

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources Number 110 – November 2024

© Clive D. Field, 2024

OPINION POLLS

Crisis in the Church of England: resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury since 2013, has never been far from public controversy during his period of office, but his position became decidedly shakier on 7 November 2024 with the publication of the independent review led by Keith Makin into the Church of England's handling of allegations of serious abuse by the late John Smyth. The review report was critical of Welby's failure to pursue the case vigorously enough once he became aware of the abuse. There were mounting calls from various quarters, including voices within the Church of England, for Welby to step down, and on 12 November he issued a statement of resignation (later clarified to be effective from 6 January 2025). Public reactions to the scandal, and its wider ramifications (beyond safeguarding) for the Church of England were the subject of several online YouGov polls among adult Britons in the run-up and aftermath to Welby's resignation, as follows:

1–4 November 2024 (N = 2,105): Respondents were asked about their attitudes to Welby, the question identifying him only as a 'public figure' and not mentioning that he was Archbishop of Canterbury. One in ten replied their views of Welby were favourable, 24% were neutral, 18% unfavourable, while 49% had not heard of him. Full data table available at:

- https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Internal_JustinWelbyFavourability_241104.pdf

6–7 November 2024 (N = 2,177): This was a general poll of attitudes to the Church of England. Just one specific question was included concerning Welby, asking respondents to name the current Archbishop of Canterbury, only 21% knowing that it was Welby. Among the other questions, 32% had a favourable opinion of the Church of England and 39% an unfavourable one; 60% supported the separation of the Church of England from the State (i.e. disestablishment) and 21% did not; 73% thought the Church of England had no or very little influence on the way most people in Britain live their lives; 31% endorsed the UK monarch no longer being head of the Church of England, with 35% opposed; and 61% backed Church of England bishops losing their seats in the House of Lords. Article and link to full data tables at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/50933-is-it-time-to-disestablish-the-church-of-england>

12 November 2024 (N = 5,856): Respondents were asked whether they had a favourable or unfavourable opinion of Welby, the question (seemingly fielded in advance of the resignation statement) again failing to mention that he was the Archbishop of Canterbury. Just 6% said their views towards Welby were favourable, 21% neutral, 31% unfavourable, while 42% had not heard of him. Full data tables available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/survey-results/daily/2024/11/12/feea0/1>

13 November 2024 (N = 4,541): Respondents were asked: 'From what you've seen and heard, do you think Justin Welby was right or wrong to resign as Archbishop of Canterbury?' Welby had issued his resignation statement the day before the survey. The majority (62%) said that Welby had been right to resign, while only 4% judged he had been wrong to do so, with 34% undecided. Full data tables available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/survey-results/daily/2024/11/13/65557/1>

Other pollsters did not release any findings on the crisis, with one very small exception. In one of its regular online surveys for *The Observer*, Opinium Research asked a sample of 2,116 UK adults on 11–13 November 2024 whether they had seen or heard anything during the past week about Welby’s announcement of his resignation following criticism of his handling of the Smyth case. Almost three quarters of respondents claimed to have seen or heard either a lot (33%) or a little (40%) about Welby’s resignation, the remaining 27% (including 47% of under-35s) being ignorant of it. The data table can be found at:

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

Assisted dying Bill: polling of British public by Focaldata and More in Common

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, introduced by Kim Leadbeater as a Private Members’ Bill, was given a second reading in the House of Commons on 29 November 2024, with 330 MPs in favour and 275 against, and following an impassioned but reasoned and respectful debate. The Bill now proceeds to the next (committee) stage. The debate was preceded by a certain amount of public opinion polling on assisted dying, two exemplars being worthy of note here because they were (a) especially detailed and (mostly) nuanced in the questions asked and (b) included breaks by a religious variable.

The first survey was conducted online among 5,033 Britons aged 18 and over by Focaldata on behalf of Care Not Killing on 6–11 November 2024. Some awareness of the Bill was claimed by 85% of the entire sample, slightly more among the professing religious (88%) than the religious nones (83%). As in all other polls on the topic, a substantial majority of Britons (73%) declared themselves in favour of legalizing assisted dying, but the proportion was lower (albeit still high) among the religious (68%) than the nones (82%), with opposition by 24% and 9%, respectively. Those who indicated support for assisted dying in principle were alerted to several caveats and contrary arguments and asked whether, in the light of them, they still supported it. Although a majority of the original majority generally continued to endorse assisted dying, there were many switchers, and this was true of the whole population, the religious, and the nones. The outliers were the extension of assisted dying to children under 12 years, which a plurality in all three groups opposed, and individuals opting for assisted dying because they could not afford the cost of social care, which only a plurality deemed acceptable.

