latest Surveys and polls on bascule of religion and belief in both the United Kingdom and Iran

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Abstract

Numerous surveys indicate that the proportion of individuals who do not hold religious beliefs is steadily increasing.

Religions and beliefs are notoriously difficult to measure, as they are not fixed or innate, and therefore any poll should be primarily treated as an indication of beliefs rather than a concrete measure.

However, one of the foremost respected measures of religious attitudes is the annual British Social Attitudes Survey, further details of the latest report may be found on NatCen’s website.

Key Words

Human Rights, Religion, Belief

Introduction

Although belief in the sanctity of human life has ancient precedents in many religions of the world the idea of human rights, that is the notion that a human being has a set of inviolable rights simply on grounds of being human began during the era of renaissance humanism in the Early Modern period. The European wars of religion and the civil wars of seventeenth century England gave rise to the philosophy of liberalism and belief in human rights became a central concern of European intellectual culture during the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. The idea of human rights lay at the core of the American and French revolutions which inaugurated an era of democratic revolution throughout the nineteenth century paving the way for the advent of universal suffrage. The world wars of the twentieth century led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The post-war era saw human rights movements for special interest groups such as feminism and the civil rights of African-Americans. The human rights of members of the Soviet bloc emerged in the 1970s along with workers' rights in the West. The movement quickly jelled as social activism and political rhetoric in many nations put it high on the world agenda.2 By the 21st century, Moyn has argued, the human rights movement expanded beyond its original

1. L.L.M Student
anti-totalitarianism to include numerous causes involving humanitarianism and social and economic development in the Developing World.³

Some notions of righteousness present in ancient law and religion is sometimes retrospectively included under the term "human rights". While Enlightenment philosophers suggest a secular social contract between the rulers and the ruled, ancient traditions derived similar conclusions from notions of divine law, and, in Hellenistic philosophy, natural law.

Ancient Near East

An inscription of the Code of Hammurabi.

The reforms of Urukagina of Lagash, the earliest known legal code (c. 2350 BC), is often thought to be an early example of reform. Professor Norman Yoffee wrote that after Igor M. Diakonoff "most interpreters consider that Urukagina, himself not of the ruling dynasty at Lagash, was no reformer at all. Indeed, by attempting to curb the encroachment of a secular authority at the expense of temple prerogatives, he was, if a modern term must be applied, a reactionary."⁴ Author Marilyn French wrote that the discovery of penalties for adultery for women but not for men represents "the first written evidence of the degradation of women".⁵

The oldest legal codex extant today is the Neo-Sumerian Code of Ur-Nammu (ca. 2050 BC). Several other sets of laws were also issued in Mesopotamia, including the Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1780 BC), one of the most famous examples of this type of document. It shows rules, and punishments if those rules are broken, on a variety of matters, including women's rights, men's rights, children's rights and slave rights.

Some historians suggest that the Achaemenid Persian Empire of ancient Iran established unprecedented principles of human rights in the 6th century BC under Cyrus the Great. After his conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, the king issued the Cyrus cylinder, discovered in 1879 and seen by some today as the first human rights document. The cylinder has been linked by some commentators to the decrees of Cyrus recorded in the Books of Chronicles, Nehemiah, and Ezra, which state that Cyrus allowed (at least some of) the Jews to return to their homeland from their Babylonian Captivity.

In opposition to the above viewpoint, the interpretation of the Cylinder as a "charter of human rights" has been dismissed by other historians and characterized by some others as political propaganda devised by the Pahlavi regime. The German historian Josef Wiesehöfer argues that the image of "Cyrus as a champion of the UN human rights policy ... is just as much a phantom as the humane and enlightened Shah of Persia." while historian Elton L. Daniel has described such an interpretation as "rather anachronistic" and tendentious. The cylinder now lies in the British Museum, and a replica is kept at the United Nations Headquarters.

Many thinkers point to the concept of citizenship beginning in the early poleis of ancient Greece, where all free citizens had the right to speak and vote in the political assembly.

