

## Faith and Society Files: Religion or Belief Landscape of the UK

The United Kingdom (UK) has a Christian inheritance and a current religious landscape in which Christianity remains the main religious tradition. At the same time, the religion and belief diversity of the UK has also, in recent years, grown substantially, along with its secularity. In this document, author Paul Weller explores the history and current statistics relating to the religion and belief diversity of the UK.



# 'Three Dimensional' Inheritance and Change

The United Kingdom (UK) has a Christian inheritance and a current religious landscape in which Christianity remains the main religious tradition. At the same time, the religion and belief diversity of the UK has also, in recent years, grown substantially, along with its secularity. In this document, author Paul Weller explores the history and current statistics relating to the religion and belief diversity of the UK.

For further information on the people, communities and organisations; the places of worship; the key beliefs and practices; and the calendars and festivals of a number of the religions introduced briefly in this document by reference to their history and statistics, see:

- [Encountering Buddhists](#)
- [Encountering Hindus](#)
- [Encountering Jews](#)
- [Encountering Muslims](#)
- [Encountering Sikhs](#)

However, the country has also seen an increasing diversity of religious life in which Muslims now form the largest religious minority alongside also relatively large groups of Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists and Pagans of various traditions, along with smaller numbers of Bahá'ís, Jains and Zoroastrians, and others.

Together with people who have an active involvement in the corporate life of their religious communities, there are also significant numbers of people whose religious belief and practice might most accurately be described in terms of 'folk religion', 'implicit religion', or 'residual Christianity'. As people whom the sociologist of religion Grace Davie describes as having a 'vicarious religion', such people may continue to engage with organised Christian religious life at times of crisis or personal significance such as birth, marriage and death, or for festivals such as Christmas.

As well as those who have either a direct or indirect relationship with one of the major world religions in the UK, there are significant numbers of those who follow other forms of religious expression. Among these are groups popularly referred to as 'sects' or 'cults' but which academics have generally referred to by the more descriptive term of 'New Religious Movements' (NRMs). Another area of religious life, often described as 'New Age' spirituality, is marked by a concern for personal growth and often draws upon practices and traditions taken from a variety of sources.

As a framework for understanding this overall context, the Baptist scholar Paul Weller, in his 2005 book *Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society*, has described the UK's religious landscape as being something that could now be seen as 'exhibiting contours that are 'Christian, secular and religiously plural,'" and that therefore:

*'...the contemporary socio-religious reality of England and the UK might be described as 'three-dimensional' in contrast with a more 'one-dimensional' Christian inheritance or the 'two-dimensional' religious-secular modifications made to that self-understanding during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'*

(P Weller, 2005, *Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society*, London: T and T Clark, p73).

In the context of what Weller also calls the 'four nations' state of the UK there are significant variations in each of the four countries of the UK, and also regional and local variations within each country. But the overall picture remains a 'three dimensional' one and, as we shall see below, one in which the balance between the three dimensions of Christianity, secularity and religious plurality is changing, in terms of an observable trend towards a rising secularity; a growing religious diversity; and a continuing, while declining, majority presence of Christianity.

# Christian Diversity Within the UK

## Historic Christian Traditions

Within this overall religion or belief landscape of the UK, the picture of Christianity is one that has developed richly diverse forms. In the first instance these varied forms reflect doctrinal differences between the various historic Christian traditions and denominations. Many of these differences are also reflected in varied national and religious histories of different parts of the UK.

Thus in England, the largest single Christian Church remains the Church of England, whilst in Scotland it is the Church of Scotland (which is Presbyterian in tradition). In Wales, the Free Churches (Baptist, Methodist and others) collectively are larger than any other Christian tradition, as are the Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland, although the Roman Catholic Church is the largest single Church there. In the rural areas of England, the Church of England has a more widespread presence than any other Christian Church, while in England, Scotland and Wales, Roman Catholic Christians are predominantly concentrated in urban areas.

