

Article

Religion and participation in England and Wales: February 2020

Exploring the participation of religious groups in political activities and volunteering, including attitudes towards political beliefs and community cohesion.

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1 . Other pages in this release

- [Exploring religion in England and Wales](#)
- [Religion, education and work in England and Wales](#)
- [Religion and crime in England and Wales](#)
- [Religion and health in England and Wales](#)

Aim of this work

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has worked with representatives from across government to identify the data that currently exist to understand the circumstances of people of different religious identities. Our aim is to assess the quality of the existing evidence base and develop plans to build on its strengths and address its limitations.

Definition of religion

Estimates presented in this release capture the concept of religious affiliation. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) [harmonised principle on religion](#) recommends that, where a single question is used in data collection, the concept that should be measured is religious affiliation. This captures how respondents connect or identify with a religion, regardless of whether they actively practise it (see [The 2021 Census: Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England and Wales: Religion topic report \(PDF, 780KB\)](#) for more information about concepts in relation to religion).

Definition of participation

[The Equality and Human Rights Commission Measurement Framework \(PDF, 15.66MB\)](#) identifies six domains or areas of life that are important to people and enable them to flourish. The participation domain is about being able “to participate in decision-making and in communities, to access services, to know that your privacy will be respected, and to be able to express yourself”.

Scope of this article

This part of the release presents statistics broken down by religious affiliation within the participation domain.

Our aim is to improve the evidence base particularly for groups that are often invisible in routine reporting of statistics, for example, because they are present in insufficient numbers for reliable estimates to be provided for them. In line with this aim, this release focuses on statistics that capture the full range of religious groups contained within the harmonised principle and does not include estimates that are available only for broad religious groupings. For England and Wales, the religious groups are:

- No religion
- Christian
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion

In the following sections, we present cross-sectional descriptive statistics allowing us to identify differences between groups but not to explain them. No adjustments have been made to take account of differences between religious groups, which could have a bearing on the extent and nature of their social and political participation. This could be an area for future research.

Throughout this release, comparisons are only made between estimates for different religious groupings where these are statistically significant (see Uncertainty and quality in Section 6 for details of how statistical significance is assessed). Caution should therefore be exercised when making other comparisons between religious groupings as observed differences may not be statistically significant.

2 . Main points

- Over half of adults in England and Wales who identified as Sikh or Muslim reported that they consider political beliefs important to their sense of who they are (60% and 55%, respectively) in 2016 to 2018.
- While around 6 in 10 adults who identified as Jewish (62%) reported having participated in political activities in England in 2016 to 2017, only around a quarter of those who identified as Sikh (26%) and Hindu (27%) reported this.
- Volunteering was higher among those who identified as Jewish (44%), Buddhist (31%), “any other religion” (30%) or Christian (23%) than remaining religious groupings in England and Wales in 2016 to 2018.
- In 2016 to 2017, 7 in 10 adults who identified as Muslim in England reported feeling that they belong to their neighbourhood (71%) but only around a quarter of them (26%) agreed that many of the people in their neighbourhood could be trusted.
- In England in 2016 to 2017, 66% of adults who identified as Christian reported that they feel they belong to their neighbourhood and almost half (47%) said that most people in their neighbourhood could be trusted.

Statistician's comments

“This is part of a programme of work we are doing to explore inequalities in our society. The reasons for inequalities are complex, as today’s findings show, with a range of factors to be taken into account. These findings are not intended to provide definitive answers but to add to the growing evidence base on equalities.”

Paola Serafino, Centre for Equalities and Inclusion, Office for National Statistics