The Twelve Tables Law established the principle “Privilegia ne irroganto” which literally means “privileges shall not be imposed.”

A declaration for religious tolerance on an egalitarian basis can be found in the Edicts of Ashoka, which emphasize the importance of tolerance in public policy by the government. The slaughter or capture of prisoners of war was also condemned by Ashoka. Some sources claim that slavery was also non-existent in ancient India. Others state, however, that slavery existed in ancient India, where it is recorded in the Sanskrit Laws of Manu of the 1st century BC.

**Early Islamic Caliphate**

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Daniel, p. 39.


Arrian, Indico. "This also is remarkable in India, that all Indians are free, and no Indian at all is a slave. In this the Indians agree with the Lacedaemonians: Yet the Lacedaemonians have Helots for slaves, who perform the duties of slaves; but the Indians have no slaves at all, much less is any Indian a whore."

Slave-owning societies, Encyclopædia Britannica.
Historians generally agree that Muhammad preached against what he saw as the social evils of his day, and that Islamic social reforms in areas such as social security, family structure, slavery, and the rights of women and ethnic minorities were intended to improve on what was present in existing Arab society at the time. For example, according to Bernard Lewis, Islam "from the first denounced aristocratic privilege, rejected hierarchy, and adopted a formula of the career open to the talents. John Esposito sees Muhammad as a reformer who condemned practices of the pagan Arabs such as female infanticide, exploitation of the poor, usury, murder, false contracts, and theft. Bernard Lewis believes that the egalitarian nature of Islam "represented a very considerable advance on the practice of both the Greco-Roman and the ancient Persian world." Muhammed also incorporated Arabic and Mosaic laws and customs of the time into his divine revelations.

The Constitution of Medina, also known as the Charter of Medina, was drafted by Muhammad in 622. It constituted a formal agreement between Muhammad and all of the significant tribes and families of Yathrib (later known as Medina), including Muslims, Jews, and pagans. The document was drawn up with the explicit concern of bringing to an end the bitter inter tribal fighting between the clans of the Aws (Aus) and Khazraj within Medina. To this effect it instituted a number of rights and responsibilities for the Muslim, Jewish and pagan communities of Medina bringing them within the fold of one community-the Ummah. The Constitution established the security of the community, freedom of religion, the role of Medina as a haram or sacred place (barring all violence and weapons), the security of women, stable tribal relations within Medina, a tax system for supporting the community in time of conflict, parameters for exogenous political alliances, a system for granting protection of individuals, a judicial system for resolving disputes, and also regulated the paying of blood-wite (the payment between families or tribes for the slaying of an individual in lieu of lex talionis).

Muhammad made it the responsibility of the Islamic government to provide food and clothing, on a reasonable basis, to captives, regardless of their religion. If the prisoners were in the custody of a person, then the responsibility was on the individual. Lewis states that

Gallagher, Nancy. Infanticide and Abandonment of Female Children.


Islam brought two major changes to ancient slavery which were to have far-reaching consequences. "One of these was the presumption of freedom; the other, the ban on the enslavement of free persons except in strictly defined circumstances," Lewis continues. The position of the Arabian slave was "enormously improved": the Arabian slave "was now no longer merely a chattel but was also a human being with a certain religious and hence a social status and with certain quasi-legal rights." 21