## Christians with Migratory Backgrounds

But the picture of Christianity in the UK, and particularly in England and Wales, also increasingly reflects the migration of groups of varied Christian background, bringing with them their traditions, organisations and forms of practice. Migration within the UK has long had this effect, particularly in terms of the 19th century migration into England and Scotland of significant numbers of Irish Roman Catholics. But in the years after the Second World War, migration became more international, with migrants from Italy, for example, leading to both the growth and the ethnic diversification of the Roman Catholic Christian community. Similarly, following Poland's 2004 accession to the membership of the European Union, Roman Catholic migrants from that country added significantly to the numbers of Roman Catholics here, as have refugee and migration movements of Roman Catholic Christians from Africa and Latin America. In terms of other Christian traditions, although the Orthodox traditions remain numerically small, Orthodox Christians with Greek Cypriot, Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Russian backgrounds arrived here throughout the 20th century, adding a new component to the Christian diversity of the country.

In the 1950s, new settlers in the UK included people from the Caribbean. The majority of these were, in their countries of origin, Christians who usually identified with one or other of the historic Christian denominations that had originally developed in the UK. But in response to what they often felt was at best a frosty reception from indigenous Christians in the UK, some formed independent congregations where they could practise Christianity free of the racism they had experienced within the older ecclesial communities. A number of these grouped together to form new denominations, while others have linked up with international movements based abroad, particularly in the USA. A significant proportion of migrants from Africa, and especially from West African countries, have also brought with them forms of indigenous Christian life that were developed in African Independent Churches, such as those of the Cherubim and Seraphim traditions.

## **New Forms of Corporate Christian Life**

But it is not only because of migration that the face of Christianity in the UK has changed. New forms of Christian life and organisation have emerged either outside of, or overlapping with, the more traditional Christian Churches. These include the development of the so-called Restorationist or New Church movements that have sought to recover a more authentic form of Christian life than they feel has been transmitted or translated by the traditional Churches in the context of contemporary society, and such congregations are increasingly organised in wider groupings and networks. As a result of all this, the early twenty-first century face of Christianity in the UK is much more diverse than many could have imagined, even half a century ago, both in terms of ethnicity and also the variety of its Christian confessional traditions, denominations and other organisational forms.

# Beyond Christian Diversity in the UK

## Historical Roots of Diversity

Although Christianity has, for many centuries, historically been by far the main religious tradition of the UK, contrary to many popular perceptions, religious diversity beyond the varieties of Christianity did not arrive only as the product of migrant and refugee population movements of the 20th century. As noted in the following overview, elements of the religious diversity that is to be found in the UK of the 21st century can – at least in ‘seed form’ - also be identified in the 19th century and, in some cases, even before that.

Pagan traditions, of course, predated the arrival of Christianity here. Some aspects of Pagan traditions were incorporated into local Christian practice (as, for example, in the ways and places in which some festivals were celebrated), whilst other aspects were driven underground until the modern era when there has been a serious attempt to revive Pagan traditions.

A small Jewish presence was established after the Norman conquest in 1066, although in 1290 Jews were expelled from England and were only re-admitted during the period of the Commonwealth that followed the 17th century English Civil War with the arrival here of Sephardi (those with geographical roots in North Africa and Spain) Jews.

But the roots of much of today’s wider religious diversity can be found in the expansion of Britain’s international role through trade that ultimately fed into the colonial and imperial project of the British Empire. In this context, individual Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians and others visited as seamen and some settled, while others came to live here and work as servants or ayahs. Initially, the presence was one that was primarily of individuals and families, rather than of more organised communities.

## Buddhists, Confucianists and Taoists

During the nineteenth century, people from China with a varied Buddhist, Confucianist and Taoist religious inheritance settled in Britain. Most were seafarers from the southern provinces of China, particularly from Guangdong. However, there was only a small Chinese population in Britain until after the Second World War.

Also during the nineteenth century, quite a number of individual scholars in the UK developed an academic, and then also personal, interest in Buddhism. Buddhist texts were translated into English, and an increasing number of individuals became interested in Buddhist teaching. The earliest Buddhist missions to the UK were undertaken by indigenous people who became Buddhists when outside of the country and then later returned to lead Buddhist missions.

## Jews

From 1881 until 1914, Ashkenazi (those with geographical roots primarily in eastern Europe and Russia) were seeking betterment through economic migration in the face of restricted social and economic possibilities in Eastern Europe and others seeking to escape the pogroms in the Russian Empire of the time arrived in significant numbers to supplement and further develop the already resident Jewish community. Following the First World War there was further settlement by Muslims and people of other religions of the former British Empire who were demobilised from the armed forces of the British Empire.

