Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life

Headline and community group analysis

13th May 2024

This document contains a summary of the headline findings and community-specific statistics of the latest set of polling commissioned by the Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL) and completed by Whitestone Insight. The order of the document is, first, the headline statistics with some brief commentary, followed by the statistics relevant to different faiths combined with analyses of that data.

Whitestone Insight interviewed 2,064 UK adults on-line between 1st and 2nd May 2024. Data were weighted to be representative of all UK adults. Whitestone Insight is a member of the British Polling Council (BPC) and abides by its rules.

Key points

- *Confidence that religion is a force for good in society was low*. Across the sample, 36% agreed and 27% disagreed. Figures for those of faith were not significantly higher, with 55% in agreement and 27% in disagreement.

This may be a greater reflection of current global conflicts rather than a belief that religion has low intrinsic value (e.g. its capacity to cultivate positive attributes, strengths, and virtues).

- *Resistance to the presence of religion in the workplace and politics*. 42% of the sample thought religion in the workplace was positive compared to 41% who disagreed (37% compared to 47% of religious). 36% of the sample agreed that politicians should speak religion compared to 38% who disagreed (51% compared to 47% of religious).

This is perhaps related to the first point. Are these findings reflecting an expectation of a higher probability that faith and religion will have a negative impact rather than a positive?

- *Low trust in the media*. The media is believed to be unbalanced (21% of the sample thought it was balanced compared to 51% who disagreed; 24% to 54% for religious) and biased (71% agreed it was biased compared to 13% who disagreed; 72% compared to 13% for religious). Correspondingly, few wanted to see more religion in the media (63% of the sample were not in favour of more media coverage compared to 18% in favour; 49% of religious respondents were not in favour compared to 28% in favour).

This distrust appears centred on a belief that the media misrepresents religious groups. Identifying bias is positive because it points to the perception of a more positive reality that is believed to be misrepresented. There is perhaps a connection between resistance to religion entering politics and the workplace and negative experiences of media bias and expectations of a higher probability of negative rather than positive outcomes to religious expression. If one

expects better outcomes and has greater trust in the media, one might be more open to religion entering public life.

- *Religion appears important to life in the UK*. 62% of respondents agreed that Christian heritage was important to the UK compared to 23% who disagreed. More non-religious also agreed with this statement – 47% compared to 37%.

Do these figures reflect the perception of an intrinsic value of Christianity or rather the value of tradition and continuity, and the security and stability these confer?

- There is a perception that the UK welcomes religious diversity (60% of the sample agreed compared to 26% who disagreed) and that good relations exist between faith groups (73% of the sample report having friends of different faiths). Moreover, while only 36% of the sample considered religion a positive force in communities, 53% stated that religion has contributed to compassion and equality in the West. Many respondents considered religious education important in schools (61% compared to 21%) and believed that knowledge of other faiths is important (80% compared to 12%).

These findings reflect a desire for harmonious inter-religious relations and a perception of the importance of individual responsibility in cultivating better relations. Education is viewed as important in allowing multi-faith communities to thrive. The findings also point to positive experiences of living within multi-faith communities and a belief (even among the non-religious) that faith and religion are positive aspects of UK life.

The findings suggest that the lived experience of faith and religion is better than media portrayals, which has doubtless contributed to distrust of the media. There is a clear desire for accurate reporting of a reality far removed from its representation in the media and not only a desire and willingness to build on inter-faith relations through education, but a perception of the imperative to do so.

Youth Statistics

- 69% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe their faith significantly impacts their lives, compared to 44% of respondents aged 55-65 and 51% of respondents aged 65 plus.

- 72% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket find faith helps them find purpose in life, in contrast to 47% of respondents aged 65 plus.

- 78% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket feel their faith has shaped their moral values, compared to 63% of respondents aged 45-54, 65% of respondents aged 55-64, and 68% of respondents aged 65 plus.

