying a series of themes relevant to the understanding and development of church congregations:
  https://link.springer.com/book/9783030761066

- Beth Singler and Eileen Barker, eds., *Radical Transformations in Minority Religions* (London: Routledge, 2022, xv + 275 pp., ISBN: 978–0–415–78670–6, £120, hardback); collection of seventeen historical and contemporary case studies of new religious movements around the world since the 1970s, including several chapters on Britain, primarily written from sociological and anthropological perspectives, and employing mainly qualitative methodologies:
  https://www.routledge.com/Radical-Transformations-in-Minority-Religions/Singler-Barker/p/book/9780415786706

- Amy Unsworth and David Voas, 'The Dawkins Effect? Celebrity Scientists, (Non)religious Publics, and Changed Attitudes to Evolution', *Public Understanding of Science*, Vol. 30, No. 4, May 2021, pp. 434–54; binary logistic regression analyses of changed attitudes to evolution among religious (Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal, Independent Evangelical, and Muslim) and non-religious publics in relation to their familiarity with four celebrity scientists and two celebrity creationists, derived from an online survey by YouGov in August 2014:
  https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0963662521989513

- Elizabeth Poole, 'Religion on an Ordinary Day in UK News: Christianity, Secularism, and Diversity', *Journal of Religion, Media, and Digital Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 2, November 2021, pp. 179–202; offers a quantitative and qualitative examination of the representation of conventional and common religion and the secular sacred in three print newspapers (*The Times*, *Metro*, and *Manchester Evening News*) on 17 September in 2013, 2014, and 2015 as part of an international comparative study (reported in the same issue of the journal), the conclusion being: 'Religion on an ordinary day in these British newspapers functions to make claims or reassert aspects of British identity':
  https://brill.com/view/journals/rmdc/10/2/article-p179_179.xml

- Leslie Francis, Susan Jones, and Ursula McKenna, 'The Contribution of Cathedrals to Psychological Health and Well-Being: Assessing the Impact of Cathedral Carol Services', *HTS Theological Studies*, Vol. 77, No. 4, 2021, a6820, 8 pp.; 802 attendees at the Christmas Eve carol services at Liverpool's Anglican cathedral in 2019 completed the Oxford Happiness Inventory both before and towards the close of the services, achieving significantly higher happiness scores on the second than the first administration of the survey instrument, suggesting that attendance at the services had a positive impact on congregants' psychological health and well-being: https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/6820

PEOPLE NEWS

Gordon Heald (1941–2021)

Gordon Heald, who ran the Gallup Poll in Britain between 1979 and 1994 and Opinion Research Business (later ORB International) between 1994 and 2009, has died. He was one of the most gifted and inspirational public opinion researchers of his generation and was a major presence on the global as well as on the national polling stage. Gordon always took a special interest in surveying popular attitudes towards religion, morality, and values. It is largely thanks to him that we have such a rich seam of data in these fields, particularly for the last quarter of the twentieth century. Members of the BRIN team have incurred countless debts to Gordon over the years, not least his readiness to share results that were otherwise not in the public domain, to ensure (as he put it) they were properly 'archived'. We shall greatly miss his professionalism, encouragement, helpfulness, and convivial spirit. There is an affectionate obituary by his son, Johnny, at:

https://www.research-live.com/article/news/obituary-gordon-heald/id/5091682