

It's official: Britain is a nation of secularists

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On the heels of [claims from the Communities Secretary](#) Eric Pickles that Britain is a Christian nation and that the Government intends to find a greater role for religion in policy-making, come two large-scale polls showing that our country is not, by any stretch of the imagination, religious. Indeed, we are a nation of secularists who want religion and politics separated.

A [poll conducted by Yougov](#) together with the Government-sponsored British Social Attitudes Survey reveal a nation averse to "faith" and hostile to religious leaders seeking political power.

Of the Yougov-Cambridge poll carried out among 2,027 adults, an overwhelming 81% of respondents agreed with the statement "Religious practice is a private matter and should be separated from the political and economic life of my country". Only 6% disagreed.

- When asked "Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?" 53% said no while 42% said yes.
- 76% said that religious leaders should **not** influence how people vote in elections (6% thought they should)
- 71% said that religious leaders should have **no** influence over the decisions of the government (8% said they should)
- 65% said that Britain would **not** be a better place if more religious leaders held public office. (7% said it would)

The same set of questions was asked in some other countries and the results can be seen [here](#).

The 29th edition of the British Social Attitudes Survey, which was published on Monday, confirms these trends. It has been analysed by the BBC which concluded along the following lines:

- In the thirty years since the British Social Attitudes survey was first produced, religious affiliation amongst people in Britain has dropped from 68% (in 1983) to 53% (in 2011).
- 85% of people aged 66 plus say they were brought up in a religion, compared to 60% of 18-25 year olds. And the gap is even greater when people are asked if they are religious now. 77% of people aged 66+ say they are religious compared to 35% of people aged 18-25.
- The likelihood of young people aged 16-25 being religious varies widely by ethnicity. White British are the least likely to be religious (24% of White British of this age group describe themselves as religious), while Bangladeshis are the most likely (at 97%). In descending percentage: 95% Pakistani, 89% Black African and 87% Indian, and 58% Black Caribbean.
- Young people were asked whether religion made a difference to their lives. Muslims were the most likely group to think so (68% of them). In contrast, self-defined Catholics were the least likely to, (only 12%).

The number of people who told the BSA survey that they had no religion varied substantially by age, peaking among the 18-24s (65%) and falling steadily to 18% among the over-75s.

Wales emerges as the least religious nation in the UK, with 58% saying they have no religion. Greater London (once one of the least religious part of the UK but now home to tens of thousands of religiously devout immigrants) has only 42% non-religious. The Midlands, another centre of immigration, recorded 41%.

But there are grounds to suggest these particular figures should be taken with a pinch of salt. It is well known amongst statisticians that respondents often overstate their religiosity. This trend is well demonstrated by the fact that 14% per cent of respondents claimed to attend a religious service once a week or more. This is at least double the figure borne out by church attendance figures. 58% said that they never attended public worship (up from 53% in 1991). 13% of the irreligious stated that they sometimes attended religious services.

Anglicans had the highest total non-attendance (56%), with Roman Catholics on 28%, other Christians on 39%, and non-Christians on 29%. Men (65%) were more likely never to attend than women (54%). Variation by age cohort was between 54% and 65%, by marital status between 56% and 64%, and by region between 54% and 65%.

[Read the YouGov-Cambridge Survey Results in full](#)

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