Esposito states that reforms in women's rights affected marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Women were not accorded with such legal status in other cultures, including the West, until centuries later. 22 The Oxford Dictionary of Islam states that the general improvement of the status of Arab women included prohibition of female infanticide and recognizing women's full personhood 23 "The dowry, previously regarded as a bride-price paid to the father, became a nuptial gift retained by the wife as part of her personal property." 24 Under Islamic law, marriage was no longer viewed as a "status" but rather as a contract, in which the woman's consent was imperative. 25 "Women were given inheritance rights in a patriarchal society that had previously restricted inheritance to male relatives." Annemarie Schimmel states that "compared to the pre-Islamic position of women, Islamic legislation meant an enormous progress; the woman has the right, at least according to the letter of the law, to administer the wealth she has brought into the family or has earned by her own work." 122 William Montgomery Watt states that Muhammad, in the historical context of his time, can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights and improved things considerably. Watt explains: "At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible - they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons." Muhammad, however, by "instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, gave women certain basic safeguards." 26 Haddad and Esposito state that "Muhammad granted women rights and privileges in the sphere of family life, marriage, education, and economic endeavors, rights that help improve women's status in society." 27 However, other writers have argued that women before Islam were more liberated drawing most often on the first marriage of Muhammad and that of Muhammad's parents, but also on other points such as worship of female idols at Mecca. 28

Sociologist Robert Bellah (Beyond belief) argues that Islam in its 7th-century origins was, for its time and place, "remarkably modern...in the high degree of commitment, involvement, and participation expected from the rank-and-file members of the community." This is because, he argues, that Islam emphasized the equality of all Muslims, where leadership positions were open to all. Dale Eickelman writes that Bellah suggests "the early Islamic community placed a particular value on individuals, as opposed to collective or group responsibility." 28

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Surveys and polls on religion and belief in the United kingdom and Iran

Belief in life after death – another core belief in Islam – is very high among both Shias and Sunnis, with roughly nine-in-ten or more in each of the countries surveyed agreeing there is a heaven and hell. Only in Iraq are Shias somewhat less likely than Sunnis to believe in hell (89% vs. 98%, respectively). Belief in angels and predestination represent two other central articles of faith in Islam. In the five countries surveyed, overwhelming majorities of Shias and Sunnis say they believe in angels and predestination. There are not significant differences by sect in attitudes toward these core tenets of Islam in any of the five countries surveyed.

Religiosity Varies by Country More Than by Sect

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<th>Importance of Religion</th>
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<td>Shias 82, Sunnis 83</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Shias 47, Sunnis 43</td>
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Unlike belief in key articles of the Islamic faith, personal religious commitment widely varies among the publics surveyed. This variation is primarily from country to country; within individual countries, Shias and Sunnis tend to report similar levels of religious commitment.

In Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, for example, at least three-quarters of Shias and Sunnis say religion is very important to them, with no significant differences between the sects. In Azerbaijan, too, Shias and Sunnis share a similar view of religion, with just under half in each group (47% and 43%, respectively) saying religion is very important in their lives. Only in Lebanon do the two sects differ significantly over the importance of religion: 66% of Lebanese Sunnis say religion is very important, compared with 51% of Lebanese Shias.

29. e Quran states that one day God will judge each individual based on his or her deeds and reward those who have lived righteous lives while punishing those who have not. (Quran 2:81-82), Pew Research Center Religion and Public law, November 7, 2013.
Survey Methods

**Iran**
Sample size: 1,519 Muslims (133 Sunnis and 1,384 Shias)
Margin of error: ±3.2 points
Sample design: Stratified area probability sample of all nine main regions proportional to population size and urban/rural population.
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18+
Languages: Farsi (Persian), Kurdish, Turkish, Gilaki, Baloch, Luri and Arabic.
Representative: Nationally representative of the adult population.
Design effect: 1.7

Census data

ethnicity. This is in order to capture the Jewish and Sikh populations, both of which are captured under race legislation but are not included in the ethnicity category in the Census, as they should be, rather than the religion category. The result is that a very loose, cultural affiliation is ‘measured’ by the Census in terms of religion or belief, with particular over-inflation of the Christian figure, and an undercounting of the non-religious population. As a result, the census data on religion is most definitely not suitable for use by employers or service providers.