3 . Participation in political and civic life

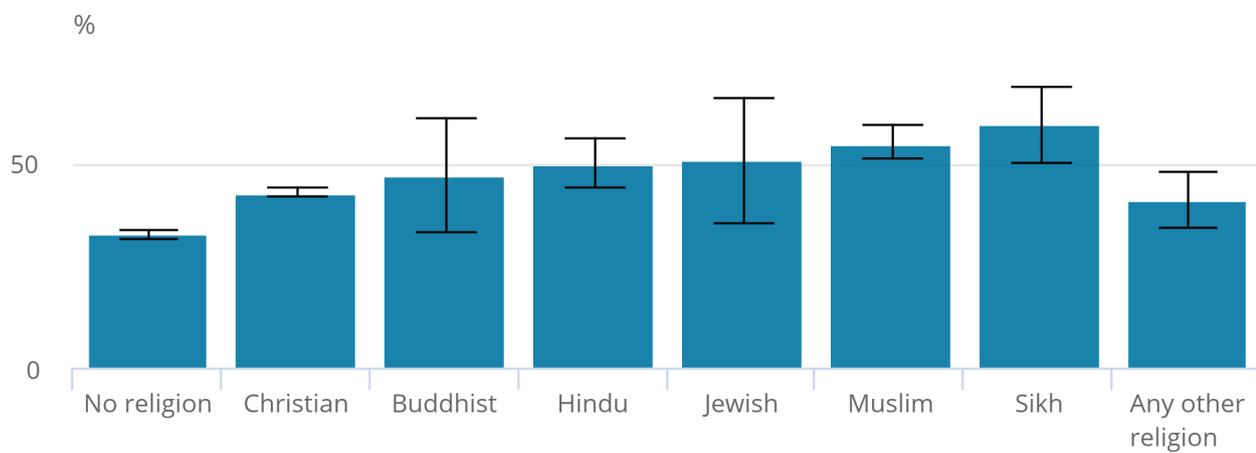
Between 2016 and 2018, over half of adults in England and Wales who identified as Sikh (60%) or Muslim (55%) expressed the view that their political beliefs were fairly or very important to their sense of who they are (Figure 1). Only a third of adults who identified as having no religion (33%) reported this.

Figure 1: A lower percentage of adults who identified as having no religion reported that political beliefs are important to their sense of who they are

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who value political beliefs as very or fairly important by religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2016 to 2018

Figure 1: A lower percentage of adults who identified as having no religion reported that political beliefs are important to their sense of who they are

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who value political beliefs as very or fairly important by religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2016 to 2018



Source: UK Household Longitudinal Study

Notes:

1. "Any other religion" encompasses those religions that are not otherwise listed separately.
2. Because of the wide confidence intervals around some of these estimates, caution should be exercised when making comparisons across other religious groupings as apparent differences may not be statistically significant.

In England in 2016 to 2017, around 6 in 10 adults who identified as Jewish (62%) reported having undertaken one or more of the following political activities in the last year:

- contacted a local official such as a local councillor, Member of Parliament (MP), government official, mayor or public official
- attended a public meeting or rally, or taken part in a public demonstration or protest
- signed a paper petition, or online or e-petition

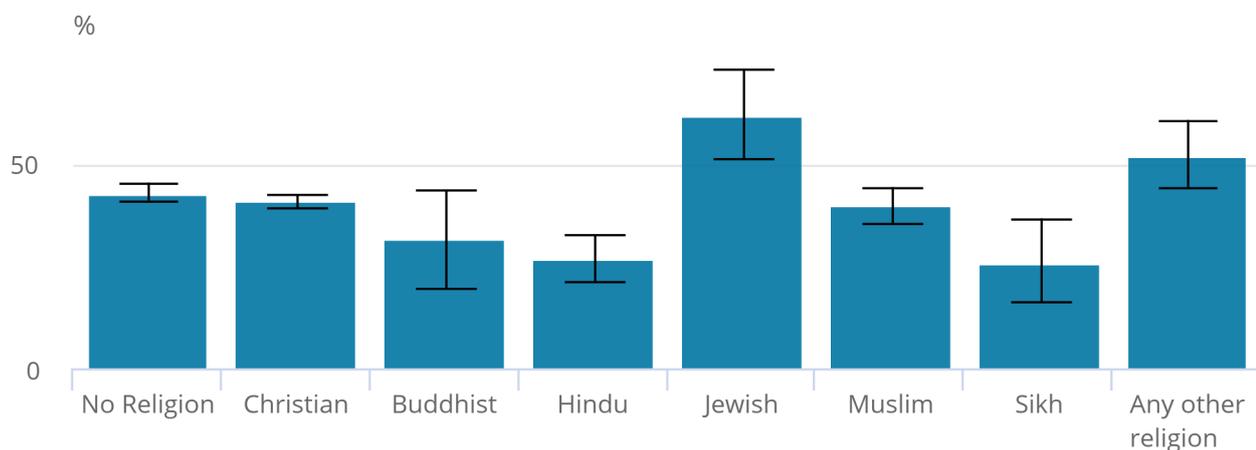
In contrast, only around a quarter of those who identified as Hindu or Sikh had done so (27% and 26% respectively) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Adults who identified as Jewish were more likely than most other religious groups to report having participated in a political activity