Further caveats and counter arguments were then addressed by Focaldata to all respondents, not just those who supported the principle of assisted dying. Asked whether, before Parliament considered the introduction of assisted dying, a Royal Commission should examine the future of palliative and end-of-life care, 70% of the full sample, 74% of the religious, and 63% of the nones agreed. There was also agreement that assisted dying would discriminate against the poor who could not afford comfortable end-of-life living (51% of all Britons, 55% of the religious, and 45% of nones); that the current state of the NHS would push some people into assisted dying if it were made legal (56%, 59%, and 50%); and that Labour should prioritize sorting out palliative, social, and end-of-life care first before even thinking about assisted dying (66%, 70%, and 58% in agreement) – technically, this was a somewhat misleading statement, since the current Bill has been brought forward as a Private Members’ Bill and the Labour government’s position on it is (officially) neutral. Full data tables can be found at:

- <https://www.focaldata.com/blog/care-not-killing-poll-results>

The second survey on assisted dying was undertaken by More in Common among an online sample of 2,111 adults aged 18 and over in Britain on 8–11 November 2024. Asked whether, assuming it was legal by that point, they would personally consider assisted dying themselves if they were diagnosed with a painful or paralytic terminal illness, 55% of all respondents said they would, but the proportion varied considerably according to the degree of importance they attached to religion in their lives, ranging from 35% for those for whom religion was very important to 66% for those for whom it was not important at all. A change in the law to enable

individuals, under certain circumstances, to seek medical assistance to end their lives was endorsed by 65% of the whole sample but by 41% of interviewees for whom religion was very important and, at the other end of the spectrum, 76% for those for whom religion was not important at all. Replies were very similar when interviewees were asked whether they supported the Leadbeater Bill then before Parliament, 64%, 42%, and 73% for the three groups, respectively. Two questions were also posed about the extent to which religious leaders should be able to influence particular decisions as the assisted dying process unfolded; in answer to one of these questions, just 14% deemed it essential that politicians should listen to religious leaders on this matter, albeit the figure rose to 40% among those for whom religion was very important. Likewise, merely 23% of the full sample found convincing the objection to assisted dying that it went against personal religious beliefs, again elevated to 60% for those for whom religion was very important. Full data tables are at:

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

Many of the issues and objections raised in these polls will doubtless surface again as the Bill passes through its remaining Parliamentary stages in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and the likelihood of it surviving unamended seems remote.

Belief in an afterlife, a nation divided into thirds: More in Common poll

More in Common's survey on assisted dying on 8–11 November 2024 was accompanied by a single question about belief in an afterlife following death. Overall, 32% of the 2,111 respondents said that they did believe in an afterlife, the stand-out figure being 47% among both the 18–24s and Londoners. A further 32% of the whole sample claimed not to believe in an afterlife, with peaks of 42% among men and persons aged 65–74, 43% for the over-75s, and 45% in eastern England. One third of all interviewees were unsure about their belief in life after death, while 2% preferred not to say. The data table is available at:

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

Ipsos Veracity Index, 2024: trust in professions and groups to tell the truth

Somewhat unexpectedly and inexplicably, the British public's trust in clergy and priests to tell the truth has apparently risen by nine points between 2023 and 2024, from 54% to 63%. This means that clergy and priests are now the ninth most trusted profession (of the 26 included in the Ipsos Veracity Index, 2024, conducted by telephone among 1,015 adults aged 16 and over on 9–15 October 2024), albeit a long way behind the leaders – nurses (94%), engineers (90%), and doctors (88%). Clergy and priests are trusted slightly more by women than men and significantly more by Baby Boomers than GenZ members. Just in case there might be any premature rejoicing at the increase, it should be remembered that, when the index started in 1983, 85% of Britons trusted clergy and priests to tell the truth. Charts and data tables are available via the blog at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-veracity-index-2024>

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Participation of ethnic minorities in Church of England ministry and leadership

The 64-page *Behind the Stained-Glass: A Report on the Participation of UK Minoritised Ethnic People in the Ministry and Leadership of the Church of England* is published by the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice and based upon mixed methods academic research led by Paul Miller as principal investigator. Quantitative data (outlined in detail on pp. 17–29) derived from three sources: data generated by the Pathways Human Resource Management system; data provided by the Ministry Development Team about ordinands; and

data on the ethnicity of clergy provided by four dioceses (Liverpool, Southwark, Birmingham, and an anonymous diocese in the Midlands). The lack or non-availability of quantitative data are said to have posed a ‘significant challenge’ to the study. Qualitative data (pp. 30–48) derived from 109 persons who took part in facilitated group conversations or who were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. There is a huge (unprioritized and uncoded) list of recommendations (pp. 54–8), including four on data, systems, and integration. The report is available at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/behind-stained-glass>

