

Statistics round up: Religion in decline around Europe and USA

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UK: Polls show that number of atheists in Britain has risen from 14% to 42% since 1963.

A [ComRes poll](#) for the Church of England-supported group Theos was mainly aimed at finding out who visits cathedrals and why (54% said they would visit a CofE cathedral more for historical and architectural reasons than spiritual ones, only 15% said otherwise) But the survey threw up some other interesting statistics that Theos was not so anxious to emphasise.

It showed 42% of people identified themselves as atheists or agnostics. In a 1963 Gallup poll, only 14% described themselves as atheist or agnostic.

The other statistics tend to suffer from a well-known tendency of respondents to overstate religious beliefs and practices.

For instance, in this poll, 15% of people claimed to attend a religious service once a month. This is certainly an overstatement if compared to the Church's own statistics, based on the count of bums on pews rather than what people claim.

The number of adults claiming to 'belong' to a religion was 64% – 39% being Anglicans (two-thirds of them over 45), 16% other Christians, and 9% non-Christians; this left 34% professing no religion (rising to 46% of the 18-24s).

Firm belief in God ('I know God exists and I have no doubts about it') stood at just 19%, with 42% classified as atheists or agnostics; the remaining 39% fell into three categories in the 'middle ground' (including those believing in a higher power but not God). Belief in God as a universal life force was 40%, compared with belief in a human soul (60%), life after death (41%), angels (35%), the Resurrection of Jesus (31%), and reincarnation (26%). The number holding all six beliefs was just 12%, peaking at 20% in London.

France: French Catholicism on the verge of collapse

The results of two identical opinion polls carried out more than 50 years apart were published in the French Catholic daily *La Croix* last week. Asking the same questions this September as in a survey for the newspaper in 1961, the Ifop polling institute said the most obvious marker – weekly attendance at Mass, or as often as possible – was already down to 38 per cent in 1961 (although as high as 70% in some regions of western France). Now it is down to just 7%.

The overall number of Catholics who never go to Mass has more than doubled from 26% to 58%, with 71% of baptised Catholics under 35 years old shunning church completely. One-third of those polled said they went occasionally.

The total number of baptised Catholics seems to have held up better, dropping from 92% of the population then to 80% now. This decline is partly attributable to the growth of non-Catholic minorities, especially Muslims, who make up about 8% of the population. But it is also due to a

rising number of Catholics who do not have their children baptised.

The number of those who said they had not or would not have their children baptised jumped from 4% in 1961 to 25% now.

The effect of the policy of laïcité (the strict Church-State divide) showed when Ifop asked if the Church should intervene in politics. In 1961, 76% of respondents – a category including the small non-Catholic minority – said "no". That figure has risen to 83%, a third of whom are weekly Mass-goers.

Despite this, the French Government is still susceptible to religious pressure, as these two stories show: [Gay marriage debate in France delayed under religious pressure](#) and [Religious protests cause France to shelve IVF for gay couples](#)

Ireland: More Catholics in Ireland than ever – but proportion drops

A new Irish Census 2011 report on Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers shows that there are more people than ever in Ireland who identify as Catholic, but ironically, the proportion of Catholics in the population has dropped. This is due to a rise in the number of adherents to other religions and none.

There has been a fourfold increase in people with no religion since 1991 and they now number 277,237, which includes the children of non-affiliated. There has been a sharp rise in the number of Muslims which has more than doubled in a decade to over 49,000, and they now account for over 1% of the population. The Church of Ireland has seen a 6% increase since 2006 and now has 129,036 members, the report from the [Central Statistics Office](#) shows.

The number of Orthodox Christians has doubled since 2002 to 45,223, while the Apostolic and Pentecostal churches saw a major surge to over 14,000 adherents.

USA: Many Catholics in the USA don't share their leaders' opinions

A new poll by the Public Religious Research Institute confirms what has been found before – Catholic leaders do not represent the views of the people in their churches. And the number of Catholics abandoning the religion of their upbringing is continuing to rise.

Although nearly one-third of Americans were raised Catholic, only 22% currently identify with Catholicism. As has been shown in previous surveys, the number of Catholics who have abandoned the Church remains substantial at 12%.

Another significant rise is among those who do not identify with any religion. Although only 7% of the 3,000 survey respondents were raised in a religiously unaffiliated family, 19% of respondents now identify as religiously unaffiliated.

Among the American Catholics surveyed, 60% believe the Church should focus more on social justice issues and their obligation to the poor, even if it means focusing less on social issues like abortion and right to life. 31% say the opposite – they favour social issues over social justice issues.

Even among Catholics who attend church weekly or more, 51% say the Church should stress social justice issues over strictly social issues. 36% said the opposite.

"The survey confirms that there is no such thing as 'the Catholic vote'," said Robert P. Jones, CEO of the polling group. "There are a number of critical divisions among Catholics, including an important divide between 'social justice' and 'right to life' Catholics."

As for voting intentions, among those Catholics who support more "social justice" teachings, 60% support Obama while 37% support Romney. Likewise, 67% of "right to life" Catholics support Romney while 27% support the president.

Overall, Catholics slightly favour Romney over Obama, with 49% supporting the Republican challenger and 47% supporting the president.

Catholics' top issues are also largely in line with Americans as a whole: 61% of Americans say the economy is the top issue in this election, followed by health care, national security, abortion and immigration. "There are few differences by religious affiliation in terms of voters' issue priorities," says the report.

The reasons for quitting religion given by those who are unaffiliated vary. 23% cited rejection of their childhood faith, 16% cited overall antipathy toward organized religion and 11% cited negative personal experiences with religion as their reasons for leaving.

5% of overall respondents cited the Catholic Church's child sex abuse scandal – the entirety of that group was made up of former Catholics.

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