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who have undertaken one or more of a number of political activities, England 2016 to 2017

Figure 2: Adults who identified as Jewish were more likely than most other religious groups to report having participated in a political activity

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who have undertaken one or more of a number of political activities, England 2016 to 2017



Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission analysis of the Community Life Survey

Notes:

1. Data are taken from the [supporting tables to Is Britain Fairer 2018](#).
2. "Any other religion" encompasses those religions that are not otherwise listed separately.
3. Because of the wide confidence intervals around some of these estimates, caution should be exercised when making comparisons across other religious groupings as apparent differences may not be statistically significant.

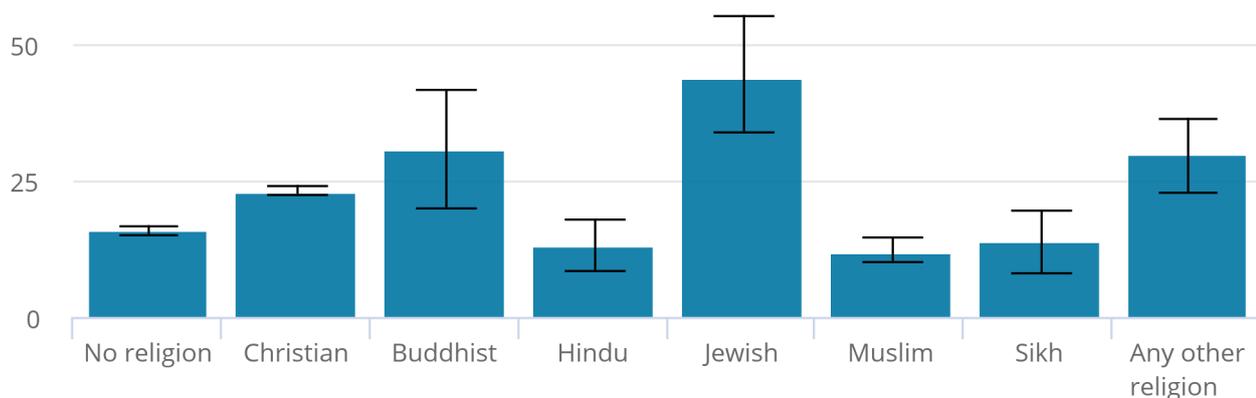
The percentage of the population who reported having participated in voluntary activity in England and Wales in 2016 to 2018 was higher for those who identified as Jewish (44%), Buddhist (31%), "any other religion" (30%) or Christian (23%) than other religious groupings (Figure 3).

Figure 3: A higher proportion of adults who identified as Jewish, Buddhist, Christian or "any other religion" volunteered in the last 12 months than those in other religious groups

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who have given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity in the last 12 months by religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2016 to 2018

Figure 3: A higher proportion of adults who identified as Jewish, Buddhist, Christian or "any other religion" volunteered in the last 12 months than those in other religious groups

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who have given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity in the last 12 months by religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2016 to 2018



Source: UK Household Longitudinal Study

Notes:

1. "Any other religion" encompasses those religions that are not otherwise listed separately.
2. Because of the wide confidence intervals around some of these estimates, caution should be exercised when making comparisons across other religious groupings as apparent differences may not be statistically significant.