- 53% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe their faith to be the only true religion, while 25% of respondents aged 65 plus share this belief. However, 45% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket are open to changing their minds about faith, compared to 22% of respondents aged 65 plus.
- 38% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket are searching for a deeper understanding of God or a higher power, contrasting with 18% of respondents aged 45-64 and 20% of respondents aged 65 plus.
- 47% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe faith and religion to be generally a force for good in society, decreasing to 30% among respondents aged 45-54 and increasing to 36% among respondents aged 65 plus.
- 21% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket have changed their religion at least once in their life, compared to 8-10% in the 45-65 plus categories.
- 31% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe that people should not talk about their faith in the workplace, compared to 50% of respondents aged 65 plus.
- 47% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket think British politicians talking about their faith is positive, compared to 36% of respondents aged 65 plus.
- 46% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe British politicians should listen to what faith leaders have to say on social and political issues, compared to 35% of respondents aged 65 plus.
- 76% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket have friends with faiths or beliefs different from their own, a trend consistent across age groups.

Youth Analysis

Faith is of higher value, significance and impact to Gen Z compared with previous generations. A higher proportion of Gen Z have changed faith compared with the 65 plus group demonstrating a higher level of conversion into a different faith amongst Gen Z. Gen Z emphasises the importance of faith in the public domain, viewing politicians discussing their faith publicly and faith leaders' involvement in social and political matters positively. A significant majority of Gen Z have friends of other faiths and the majority learn about other faiths from these friends, contrasting with only 25% of over 65s learning about other faiths from friends who hold different beliefs.

Overall Gen Z are more seeking God; they are more zealous in their faith being that the majority of them believe their faith is the only true religion; they are more wanting to speak of their faith in public and hear others share their faith, whilst also showing higher levels of interfaith and learning through interfaith.

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Jewish Community Statistics

- Jewish respondents were in the most agreement with Christian heritage being the most important aspect of British culture (87%) followed closely by Christian respondents (80%), Budhist respondents (73%) and Muslim respondents (65%). Respondents of no religious faith were least likely to agree with this statement at 47%.
- 80% of Jewish respondents agreed with the statement that the UK is a Christian country followed by 64% of Christian respondents, 63% of Hindu respondents and 38% of Muslim respondents.
- Jewish respondents were most likely to agree that it is important to understand what the major religions are about with 86% of respondents agreeing with this statement compared with 78% of Christian respondents and 64% of respondents of no religious faith.
- Jewish respondents were in most agreement (97%) with the statement that it is important to learn about other faiths besides your own in school and (88%) that it is good that children are taught religious education in school compared with 65% of Hindu respondents and 50% of respondents with no religious faith.
- Jewish respondents were most likely to agree that freedom of religion has worsened in the UK in the last ten years with 82% agreeing with this statement compared with 46% Muslims, 38% of Hindus and 54% of Christian respondents.
- 100% of Jewish respondents have friends who hold a different faith or beliefs about God to them.

Jewish Community Analysis

British Jews prioritise learning about other religions and value religious education in schools.100% of Jewish respondents have a friend of another faith. They are the most inclined to agree that the UK is a Christian country and that its Christian heritage is important.

Considering the post October 7th climate, which has seen antisemitism reach the highest levels since records began, there may be a correlation between Jewish respondents being most likely to agree that freedom of religion has decreased in the UK in the last 10 years and concerns around rising antisemitism.