2011 Census

Take a look at our infographic summarising some of the key 2011 Census results

According to the 2011 UK Census, those of no religion are the second largest belief group, about three and a half times as many as all the non-Christian religions put together – at 26.13% of the population. 16,038,229 people said they had ‘no religion’ with a further 4,406,032 (7.18%) not stating a religion. 58.81% described their religion as Christian and 7.88% as some non-Christian religion. This represented a massive change from the 2001 Census, where 15.5% of the population recorded having no religion, and 72% of the population reported being Christian.

However, in a poll conducted by YouGov

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in March 2011 on behalf of the BHA, when asked the census question ‘What is your religion?’, 61% of people in England and Wales ticked a religious box (53.48% Christian and 7.22% other) while 39% ticked ‘No religion’. When the same sample was asked the follow-up question ‘Are you religious?’, only 29% of the same people said ‘Yes’ while 65% said ‘No’, meaning over half of those whom the census would count as having a religion said they were not religious.

Less than half (48%) of those who ticked ‘Christian’ said they believed that Jesus Christ was a real person who died and came back to life and was the son of God.
Asked when they had last attended a place of worship for religious reasons, most people in England and Wales (63%) had not attended in the past year: 43% of people last attended over a year ago and 20% of people had never attended. Only 9% of people reported having attended a place of worship within the last week.

The Humanist Society of Scotland commissioned a separate poll asking the Scottish census question, ‘What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?’. In response, 42% of the adult population in Scotland said ‘None’.

When asked ‘Are you religious?’ 56% of the same sample said they were not and only 35% said they were.

See our 2011 Census Campaign for a fairer, more accurate census on belief in Britain.

Other surveys and polls on religion and belief in the UK

In the UK, the percentage of the population which describes itself as belonging to no religion has risen from 31.4% to 50.6% between 1983 and 2013 according to the British Social Attitudes Survey’s 31st report issued in 2014. Among people aged between 15 and 24, the incidence of religious affiliation is only 30.7%. It is only amongst the over 55s that the majority of respondents are religious.

Conversely, the report found that only 41.7% of people in the UK identify as Christians compared to 49.9% in 2008 and 65.2% in 1983. The Church of England has seen the greatest decline in its numbers; membership has more than halved from 40.3% of the population in 1983 to just 16.3% in 2014.

A 2014 YouGov poll found that 77% of the population did not consider themselves to be religious, including the 40% who said they were not religious at all.

Religiosity is particularly on the wane amongst young people. A 2013 YouGov poll found that only 25% of 16-24 year olds believe in God, whilst 38% do not believe in either God or a greater spiritual power. The same study found that only 12% of young people pronounced themselves as being influenced by religious leaders.

An Ipsos MORI poll, published in January 2007 for the British Humanist Association indicated that 36% of people – equivalent to around 17 million adults – are in fact humanist in their basic outlook.

Another question found that 41% endorsed the strong statement: ‘This life is the only life we have and death is the end of our personal existence’. 62% chose ‘Human nature by itself gives us an understanding of what is right and wrong’, against 27% who said ‘People need religious teachings in order to understand what is right and wrong’.

In the 2007-08 Citizenship Survey, participants were requested to select factors that they regarded as important to their identity from thirteen options. Whilst family was top with 97%, followed by interests (87%), religion ranked bottom at 48%. Religion ranked bottom consistently with all age groups up to 65+, where it only moves up to eleventh. Christians ranked religion as thirteenth as a factor important to their identity.
Church attendance in the UK

The 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey

found that 58.4% of the population never attend religious services while only 13.1% of people report going to a religious service once a week or more. Of the 16% of people who define as belonging to the Church of England, 51.9% never attend services and in fact only 10.7% of people who identify with the Church of England report attending church at least weekly. More generally, the 2014 BSA Survey discovered that 58.3% of people who were brought up in a religion never attend services, and only 12.8% do so on a weekly basis.

However, self-reported Church attendance is invariably higher than actual recorded attendance.

According to Religious Trends No 7 published by Christian Research, overall church attendance in the United Kingdom diminished rapidly from 1980 to 2005 in both proportional and real terms.