4 . Social and community cohesion

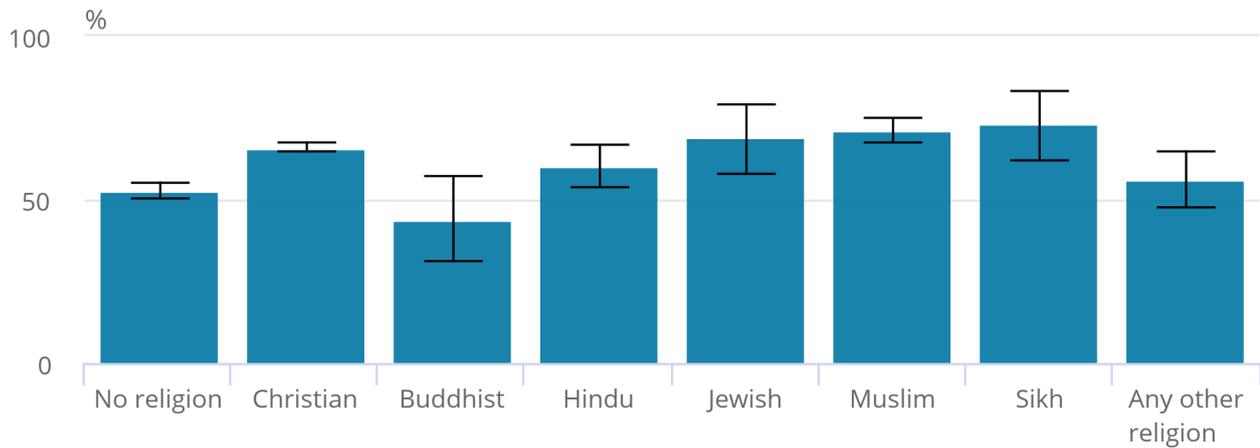
The [Community Life Survey for England](#) asks people how strongly they feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood. In 2016 to 2017 (Figure 4), those identifying as Muslim or Christian (71% and 66% respectively) were more likely to say they feel fairly or very strongly that they belong to the neighbourhood than those identifying as Buddhist or with no religion (44% and 53% respectively).

Figure 4: 7 in 10 of those who identified as Muslim reported feeling a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who feel fairly or very strongly that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood, England, 2016 to 2017

Figure 4: 7 in 10 of those who identified as Muslim reported feeling a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood

Percentage of adults (aged 16 years and over) who feel fairly or very strongly that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood, England, 2016 to 2017



Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission analysis of the Community Life Survey

Notes:

1. Data are taken from the [supporting tables to is Britain Fairer 2018](#).
2. "Any other religion" encompasses those religions that are not otherwise listed separately.
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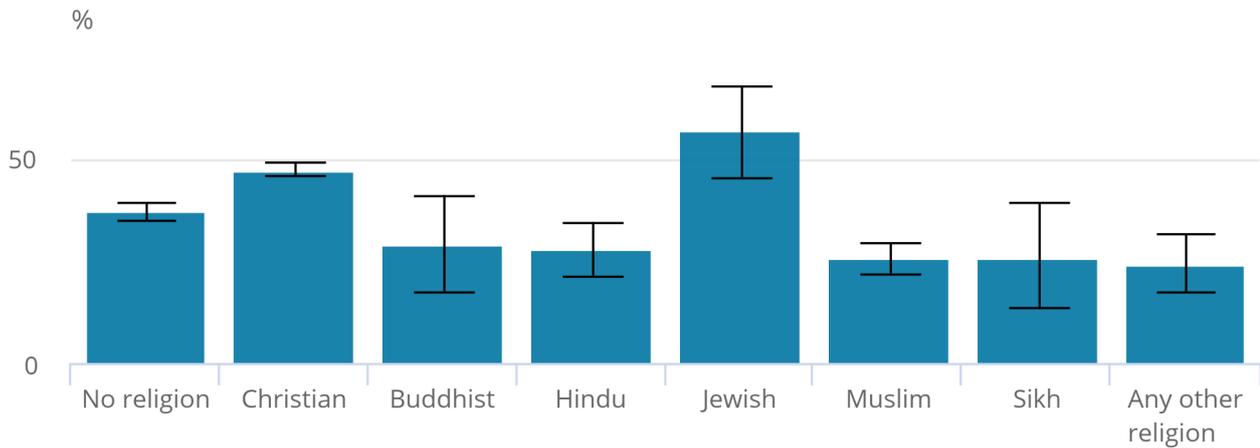
Those identifying as Jewish or Christian were more likely than other religious groups to say that many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted (57% and 47% respectively) (Figure 5). Interestingly, although a high percentage of those who identified as Muslim reported a strong feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood, only around a quarter (26%) said that many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted.