## **Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs**

But it was from the middle of the 20th century onwards that the size, distribution and significance of the religious minorities such as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, grew in both size and in social, cultural and religious impact. Again this initially occurred through the settlement of demobilised soldiers, sailors and pilots following the Second World War. But it was the labour migration of the 1950s and 1960s of post-war reconstruction and labour shortage that led to (initially largely male) workers of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh backgrounds from the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent becoming a visible feature of UK life, leading to the development here of significant communities of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

With the impact of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the flow of primary migration slowed down, but spouses and children began to join the original, mainly male, migrants and as originally migrant minorities started to perceive themselves more in terms of settled groups, they paid increasing attention to building the structures necessary for sustaining and developing an established internal community life, for maintaining and transmitting their religious life, and for relating to the wider society. Thus Mandirs (Hindu temples), gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) and mosques (Muslim places of prayer) were founded and became an increasingly established and visible feature of the religion or belief landscape of the UK.

As a result of the Africanisation policies of the newly independent African states of the former British Empire, during the later 1960s and early 1970s the original migrant groups were supplemented by the arrival from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi of a substantial number of people of East African Asian origins. Together with migrants coming directly from Fiji, Trinidad and Guyana, this led to the growth of the Hindu population.

The Chinese population in the UK grew from the 1960s onwards, with the migration of ethnic Chinese from Singapore, Malaysia and the rural Territories of Hong Kong. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, refugee settlement further strengthened, in particular: the Buddhist population, following the Chinese take-over of Tibet; the Orthodox Christian population following conflict in Cyprus; the Hindu, Jain and Sikh populations by South Asian Hindus, Jains and Sikhs migrating from East African states as a consequence of the Africanisation policies introduced during the early 1960s; and the Bahá'í and Zoroastrian communities in the wake of the Iranian Revolution.

In the 1990s further diversification occurred with the arrival of new and predominantly Muslim refugee and migrant groups following conflicts in Somalia and other parts of Africa, Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, but also mainly Hindu Tamils fleeing the conflict in Sri Lanka. In the 2000s, these have been supplemented by many Muslims from the Middle East, and especially from Iraq and Syria.

# The 2011 Census and Religion or Belief in the UK

## Counting Religion: Christian, Plural and Secular

Beginning with the 2001 introduction into the national census of questions on religion or belief, it is possible to gain a good idea of the numbers of those who identify with various religions in the UK and to see changes over time, as in comparing the results of the 2011 census questions on religion or belief with those in 2001. At the same time, for various reasons some caution must be exercised in relation to what this data does and does not tell us.

First of all, the data is the product of a what is a voluntary question within the Census which 4,528,323 people (or 7.2% of UK respondents) did not answer, including 3,804,104 or 7.2% in England; and 233,928 or 7.6% in Wales. And unlike in relation to other questions that were not answered, the Office for National Statistics did not estimate what these responses might have been or impute them to the overall census results. Second, in both the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, different versions of the religion or belief question were asked in England and Wales (where the questions were the same) as compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Thus the questions in Scotland and Northern Ireland were framed in terms of the arguably 'harder-edged' notion of 'belonging' to a specific religion and/or denomination as compared with the 'What is your religion?' form of the question that was asked in England and Wales. So this difference must therefore be borne in mind when looking at any data that is brought together on a UK-wide basis. Finally it needs to be understood that the Census questions were to do with religious affiliation in the sense of identification with a religion rather than asking about people's religious belief or religious practice.

Bearing in mind all these qualifications, the following **Table 1** sets out, for both 2001 and for 2011, the number of people across the UK who identified with particular religious traditions or with 'no religion', as well as the percentages of these among all respondents:

**Table 1**

Religion	UKTotal 2001	UKTotal 2011	UK% 2001	UK% 2011
Buddhist	151,816	261,584	0.3%	0.4%
Christian	42,079,417	37,583,962	71.9%	59.5%
Hindu	558,810	835,394	1.0%	1.3%
Jewish	266,740	269,568	0.5%	0.4%
Muslim	1,591,126	2,786,635	2.7%	4.4%
Sikh	336,149	432,429	0.6%	0.7%
Other Religion	178,837	262,774	0.3%	0.4%
<b>Total Other than Christian Religion</b>	3,083,478	4,848,384	5.3%	7.6%
<b>Total Religion</b>	45,162,895	42,432,346	76.8%	67.1%
No religion	9,103,727	16,221,509	15.5%	25.7%
Not stated	4,288,719	4,528,323	7.3%	7.2%
<b>Total no religion/not stated</b>	13,392,466	20,749,832	22.8%	32.9%
<b>Grand Totals</b>	58,555,341	63,182,178	100.00%	100%



**Table 2** sets out, for both 2001 and for 2011, the number of people in England, in Wales, and in England and Wales together, who identified with particular religious traditions; who identified with 'no religion'; or who did not provide an answer.

**Table 2**

Religion	England 2001	England 2011	Wales 2001	Wales 2011	Total England and Wales 2001	Total England and Wales 2011
Buddhist	139,046	238,626	5,407	9,117	144,453	247,743
Christian	35,251,244	31,479,876	2,087,242	1,763,299	37,338,486	33,243,175
Hindu	546,982	806,199	5,439	10,434	552,421	816,633
Jewish	257,671	261,282	2,256	2,064	259,927	263,346
Muslim	1,524,887	2,660,116	21,739	45,950	1,546,626	2,706,066
Sikh	327,343	420,196	2,015	2,962	329,358	423,158
Other Religion	143,811	227,825	6,909	12,705	150,720	240,530
<b>Total Religions</b>	38,190,984	36,094,120	2,131,007	1,846,531	40,321,991	37,940,651
No religion	7,171,332	13,114,232	537,935	982,997	7,709,267	14,097,229
Not stated	3,776,515	3,804,104	234,143	233,928	4,010,658	4,038,032
<b>Total no religion/not stated</b>	10,947,847	16,918,336	772,078	1,216,925	11,719,925	18,135,261
<b>Total All</b>	49,138,831	53,012,456	2,903,085	3,063,456	52,041,916	56,075,912

**Table 3** sets out, for both 2001 and for 2011, the percentages of respondents to the Census in England, in Wales, and in England and Wales together, who identified with particular religious traditions; with 'no religion'; or who did not provide an answer.

**Table 3**

Religion	England % 2001	England % 2011	Wales % 2001	Wales % 2011	England and Wales % 2001	England and Wales % 2011
Buddhist	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%
Christian	71.7%	59.4%	71.9%	57.6%	71.7%	59.3%
Hindu	1.1%	1.5%	0.2%	0.3%	1.1%	1.5%
Jewish	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.5%
Muslim	3.1%	5.0%	0.8%	1.5%	3.0%	4.8%
Sikh	0.7%	0.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.6%	0.8%
Other Religion	0.3%	0.4%	0%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
<b>Total Religions</b>	77.7%	68.1%	73.4%	60.3%	77.5%	67.7%
No religion	14.6%	24.7%	18.5%	32.1%	14.8%	25.1%
Not stated	7.7%	7.2%	8.1%	7.6%	7.7%	7.2%
<b>Total no religion/not stated</b>	22.3%	31.9%	26.6%	39.7%	22.5%	32.3%
<b>Total All</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In terms of broad identification with a religion, as seen in Table 1, it would seem that while falling in numbers (from 45,162,895 people to 42,432,346) and in proportion of the population responding to the Census (from 76.8% to 67.1%), religion remains a factor of at least some significance in the self-understanding of around two thirds of the population of the UK. Among these, Christians are by far the largest group, followed by Muslims; then Hindus and Sikhs; then Jews; then Buddhists; and then Jains, Bahá'ís and Zoroastrians.

If focusing on England and Wales, in both the 2001 and 2011 Censuses for England alone, and also for England and Wales taken together, the largest religion population remains Christian. After Christian, the next largest group of respondents were, in both 2001 and 2011, Muslim; then Hindu and Sikh; then Jewish. Following these groups, in 2001, the next largest group had been 'Other religions' and then Buddhists. In 2011, it was Buddhists and then 'Other religions'. In relation to Wales on its own, in both the 2011 and 2001 Censuses, the next largest groups after Christian were Muslim; then 'Other religions', then Hindu; then Buddhist. Following these groups in 2001, the next largest groups had been Jewish and then Sikh. In 2011, this was Sikh and then Jewish.