In 1980 5,201,300 people, representing 11.1% of the UK population, attended Church on a given Sunday, but by 2005 this number had reduced to 3,166,200, equating to 6.3% of the UK population. By 2015, the level of church attendance in the UK is predicted to fall to 3,081,500 people, or 5% of the population.

The Church of England’s own attendance figures also attest to decline; in 2012 average Sunday attendance figures were just 800,000, half the number that attended in 1968 and significantly lower than the 2002 figure of 1,005,000.

Attitudes in the UK

Attitudes towards belief

In a 2007 survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the broadcaster and writer John Humphries, 42% of the participants believed religion had a harmful effect.

C of E not important say most people – YouGov, 2005

In a large-scale YouGov poll of over 3,500 people, the Church of England came 32nd out of 37 in a list of what people think defines Britishness. Only 17% of respondents thought that the Church of England was “very important” in contributing to a sense of Britishness, while 23% thought it was “not important at all”.

Families at prayer? As congregations shrink, half of children with two religious parents reject church – ESRC, August 2005

Religious belief is declining faster than attendance at services in the UK, according to a study funded by the ESRC which found that parents’ beliefs, practices and affiliations have the biggest impact on children.
Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12-19 Year Olds (PDF) – Research report for the DfES, 2004

65% of young people are not religious. Though religious belief amongst the young has declined by 10% in less than 10 years, moral attitudes have not and fewer young people are racially prejudiced.

Iranians’ Views Mixed on Political Role for Religious Figures

As Iranians prepare to elect a new president on June 14, a survey by the Pew Research Center shows that just 40% think religious figures should play a large role in politics. An additional 26% of Iranians say religious figures should have some influence in political matters, while three-in-ten believe they should have little or no influence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iranians Prefer a Religious Political System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious figures should have ... on political matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too much influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No influence at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Ref.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implementing sharia in Iran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAVOR</th>
<th>OPPOSE</th>
<th>DK/Ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iran’s laws follow sharia ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAVOR</th>
<th>OPPOSE</th>
<th>DK/Ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very closely</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat closely</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too closely</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not closely</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This question was asked of Iranian Muslims only. All other questions in this report were asked of all Iranians.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q13-RN, Q68 and Q80.

The survey – conducted between Feb. 24 and May 3, 2012 – also found that an overwhelming majority of Iranians (83%) say they favor the use of sharia, or Islamic law. Yet only 37% of Iranian Muslims think their country’s current laws follow sharia very closely. Most say existing laws adhere to Islamic law somewhat closely (45%), not too closely (10%) or not at all closely (3%).

These are among the key findings of a nationally representative Pew Research survey of Iranians. Face-to-face interviews with 1,522 adults, ages 18 and older, also show that most Iranians do not consider religious extremism to be a major problem in their country. Similarly, only minorities say there are widespread tensions or conflicts between more and less devout Muslims, different religious groups, and Sunni and Shia Muslims in their country. Unlike in most countries surveyed by Pew Research, due to political sensitivities it was not possible to ask Iranian citizens to directly rate the performance of their government or religious institutions.

**Religion and Politics In Iran**

### Political Role for Religious Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No influence at all</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too much influence</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some influence</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large influence</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Ref.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, religious leaders have played a major role in the Iranian political system. The Supreme Leader is both the country’s top Islamic cleric and its most powerful political official, while the Guardian Council – a body of religious scholars – can veto any legislation it deems not in accordance with Islam.

The Pew Research survey finds that most Iranians favor a political system in which religious figures play a role. Nearly two-thirds of Iranians (66%) say religious figures should have at least some influence in political matters, compared with three-in-ten who say they should have little (19%) or no influence (11%).

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32. Above Source(31) Photo Credit: © Manca Juvan/In Pictures/Corbis
However, the survey finds that only four-in-ten Iranians say that religious figures should have a large influence in political matters. Overall, younger Iranians are less supportive of religious leaders having a large influence in politics: 35% of those ages 18-34 favor religious figures playing a large political role, compared with 46% of those 35 and older.