Figure 5: Adults who identified as Jewish and Christian were most likely to agree that many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted

Percentage of adults (aged 16 and over) who say that many of the people in their neighbourhood can be trusted, England, 2016 to 2017

Figure 5: Adults who identified as Jewish and Christian were most likely to agree that many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted

Percentage of adults (aged 16 and over) who say that many of the people in their neighbourhood can be trusted, England, 2016 to 2017



Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission analysis of the Community Life Survey

Notes:

1. Data are taken from the [Supporting Tables to is Britain Fairer 2018](#).
2. Estimates for those who say that many of the people in their neighbourhood can be trusted who identify as Buddhist and Sikh have a coefficient of variation of 20% or more, and as such should be used with caution.
3. "Any other religion" encompasses those religions that are not otherwise listed separately.
4. Because of the wide confidence intervals around some of these estimates, caution should be exercised when making comparisons across other religious groupings as apparent differences may not be statistically significant.

5 . Measuring the data

The Community Life Survey

The [Community Life Survey](#) is a household self-completion online and paper survey of approximately 10,000 adults aged 16 years or over in England. Since 2016 to 2017, the survey has included an ethnic boost aimed to increase the number of respondents from ethnic minority groups to ensure there is a representative sample. This will have the effect of boosting the sample size for some religious groupings.

The UK Household Longitudinal Study

The analysis in this section is based on cross-sectional data from Wave 8 of the [UK Household Longitudinal Study](#). This is a longitudinal household survey of approximately 40,000 households (at Wave 1). Interviews are carried out face-to-face or through a self-completion online survey. It includes a youth questionnaire for those aged 10 to 15 years to complete (not included in this analysis), alongside the main adult survey, which is completed by respondents aged 16 years and over. It also includes an ethnic minority boost sample and an immigrant and ethnic minority boost sample, which has the effect of boosting the numbers of some religious groupings.

6 . Strengths and limitations

Uncertainty and quality

The statistics presented are estimates and as with all estimates, there is a level of [uncertainty](#) associated with them. Where available, 95% [confidence intervals](#) have been shown. These show the range within which we would expect the true value to lie for 95 out of every 100 samples drawn at random from the population. Wide confidence intervals, often associated with small sample sizes or large sample variance, indicate a wider range of values within which we would expect the true value to lie.

In many cases, sample sizes for specific religious groups are small and confidence intervals are large and overlap with one another. This makes it difficult to make robust comparisons between groups. Only [statistically significant](#) differences, as defined in this section, are commented on in this article.

Throughout this release we have assessed statistical significance using non-overlapping confidence intervals. This method has the limitation that some estimates with overlapping confidence intervals may be significantly different but will not be identified as such (that is, the false-negative rate will be inflated). In addition, no adjustments have been made for multiple comparisons.

In line with the 2011 Census, questions in all surveys relating to religion are voluntary and respondents can opt not to reveal their religious affiliation. Throughout this release, we have assumed that there is no link between choosing not to self-identify and the outcome being examined. For example, an individual of a particular religious affiliation who withholds that identity is no more or less likely to have volunteered in the last 12 months than one who has indicated their religious affiliation. However, if this is not the case, this would affect the results presented here.

When interpreting the results of this analysis, it should be remembered that the estimated percentages may be indicative (or otherwise) of a statistical association between participation levels and religious affiliation, but do not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two.

It has not been possible to present estimates for Wales separately from England because of sample sizes for some religious groups (see Related links for sources of information for Wales only for broad religious groups.)

7 . Related links

[National Survey for Wales](#)

Provides data on a range of measures for Wales by broad religious group, including whether people have contacted a councillor in the last year, whether people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area, their attendance at or participation in arts events in the last year, sports participation and feelings of belonging to their local area.

[Local Government Candidates Survey](#)

Provides data on candidates, and community and county councillors elected at 2017 local government elections in Wales by broad religious group.