Ethnic diaspora congregations in Scotland: Brendan Research report

The 36-page report ‘*Churches Without People and People Without Churches*’: *Diaspora Congregations in Scotland* is the outcome of a research project commissioned by Action for Churches Together in Scotland with the support of the Scottish Church Leaders’ Forum. Conducted by Brendan Research, through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, its authors are Sheila Akomiah-Conteh, Fiona Tweedie, and Liam Jerrold Fraser. Internet searches identified over 200 churches across Scotland with significant ethnic diaspora memberships, seven tenths of them of African diaspora origin, and drawn from 35 denominations. Locationally, these congregations were overwhelmingly (96%) urban, with the main concentration in three of Scotland’s four largest cities: Glasgow (77), Edinburgh (46), and Aberdeen (22). Membership (including children) of the 65 churches which responded to an online survey in October 2022-January 2023 was 7,200, or just over 100 each, hardly a game-changing magnitude given the scale of Christian losses elsewhere in Scotland. The report is available at:

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e5wYhTFiyecYUHN3-QZOouLY9iPnbq7u/view>

Provision of religious education in primary schools in England and Wales

The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education has released the findings of a survey of provision for religious education (RE) in primary schools, based upon replies to a questionnaire on Survey Monkey by 557 primary school teachers in England and Wales during the summer term 2024. Results are presented in a series of 19 tables which cover issues such as time, funding, teaching, professional development, subject content, leadership, and causes for concern. The proportion of primary schools meeting their statutory duty to teach RE to all pupils fell from 96% in 2022 to 87% in 2024. Further information is available at:

- <https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools-autumn-2024>

Intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe

The 55-page *Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe: Report, 2024* has been published by the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe), which was founded in 2010. Among the findings in the first section on anti-Christian hate crimes, the report identifies 2,444 anti-Christian hate crimes in 35 European countries in 2023, 950 of which were in France and 702 in England and Wales, both according to police statistics. In the second section on discrimination against Christians, the interim report in October 2024 of the Commission of Inquiry into Discrimination Against Christians in the UK (based on 17 hearings between October 2023 and July 2024) and a questionnaire survey among a self-selecting sample of 1,562 UK Christians (reported in *The Costs of Keeping the Faith*, featured in our June 2024 edition) are both referenced, the latter at some length. The third section concerns restrictions on religious freedom and documents several UK cases. Sixteen recommendations are addressed to a variety of European nations, organizations, and groups. OIDAC’s report is available at:

- [https://www.intoleranceagainsthchristians.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/files/OIDAC_Report_2024 - Online Version.pdf](https://www.intoleranceagainsthchristians.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/files/OIDAC_Report_2024_-_Online_Version.pdf)

PEOPLE NEWS

Profile of Fiona Tweedie, church statistician

Church statistician Fiona Tweedie was the subject of the back-page profile in the *Church Times* on 1 November 2024 (p. 48). A former lecturer in statistics at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, she is now an ordained local minister in the Church of Scotland and works part-time as its official statistician. She also runs Brendan Research, a consultancy combining statistics and mission, which has included several UK Christian denominations among its clients. The *Church Times* profile can be viewed at:

- <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/1-november/features/interviews/interview-fiona-tweedie-statistician>

An earlier (2022) interview with Tweedie by the Church of Scotland is still available online at:

- <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/vocations/talking-ministry/2022/march-what-is-gods-plan-for-me>

APPENDIX: KEYWORDS/TAGS

Action for Churches Together in Scotland, afterlife, Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, assisted dying, Brendan Research, Care Not Killing, Christianophobia, Christians, Church of England, Church Times, diaspora congregations, disestablishment, ethnic minorities, Fiona Tweedie, Focaldata, hate crimes, importance of religion, Ipsos, Ipsos Veracity Index, John Smyth, Justin Welby, Keith Makin, Kim Leadbeater, legislation, Liam Jerrold Fraser, More in Common, National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe, Opinium Research, Paul Miller, personal religious beliefs, politics, primary schools, religious affiliation, religious education, religious leaders, religious prejudice, Scotland, Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, Sheila Akomiah-Conteh, Terminally Ill Adults End of Life Bill, The Observer, trust in clergy and priests, truthfulness, YouGov