In addition to supporting a role for religious figures in politics, roughly eight-in-ten Iranians (83%) say sharia should be implemented in their country, compared with 15% who are opposed to using Islamic law.

When asked how closely Iran’s current laws adhere to sharia, fewer than four-in-ten Iranian Muslims (37%) answer very closely. A plurality (45%) says that Iran’s existing statutes adhere to sharia somewhat closely, while 10% say not too closely and 3% say not at all closely. Among the 13% of Muslims who say their country’s laws do not follow sharia closely, nearly eight-in-ten (78%) say Islamic law should be implemented.

**On ‘faith’ schools**

In June 2014, an Opinium poll found that:

- 58% of the British public was opposed to the existence of state-funded ‘faith’ schools, with just 30% accepting state funding.

- 70% of those opposed to state funding said this because they think the taxpayer should not be funding religion, 60% because they think ‘faith’ schools promote division and segregation, and 41% because they think they are contrary to the promotion of a multicultural society.

- 56% of respondents said that faith schools should teach the national curriculum, with only a small minority arguing that they should have significant flexibility over what they teach.

In a ComRes/Accord poll from November 2012, 73% of respondents agreed (and 50% strongly agreed) that “state funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy”. Just 18% disagreed.

In an Ipsos Mori poll commissioned by the teachers’ union NASUWT and Unison in April 2010, when asked which group is the most appropriate to run state-funded schools, only 4% answered ‘religious organizations’. When asked which groups should not run state-funded schools, 35% said religious organizations (the highest figure obtained by any of the answers listed).

In a YouGov/Accord poll from June 2009:

- 57% believed that state funded schools that selected students according to their religion harm community cohesion.

- 72% agreed or strongly agreed that all schools should implement recruitment and employment policies that do not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.
74% held the view that all state schools should teach an objective and balanced syllabus for education about a wide range of religious and non-religious beliefs.

**On assisted dying**

Polls taken on the issue of assisted dying consistently demonstrate the majority of the public wish the law to be reformed, and to create a humane and ethical law on assisted dying. A September 2012 YouGov poll commissioned by the BHA found that 81% of UK adults (including 82% of Anglicans and 66% of Catholics) support the notion of mentally competent individuals with incurable or terminal diseases who wish to end their lives receiving medical assistance to do so, without those assisting them facing prosecution.

In May 2014, 73% of respondents to a YouGov/Dignity in Dying poll supported Lord Falconer’s proposals to legalise assisted dying for the terminally ill. Only 13% were against the proposals.

Majorities of religious believers support assisted dying. Separate YouGov polls in 2013 found that:

78% who attend a place of worship at least monthly support the practice

62% of strongly religious people support assisted dying for the terminally ill

According to the 26th report of the British Social Attitudes Survey published in 2010, 71% of religious and 92% non-religious people (82% in total) believe that a doctor should be allowed to end the life of a patient with an incurable disease. The 2012 survey similarly found that 84% of people support assisted dying for the incurably ill.

**On abortion and contraception**

The British Social Attitudes Survey 2012 found that there is an overwhelming consensus in the UK that abortion is justified in cases of:

a health risk to the parent, with 95% in favour

the diagnosis of a defect, with 85% in favour

the parents not wishing to have a child, with 76% in favour

Only 6% of Catholics questioned in a poll by YouGov for ITV agreed that abortion should never be allowed, and only 11% believed abortion should only be permitted as an indirect consequence of a life-saving treatment for the mother. In contrast 30% agreed that abortion should be a matter of individual choice, and 44% agreed that abortion should be permitted on grounds of ‘rape, incest, severe disability to the child or as an indirect consequence of life-saving treatment for the mother’.

Only 4% of Catholic adults questioned believed artificial contraception is wrong and should not be used. 71% agreed it should be used more often, 23% believed it was a matter entirely for couples.
A 2013 YouGov poll found that the percentage of the population wanting an outright ban on abortion had declined from 12% in 2005, to 7% in 2013. Whilst 44% of those polled agreed that life begins at conception, most of this group did not support a ban on abortion.