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Muslim Community Statistics

- 92% of Muslim respondents believe their faith has a significant impact on the way they live their life compared with 47% of Christian respondents.
- 88% of Muslim respondents find faith helps them find purpose in life compared with 50% of Christian respondents.
- 96% of Muslim respondents feel their faith has shaped their moral values compared with 66% of Christian respondents.
- 83% of Muslim respondents believe their faith to be the only true religion compared with 28% of Christian respondents and 5% of Jewish respondents.
- 61% of Muslim respondents are searching for a deeper understanding of God or a higher power compared with 33% of Christian respondents. Others above 50% = Hindu respondents and Budhist respondents.
- 83% of Muslim respondents believe religion is generally a force for good in society compared with 54% of Christian respondents. Only 33% of Jewish respondents believe it to be a force for good.
- 80% of Muslim respondents are more interested in their faith now than when they were younger compared with the 38% of Christian respondents.
- Muslim respondents were most in agreement (67%) with British politicians talking about their faith being a positive thing compared with Sikhs as the least positive at 41%.
- 77% of Muslim respondents thought British politicians should listen to what faith leaders have to say on social and political issues compared with 48% of Christian respondents.
- 75% of Muslim and Christian respondents have friends with faiths or beliefs about God that are different from their own. 96% of Hindu respondents and 100% of Jewish respondents recorded the same.

Muslim community analysis

By far Muslim respondents hold the most value towards faith in their lives. They find their faith helps them find purpose, shapes their moral values and that it is a force for good in society, standing in stark comparison with Christian respondents who are over 40% less likely to agree that their faith has a significant impact on their lives.

Overall the results show that Islam to Muslims is the most thriving and personally impactful belief held by the people of Britain today.

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Christian community statistics

- 38% of Christian and Jewish respondents prefer not to tell people about their faith compared with 29% of Muslim respondents. Christian and Jewish respondents are the least willing to tell people about their faith.
- Christians were least likely to have changed faith in their life suggesting that Christianity is receiving the least converts.
- Christians are least likely to oppose talking about faith in the workplace with 37% believing it should not be spoken about compared with 43% Muslim respondents, 52% of Hindu respondents and 47% of Jewish respondents.
- 46% of respondents within the 18-24 year old bracket believe that Christian heritage is an important aspect of British culture compared with 74% of those in 65 plus bracket.

Christian Community analysis

There is clearly a crisis of self-confidence among Christians in Britain. When presented with the statement, “I prefer not to tell people about my faith or religious beliefs,” as many as 38% of Christian respondents agreed - the highest of all faith groups except for Jews (also at 38%) while only 50% disagreed - the lowest of all faith groups.

Moreover, only 28% believe that Christianity is the only true religion, compared to 83% of Muslims, and only 50% say their faith helps them to find purpose in life - lower than Muslims (88%), Hindus (70%) and Buddhists (80%). Only Jews and Sikhs were lower, at 33% and 19% respectively.

There is also a declining appreciation for the role that Christian heritage plays in British culture in the wider population, with only 46% of 18-24 year olds believing it is an important aspect, compared to 74% of over 65s.

One point of positivity for Christians is that, as a group, they are the least likely to oppose talking about faith in the workplace, with 37% believing it should not be spoken about compared with 43% of Muslims, 52% of Hindus and 47% of Jews.

Buddhist statistics

- 52% of Budhists have changed their religion at least once which is 33% higher than the next highest group (Sikhs). Suggesting a high conversion rate into Buddhism.

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Non-religion statistics

- 13% of non-religious respondents believed faith and religion are generally a force for good in society opposed 55% of those with a religious faith.
- Those with no religion were most likely to agree with the statement that religion should not be spoken about in the workplace.
- Whilst those of faith (51%) and young people (47%) agreed that British politicians talking about their faith publicly is a positive thing only 19% of those of no-faith felt this way.
- Despite 87% of Jewish respondents, 65% of Muslim respondents and 80% of Christian respondents thinking Christian heritage is an important aspect of British culture only 47% of those of no-faith agreed with this statement.
- Respondents of no-faith were least likely to think that British politicians should listen to faith leaders on what they have to say on social and political issues (22% compared with 50% of faith).
- Respondents of no-faith were 10% less in agreement than those of faith on the statement that it is important to learn about other faiths than your own.
- Respondents of no-faith were far more likely to disagree with the statement that it is good for children to learn about religion in school (34% compared with 9% of those with faith.