

More Brits than ever are non-religious, NSS analysis suggests

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More British people are becoming non-religious, according to the National Secular Society's initial analysis of the latest [British Social Attitudes survey](#).

Data hidden within the report, which was published last week, suggests that just over half of British people are non-religious. The proportion of those sampled who declared they had no religion was 51%. After weighting for various other factors, the data suggested that 53% of the British public was non-religious.

The NSS analysis also suggests that 15-18% of the public is Anglican; around 9% is Catholic; 17-18% are from other Christian denominations; and 5-6% follow other religions.

The final data on British people's religious affiliations will be published later this summer.

In last year's survey [48% of people](#) said they had no religion. The survey has never found that more than 51% of people are non-religious.

The NSS said the findings should prompt an urgent re-think of the role of religion in public life.

Almost 3,000 people took part in the study. Survey results on British people's religious beliefs often vary. But questioners tend to find that around half of the British population is non-religious when they ask 'Do you consider yourself to have a religion?' and 'If so, which one?' Last week's [Scottish Social Attitudes survey](#) found that an even higher proportion of Scots (58%) had no religion.

The BSA report also showed that non-religious people were more socially liberal than believers on a wide range of issues. Almost nine in ten people with no religion in 2016 said pre-marital sex was "not wrong at all". This was compared to 73% of Anglicans, 76% of Catholics, 62% of other Christians and 33% of non-Christian religious people.

A similar pattern emerged on same-sex relationships: 76% of non-religious people said they were "not wrong at all". The corresponding numbers were 55% of Anglicans, 62% of Catholics, 53% of other Christians and 30% of non-Christian religious people.

Non-religious people are more likely to believe that prejudice against transgender people is always wrong; that adults should be allowed to view whichever films they like; and that women should be allowed abortions. Non-religious people are also more likely to accept euthanasia than the religious.

And although religious people remain more conservative than the non-religious, their attitudes towards premarital sex, same-sex relationships and abortion are becoming more liberal. In some instances, the change is rapid: for example, the proportion of Anglicans who accept pre-marital sex has risen by 19% in four years. This suggests the influence of religious ideas on social attitudes is waning.

The findings add weight to the arguments made in the National Secular Society's [secular charter](#) and recent report, [*Rethinking religion and belief in public life: a manifesto for change*](#).

The report said that there should be no established religion and the state should not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine. It called on the government to emphasise individual rights and social cohesion and move away from the outmoded concept of state multiculturalism.

Religion should play no part in schools. Free expression should not be restricted by religious considerations. There should be no religious exemptions from the law. Public and publicly-funded service provision should not discriminate on religious grounds.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns director, said: "As Britain becomes more religiously diverse, and at the same time, increasingly non-religious, it is ever clearer that the UK's political structures, education system and laws should be reformed so they reflect society as it is today.

"The National Secular Society's manifesto for change is an exciting blueprint for the UK's future. Whilst Christianity has played a role in shaping modern Britain, it is now appropriate to call time on the many vestiges of religious privilege – not least the seats given as of right to 26 Anglican clergy in our legislature, and religious groups' considerable influence over our publicly funded schools."

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