The level of support for abortion has been tracked by a series of polls since the 1980s. In the earliest polls' 'abortions should be made legally available for all who want it', and this number has generally been slowly rising.

In 2007, the organisation Catholics for Choice commissioned a poll from YouGov on religious opinion towards abortion, and the involvement of Catholic Bishops in the political debate concerning abortion law. In response to the statement 'It should be legal for a woman to have an abortion when she has an unwanted pregnancy’, 63% of all respondents to the poll strongly agreed or agreed (14% disagreed or strongly disagreed); 58% of self-identified Protestants strongly agreed or agreed (19% disagreed or strongly disagreed); and 43% of self-identified Catholics strongly agreed or agreed (27% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

In response to the statement ‘Catholic bishops concentrate too much of their attention on abortion when there are other issues that also require their attention’, 64% of all respondents to the poll strongly agreed or agreed (8% disagreed or strongly disagreed); 68% of self-identified Protestants strongly agreed or agreed (7% disagreed or strongly disagreed); and 42% of self-identified Catholics strongly agreed or agreed (27% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

**On medical research**

In the British Social Attitudes Survey, when asked ‘medical research on embryos should probably or definitely be allowed’, 61% of religious respondents agreed, compared to 77% non-religious respondents.

**On religion and government**

A 2012 YouGov poll found that 67% of people do not think that religion should play any role in public life. In general, 51% of people think that religion is declining in Britain.

In the British Social Attitudes Survey 2010:

- 75% of those questioned believed their religious leaders should not to influence their voting behaviour

- 67% believe religious leaders should stay out of government decision making.

- 45% of Britons believe that the involvement of religious leaders would have a deleterious effect on policy.

- Only 25% of people believe religious involvement would produce better policy.

- 73% of respondents believe that ‘people with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others’. This view was held by 82% of people who class themselves as non-religious, and 63% of those who consider themselves religious
The 28th report of the British Social Attitudes Survey (2011) also concluded that we can expect to see ‘a continued increase in liberal attitudes towards a range of issues such as abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, as the influence of considerations grounded in religion declines.’

The same report goes on to recommend that, ‘the recently expressed sentiment of the current coalition government to “do” and “get” God (Warsi, 2011) therefore may not sit well with, and could alienate, certain sections of the population.’ On the other hand, according to the U.S. Department States in 2013, In Iran, the government imposed legal restrictions on proselytizing and regularly arrested members of the Zoroastrian and Christian communities for practicing their religion. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for members of nearly all non-Shia religious groups, most notably for Bahais. Pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen, remained imprisoned at year’s end after being sentenced to eight years in prison on charges related to his religious beliefs. – (See more at: http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper)

**On bishops in the House of Lords**

A 2012 YouGov poll found that 58% of Britons do not believe that bishops should sit in the House of Lords. 65% of people think that bishops are out of touch with public opinion.

A 2011 survey for Unlock Democracy found that if the House of Lords was reformed in such a way as to guarantee a residual power of appointment for a limited number of places, only 10.6% of people would think that bishops would be an appropriate choice.

74% of the British public believe it is wrong that Bishops have an automatic right to a seat in the House of Lords, including 70% of Christians according to an ICM survey conducted in 2010 on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

**Volunteering and the non-religious**

The BHA has produced a briefing on religion, belief and volunteering.

Figures released by the Department for Communities and Local Government published in the report *Citizenship Survey: April 2010 – March 2011 in September 2011* demonstrate that there is almost no difference in participation between those with no religion (56%) and Christians (58%). The proportion of Hindus and Muslims participating in civic engagement and formal volunteering is the lowest of all religion or belief groups, at 44% respectively.

