

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

Number 104 – May 2024

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OPINION POLLS

Attitudes to faith in public life

The Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL) commissioned Whitestone Insight to undertake an online poll of 2,064 UK adults on 1–2 May 2024 concerning their attitudes to faith in public life. The questionnaire comprised seven clusters each of six statements inviting agree/disagree responses, the first cluster being restricted to the half-sample claiming to belong to a religion and exploring their personal faith, the remaining clusters investigating topics such as religious education and religion in the media, politics, and the workplace. Taking the results at face value, there are doubtless some positives that the IIFL will derive from the survey, especially the lip-service paid to the past and potential future role of religion in shaping society. However, there are also several indications of the public’s lack of engagement with, and ambivalence about, religion; for instance, 65% disagreed they were searching for a deeper understanding of God or a higher power, 63% opposed more religion in the media, 59% disagreed they were more interested in issues of faith than when they were younger, and 46% denied that faith and religion generally are a force for good (with just 36% thinking the opposite). The dataset can be accessed via the second link in IIFL’s press release at:

- <https://iifl.org.uk/reports/britains-attitudes-to-faith-in-public-life-may-2024/>

The first link leads to a blog by Amanda Murjan, who contends (optimistically) ‘this report points to an unspoken positive experience of faith and religion in the UK, and a belief in its potential to benefit communities’.

Attitudes to Sunday trading hours in England and Wales

Three decades have elapsed since Parliament last updated Sunday trading legislation in England and Wales, permitting large shops to open for up to six hours on Sundays and smaller shops to trade as they wished. This was a compromise between the competing interest groups at the time. In terms of public opinion, much of the heat has gone out of the issue since then (not least with online shopping). However, satisfaction with the current arrangements has been the subject of a YouGov tracker over the past five years, with attitudes monitored on a bimonthly basis. The series is too long to reproduce all the data points here, but we have selected one at annual intervals in Table 1, below. From this it will be seen that approximately half of adults favour unregulated Sunday trading, just over one-quarter are satisfied with the limit of six hours for larger shops, and between one in six and one in eight persons would prefer no shops to be open at all on Sundays. The dataset for the most recent poll can be found at:

- https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation11_sr_13.pdf

Table 1: British public’s attitudes to Sunday trading hours, 2019–24

% down	7/19	6/20	7/21	6/22	6/23	5/24
N =	1,691	1,667	1,778	1,801	1,782	1,793
Shops should be allowed to open as long as they want	51	44	50	51	55	51
Shops should only be allowed to open for six hours	28	31	28	27	26	27
Shops should not be allowed to open at all	15	18	14	14	12	17
Don’t know	7	7	8	9	7	6

Source: YouGov. Note: Dates are given in abbreviated month/year format.

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 2, 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, the margin between the two having widened to 13 points in the latest study, full data from which can be found at:

- [https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov - Gaza attitudes May 2024.pdf](https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov_-_Gaza_attitudes_May_2024.pdf)

Table 2: 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	23/4	7/5
N =	2,046	2,080	2,007	2,085	1,751	2,092	2,073	2,070	4,061	3,874	2,100	2,072
Israeli side	21	19	19	16	19	16	15	15	15	16	16	16
Palestinian side	15	21	20	22	27	28	26	28	29	28	28	29
Both sides equally	20	32	30	32	30	22	28	27	25	22	24	23
Don't know	45	28	31	29	24	34	31	30	31	34	31	31

Source: YouGov. Note: 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 17–19 May 2024, the degree to which anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are perceived as problems having risen by one point this month, although this is unlikely to be statistically significant. This latest dataset is available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/press-and-polls/westminster-voting-intention-political-attitudes-poll-daily-telegraph-21-may-2024/>

Table 3: Perceptions of anti-Semitism as a problem in the UK, July 2023–May 2024

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Big problem	16	15	14	17	22	21	16	21	21	20	21
Somewhat a problem	34	35	37	37	35	36	41	38	40	38	38
Not really a problem	25	25	23	21	18	21	22	19	18	19	20
Not a problem at all	7	9	8	8	7	7	7	6	7	7	7
Don't know	18	17	18	18	17	14	15	15	15	16	14
<i>A problem</i>	50	49	51	53	57	57	56	60	61	58	59
<i>Not a problem</i>	32	33	31	28	25	29	27	25	24	26	27

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Table 4: Perceptions of Islamophobia as a problem in the UK, July 2023–May 2024

% down	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Big problem	20	21	22	20	23	21	19	22	23	21	20
Somewhat a problem	35	35	36	37	36	37	37	39	37	37	40
Not really a problem	21	21	19	19	18	21	20	18	19	18	20
Not a problem at all	9	9	10	9	10	10	10	8	9	10	9
Don't know	15	14	13	14	14	12	13	13	12	13	11
<i>A problem</i>	55	56	58	57	59	58	56	61	60	59	60
<i>Not a problem</i>	30	30	29	28	28	30	30	26	28	29	29

Source: Savanta political tracker.

Fall-out from Israel-Hamas conflict: university student opinion

The Israel-Hamas conflict has sharply divided university student views around the world and led to a wave of protests and occupations on university campuses. To test opinion in the UK, Stand with Us UK (an organization supporting Israel and combating anti-Semitism) commissioned Savanta to undertake an online poll among 1,024 UK university students on 19–23 April 2024. Three questions were asked. Two sought agreement/disagreement with statements: ‘Jewish people are likely to face antisemitism for wearing Jewish symbols on campus, even if they actively support the Palestinian cause’ (45% agree, 25% disagree, 30% neither or don’t know); and ‘People publicly supporting the Israeli cause on campus should expect to face abuse’ (38% agree, 31% disagree, 31% neither or don’t know). The third question asked student respondents to choose between competing statements about the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, which triggered the current conflict: 36% said it was ‘a terrorist attack conducted by Hamas against innocent people’, 29% that it was ‘an understandable act of resistance against Israeli oppressors’, with 35% undecided. It will be seen that one-third of students are either seeking to remain neutral on the issue or do not engage with it at all. Full data tables, including breaks by religion, are available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/press-and-polls/campus-protests-poll-stand-with-us-uk-17-may-2024/>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Will religion count in the UK and other national elections in 2024?

With a general election in the offing in the UK, the religious think tank Theos has launched a series of briefings exploring the relationship between religion and electoral behaviour. They are being written by Paul Bickley and George Lapshynov (both of Theos) in conjunction with Yinxuan Huang (Bible Society) on the basis of successive waves of the British Election Study (BES) Internet Panel, fielded by YouGov. The first two briefings are already available. No. 1, ‘Do the Religious Vote?’, explores voter turnout according to religious affiliation, religious attendance, and self-reported religiosity, revealing a complex set of different effects. No. 2 asks ‘Who Do the Religious Vote for?’, answering the question by references to the period 2014–23, thereby updating the analysis in an earlier (2014) Theos report by Ben Clements and Nick Spencer on *Voting and Values in Britain: Does Religion Count?* The authors of this 2024 briefing conclude that some historic religious partisanshipes appear to have changed, notably the Roman Catholic Labour vote, while others, such as the Anglican Conservative vote, persist. Further briefings will be added on publication to the Theos project website at:

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/religion-counts-2024>

Bickley and Lapshynov have a related article based on the BES data, ‘Does Religion Influence Votes?’, in the *Church Times*, 17 May 2024, p. 15, the answer to their question being ‘Yes, but not in a straightforward way’; this can be found at:

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/17-may/comment/opinion/does-religion-influence-votes>

Responding to the sudden announcement by the Prime Minister of a UK general election to take place on 4 July 2024, Bickley has also hastily penned a blog on ‘How Religion Will Influence the 2024 UK General Election’; this can be found at:

- <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2024/05/23/how-religion-will-influence-the-2024-uk-general-election>

UK evangelical Christians and politics

A much smaller-scale and less representative study on a related theme is *Thinking Faithfully about Politics: A Snapshot of How Evangelicals Think and Act as They Engage in Politics* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2024, 28pp.). This is based upon an opportunity (self-selecting) sample of 1,380 evangelical Christians in November-December 2023. A key finding is: ‘The Christians we surveyed would be more likely to vote for parties that protected free speech in the workplace, opposed assisted suicide, reduced the time limit for abortion, supported safe and legal routes for asylum, backed religious freedom in trade deals and increased the minimum wage. This is not a portfolio of policy preferences that neatly map onto any party platform.’ The report is available at:

- <https://www.eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/General-Election-report-2024-A5-WEB.pdf>

Church of England attendance statistics, 2023: preliminary view

Evidently searching for a ‘good news’ story, the Church of England has taken the unusual step of press-releasing a preliminary snapshot of its Statistics for Mission for 2023, even though it acknowledges that ‘The totals could be revised as further figures come in and checks continue’, until the definitive version of the data is published in the autumn or winter. The key interim finding is that all-age average weekly attendance at Church of England services rose by 4.7 per cent between 2022 and 2023, from 654,000 to 685,000. However, this is still well below pre-Covid-19 levels (it was 854,300 in 2019) and also 6.7% below what is described as ‘the projected pre-pandemic trend’, which is defined as ‘a straight-line fit to published attendance figures from 2014–2019’. The press release is available at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/weekly-church-attendance-five-cent-third-year-consecutive-growth>

Church of Scotland congregational statistics, 2023

Among the many reports considered by this year’s meeting of the Church of Scotland General Assembly was one on congregational statistics as at 31 December 2023. The number of members was 259,200, a fall of 4.1% from 2022, and more than one-third fewer than in 2013. During the year, there were only 760 admissions by profession of faith. In-person weekly worshippers were 61,580, with an additional 26,850 worshipping online or offline, the total of 88,430 equivalent to just 34.1% of membership. Almost three-fifths of worshippers are aged 65 and above. More information, including breaks at presbytery level, is available in section 24 of the volume of General Assembly reports at:

- https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/121325/Volume-of-Reports-2024.pdf

Collective worship in state schools: teacher attitudes and experiences

The National Secular Society (NSS) has press-released the findings of an online poll it commissioned Teacher Tapp to conduct among 2,000 senior leaders at primary and secondary schools in England on the subject of holding daily acts of collective worship of a wholly or broadly Christian nature (which is a statutory requirement). Seven in ten of these leaders disagreed or strongly disagreed with this law and only 12% supported it, with limited differences of view between leaders of schools with a religious character and without. NSS has also obtained hitherto unpublished data from another Teacher Tapp poll from 2022, this time undertaken among 7,600 teachers, 66% of whom reported that their school did not hold collective worship, rising to 79% of teachers at schools without a religious character. The NSS press release is at:

- <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2024/05/most-school-leaders-disagree-with-law-on-worship-poll-finds>

Further release from the UK National Jewish Identity Survey

David Graham, *Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron: The Observance of Israel Commemoration Days by UK Jews* (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2024, 17pp.) is based on findings from the UK National Jewish Identity Survey in November-December 2022, completed online by an opportunity sample of 4,891 self-identifying Jews. Focusing on UK Jewish commemoration of Israel's Memorial Day (by 24%) and celebration of Israel's Independence Day (by 32%), this factsheet is available at:

- <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/yom-haatzmaut-and-yom-hazikaron-observance-israel-commemoration-days-uk-jews>

National Jewish Student Survey, 2024

The Union of Jewish Students, which represents the interests of 9,000 Jewish students in the UK and Ireland, has published Edward Daniel and Sarah Wilks, *Creating Community, Fostering Leadership: The National Jewish Student Survey, 2024*, the first large-scale and systematic study of Jewish student life since 2011. The 2024 survey was completed by a self-selecting sample of 1,026 Jewish students between May and November 2023, overwhelmingly before the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023. The principal areas of questioning concerned: campus life, representation, worries, finances, friends and living, communication, Jewish experience, perceptions of Jewish identity, knowledge of Judaism, impact of Jewish education, nature of being Jewish, charitable giving, activism, volunteering, anti-Semitism on campus, relationship with Israel, Zionism, Israel on campus, apprehension about Israel, two state solution, mental health and neurodiversity, and future plans. Almost three-quarters had experienced a mental health difficulty during the previous twelve months, typically involving stress, anxiety disorders, or depression. The 56-page report can be downloaded from:

- <https://www.ujs.org.uk/the-national-jewish-student-survey-2024>

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Scotland's census, 2022: religious affiliation data

On 21 May 2024, the National Records of Scotland published *Scotland's Census, 2022: Ethnic Group, National Identity, Language, and Religion*, offering an initial view (at national level) of the 2022 census data on these topics. The major finding from the voluntary religion question was that, for the first time in the history of the census, the majority of Scotland's people professed to have no religion. At 51.12%, the proportion doing so was 14.46% up on the 2011 census figure, seemingly mostly at the expense of the Church of Scotland, whose market share fell by 12.08% between 2011 and 2022, representing a loss of 610,100 people over this eleven-year period. The percentage of persons with no religion increased across all age groups, while males were still more likely to have no religion than females. A summary of the national picture is shown in Table 5, overleaf. The national level report is available at:

- <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion/>

Users can interrogate the data for themselves at:

- <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/search-the-census#/search-by>

**Table 5: Religious profession in Scotland:
census of population, 2011–22**

% down	2011	2022	change
No religion	36.66	51.12	+14.46
Church of Scotland	32.44	20.36	-12.08
Roman Catholic	15.88	13.30	-2.58
Other Christian	5.50	5.13	-0.37
Muslim	1.45	2.20	+0.75
Hindu	0.31	0.55	+0.24
Buddhist	0.24	0.28	+0.04
Sikh	0.17	0.20	+0.03
Jewish	0.11	0.11	
Pagan		0.35	
Another religion	0.29	0.23	-0.06
Not stated	6.95	6.16	-0.79

Source: National Records of Scotland. Note: Pagan was only a write-in option in 2011.

Hate crimes recorded by the police in Scotland, 2022–23

Justice Analytical Services of the Scottish Government have published a report and dataset on *Hate Crimes Recorded by the Police in Scotland, 2022–23*. The total of such crimes in the year was 6,257, which was the lowest number since 2014–15. Of these, 501 (8.0%) were recorded as having a religion aggravator, a somewhat higher proportion than in 2021–22 (6.9%) when the absolute religion sub-total of 478 was the lowest since 2014–15. More information at:

- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/hate-crimes-recorded-by-the-police-in-scotland-2022-23/>

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Coronavirus chronicles: giving up on online or offline services during lockdown

Andrew Village and Leslie Francis have mined their ‘Covid-19 and Church-21 Survey’ dataset (derived from an opportunity sample) to explore ‘Giving Up on the Church of England in the Time of Pandemic: Individual Differences in Responses of Non-Ministering Members to Online Worship and Offline Services’, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, May 2024, pp. 19–38. Specifically, the authors investigate a subset of 826 non-ministering Anglicans living in England (comprising 800 lay people and 26 retired clergy) and the attributes of the quarter of them who had given up on online and/or offline services in church during the 2021 Covid-19 lockdown. The article is available open access at:

- <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-anglican-studies/article/giving-up-on-the-church-of-england-in-the-time-of-pandemic-individual-differences-in-responses-of-nonministering-members-to-online-worship-and-offline-services/45FA9F42662A16D098A74C46E4BC8321>

APPENDIX: KEYWORDS/TAGS

Amanda Murjan, Andrew Village, anti-Semitism, British Election Study Internet Panel, census of population, church attendance, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Church Times, collective worship in schools, coronavirus, Covid-19, David Graham, Edward Daniel, Evangelical Alliance, evangelical Christians, faith in public life, George Lapshynov, Hamas, hate crime, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life, Islamophobia, Israel-Hamas conflict, Israelis, Jews, Journal of Anglican Studies, Justice Analytical Services, Leslie Francis, Muslims, National Jewish Student Survey, National Records of Scotland, National Secular Society, Palestinians, Paul Bickley, religion and politics, religion in the media, religion online, religious census, religious hate crimes, religious prejudice, religious profession, Sarah Wilks, Savanta, schoolteachers, Scotland, shopping, Stand with Us UK, Sunday trading hours, Teacher Tapp, Theos, UK National Jewish Identity Survey, Union of Jewish Students, university students, voting, Whitestone Insight, Yinxuan Huang, Yom Ha'atzmaut, Yom HaZikaron, YouGov