The report *Faith and Voluntary Action* from the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2007) finds that ‘Religious affiliation makes little difference in terms of volunteering’. The report also states that motivation for volunteering is complex – and ‘faith’ as a motivator is actually very difficult to prove/assess/measure.

The *2001 Citizenship Survey* finds that the proportion of people who volunteered and had a religious affiliation is similar to the proportion of people who had no religious affiliation, and
this is true of both informal and formal volunteering. In both categories of those with religious affiliation and those with none, 39% participated in formal volunteering at least once a year, and 68% of those with no religious affiliation participated in informal volunteering versus 67% of those who describe themselves as having a faith.

In the Cabinet Office research publication (2007) ‘Helping Out. A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, shows that the rates of volunteering differ between religious groups differ within religious groups, and between religious and non-religious people. Non-religious people volunteer more than some, but less than others.

The BHA, meanwhile, took issue with a 2014 BBC poll suggesting that religious believers are more likely to donate to charity than non-believers (77% against 67%). As well as contradicting previous research such as that detailed above the survey’s methodology was flawed in that its definition of ‘believers’ was restricted to those practising and that many of the charities benefitted were likely to have been local churches.

Religion and belief internationally

According to the 2014 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, a majority of the population in all of the 9 European countries surveyed, as well as in Canada, Israel, Japan, Australia, Argentina and Chile did not think that a belief in God was a necessary part of being moral. This figure was as high as 85% in France and 80% in Spain. The young and the University-educated were found to be more likely to hold this view in many countries.

Also in 2014, a WIN/Gallup poll found that Britain is very sceptical on the benefits of religion when compared to other countries. Only a third of British respondents saw religion as a force for good, whilst over a quarter believed it to exert a negative impact. In Denmark, Belgium, France and Spain, the overall perception of religious was net negative. Internationally, it was consistently found that the more educated a person was, the more likely they were to harbour a negative view of religion.

In 2012, WIN/Gallup found that 36% of the world’s population define as non-religious, with 13% of that self-defining as atheists. This is a significant increase on previous years.

In September 2010 Ipsos conducted a 23-country poll on religion. Of the 18,192 people who participated, 48 per cent agreed ‘religion provides the common values and ethical foundations that diverse societies need to the thrive in the 21st Century’. However 52 per cent also agreed with the statement ‘religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress in developing and developed nations alike’. With the exception of the United States of America, generally wealthy nations had a markedly more negative view of religion.

In 2007 Britain ranked 15th in a table that showed the top fifty countries with the largest percentage of people who identify themselves as either atheist, agnostic or a nonbeliever in God.

In 2004, the BBC commissioned an ICM poll in ten countries examining levels of belief; participants from the United Kingdom tended to display markedly less religious belief than many of their counterparts. In response to the question ‘A belief in God (higher power)
makes for a better human being’, 43% participants from the UK disagreed with this statement, substantially more than any other nationality.

In the United States the picture of belief is quite different. However, it is important to note that in the USA, as with most of Europe, there is a marked decline in the level of belief; according to Gallup polling, the number of people identifying as non-religious was 15% in 2013, up from 6% in 1995. A 2014 Pew poll, meanwhile, found that a third of 18-29 year olds now have no religious affiliation.

Sources


2) Scott McLemee, "The Last Utopia" Inside Higher Education Dec. 8, 2010 online.


12) Arrian, Indica. "This also is remarkable in India, that all Indians are free, and no Indian at all is a slave. In this the Indians agree with the Lacedaemonians. Yet the Lacedaemonians have Helots for slaves, who perform the duties of slaves; but the Indians have no slaves at all, much less is any Indian a whore."

13) Slave-owning societies, Encyclopædia Britannica.


16) Esposito (2005) p. 79.


22) Jones, Lindsay. p.6224.


29) The Quran states that one day God will judge each individual based on his or her deeds and reward those who have lived righteous lives while punishing those who have not. (Quran 2:81-82), Pew Research Center Religion and Public Law, November 7, 2013.


33) British Humanities Association for the one life we have.