In the case of each of these religious traditions, people who identify with them share in common many beliefs and practices. However, within most religious groups there are also significant variations of tradition, organisation, ethnicity and language.

# The Geography and Ethnicity of Religions in the UK

## Geography of Religions in the UK

Of the four nations that comprise the UK, England has both the broadest and most numerous variety of religious traditions and communities. Among these, Muslims form the largest religious minority followed by Hindus, and then by Sikhs, Jews, Buddhists and 'Other Religions'.

In Scotland, as in England, Muslims make up the largest religious minority, although in Scotland this is followed by those using the write-in option for 'Other Religions', and then by Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, and Hindus. For Wales, as in all other countries in the UK, Muslims form the largest religious minority. As in Scotland, this is followed by 'Other Religions', then by Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jews. Northern Ireland continues to be the part of the UK that exhibits least diversity of religion or belief, although the 2011 Census results include some indication of a small rise in the other than Christian, but religious, population. As in other parts of the UK, Muslims constitute the largest religious minority and, as in Wales and Scotland, Muslims are followed by those using the write-in option for 'Other Religions', and then by Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Sikhs.

In addition to these differences between the countries of the UK, the longer-term religious and national histories and more recent patterns of migration settlement have affected the religious composition of each local and regional area. Therefore some areas have a more multi-faith character, and others have concentrations of people of particular religions and/or traditions within these religions.

In each nation, the greatest diversity of religions is to be found in cities, metropolitan boroughs and some towns. The cosmopolitan nature of London means that religious as well as ethnic and linguistic diversity is at its broadest there, with now just less than half (48.4%, compared with three-fifths in 2001) of London's population recording their religion as Christian in the 2011 Census. For all the other religions the highest proportion of their regional populations is to be found in London, with the exception of the Sikhs, whose regional population share is at its greatest in the West Midlands.

Along with London, seaports such as Liverpool and Cardiff generally have had longer-established communities because trade brought seafarers from other countries to such countries and led to the establishment of some degree of community life there. In addition, many old industrial towns and cities of the English Midlands and North, such as Leicester and Bradford, have communities of South Asian origin that were established as a result of migration from particular areas of Commonwealth countries in response to the invitation to work in British industries in the context of the post-Second World War labour shortages in Britain.

Relatively speaking, the minority religion presence in the English regions is at its greatest in the West Midlands, the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and the East Midlands. The main concentrations of minority religions are found in the areas of greatest general population density, including London, the West Midlands, the Leicester-Nottingham area, and the conurbations of the Pennines. Such concentrations of minority religious populations underline the fact that, as in 2001, religious diversity is still primarily an urban phenomenon. Tables 4-7 illustrate the degree of diversity that can be found between areas, with examples taken from the 2001 and 2011 Census results for Blackburn with Darwen, Leicester, the London Borough of Newham and Norwich.

In the light of this it is clear that the locality in which one lives, works, or where one's congregation is based will likely play a very significant role in relation to the kind and degree of religion or belief diversity that is likely to be encountered. At the same time, it is important to note that there can be areas in which there might be relatively little of what might be called 'visible religious diversity' but, for example, a significant presence of white Buddhists, Pagans and others.

**Table 4** shows self-identification by religion in the 2001 and 2011 Census by numbers and proportions of the population of Blackburn with Darwen, and ranking for concentrations of each religious group, by local authority in England

**Table 4**

Religion	Numbers in 2001	Numbers in 2011	% in 2001	% in 2011	Ranking in 2011
Buddhist	159	306	0.1%	0.2%	283
Christian	87,001	77,599	63.3%	52.6%	308
Hindu	423	574	0.3%	0.4%	166
Jewish	53	54	0.0%	0.0%	304
Muslim	26,674	39,817	19.4%	27.0%	3
Sikh	138	161	0.1%	0.1%	186
Other Religion	188	295	0.2%	0.2%	341
<b>Total all Religions</b>	<b>114,636</b>	<b>118,806</b>	<b>83.4%</b>	<b>80.5%</b>	-
No religion	10,981	20,374	8.0%	13.8%	342
Not stated	11,853	8,309	8.6%	5.6%	341
<b>No religion/not stated</b>	<b>22,834</b>	<b>28,683</b>	<b>16.6%</b>	<b>19.4%</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>137,470</b>	<b>147,489</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		<b>N= 384</b>

Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding effects

**Table 5** shows self-identification by religion in the 2001 and 2011 Census by numbers and proportions of the population of Leicester, and ranking for concentrations of each religious group, by local authority in England Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding effects

**Table 5**

Religion	Numbers in 2001	Numbers in 2011	% in 2001	% in 2011	Ranking in 2011
Buddhist	638	1,224	0.2%	0.4%	121
Christian	125,187	106,872	44.7%	32.4%	347
Hindu	41,248	50,087	14.8%	15.2%	3
Jewish	417	295	0.2%	0.1%	183
Muslim	30,885	61,440	11.0%	18.6%	11
Sikh	11,796	14,457	4.2%	4.4%	12
Other Religion	1,179	1,839	0.4%	0.6%	45
<b>Total all Religions</b>	<b>211,350</b>	<b>236,214</b>	<b>75.5%</b>	<b>71.7%</b>	-
No religion	48,789	75,280	17.4%	22.8%	255
Not stated	19,782	18,345	7.1%	5.6%	343
<b>No religion/not stated</b>	<b>68,571</b>	<b>93,625</b>	<b>24.5%</b>	<b>28.4%</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>279,921</b>	<b>329,839</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		<b>N = 384</b>

Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding effects

**Table 6** shows self-identification by religion in the 2001 and 2011 Census by numbers and proportions of the population of the London Borough of Newham, and ranking for concentrations in each religious group, by local authority in England

**Table 6**

Religion	Numbers in 2001	Numbers in 2011	% in 2001	% in 2011	Ranking in 2011
Buddhist	1,592	2,446	0.7%	0.8%	32
Christian	114,247	123,119	46.8%	40.0%	342
Hindu	16,901	26,962	6.9%	8.8%	7
Jewish	481	342	0.2%	0.1%	153
Muslim	59,293	98,456	24.3%	32.0%	2
Sikh	6,897	6,421	2.8%	2.1%	19
Other Religion	664	1,090	0.3%	0.4%	213
<b>Total all Religions</b>	<b>200,075</b>	<b>258,836</b>	<b>82.00%</b>	<b>84.2%</b>	-
No religion	21,978	29,373	9.0%	9.5%	348
Not stated	21,838	19,775	9.0%	6.4%	283
<b>No religion/not stated</b>	<b>43,816</b>	<b>49,148</b>	<b>18.00%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>243,891</b>	<b>307,984</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		<b>N = 384</b>

Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding effects

**Table 7** shows self-identification by religion in the 2001 and 2011 Census by numbers and proportions of the population of Norwich, and ranking for concentrations in each religious group, by local authority in England

**Table 7**

Religion	Numbers in 2001	Numbers in 2011	% in 2001	% in 2011	Ranking in 2011
Buddhist	485	978	0.4	0.7%	35
Christian	73,428	59,515	60.4	44.9%	331
Hindu	348	1,017	0.3	0.8%	113
Jewish	239	241	0.2	0.2%	101
Muslim	887	2,612	0.7	2.0%	116
Sikh	102	168	0.1	0.1%	169
Other Religion	619	886	0.5	0.7%	17
<b>Total all Religions</b>	<b>76,108</b>	<b>65,419</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>49.4%</b>	-
No religion	33,766	56,268	27.8	42.5%	1
Not stated	11,676	10,827	9.6	8.2%	39
<b>No religion/not stated</b>	<b>45,442</b>	<b>67,095</b>	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>50.7%</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>121,550</b>	<b>132,514</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		<b>N= 384</b>

Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding effects

In terms of concentrations of people of different religions within various local authority areas in England, for those responding as Christian in the 2011 Census, the 13 greatest concentrations are in North West England, including the highest concentration (of 80.9%) in Knowsley while the lowest concentration of those responding Christian is in Tower Hamlets (which – see below – has the highest concentration of Muslims) at only 27.1% of the population.

**Table 8** sets out the highest concentrations of people of other than Christian traditions in various local authority areas in England

**Table 8**

<b>Muslims</b>			<b>Sikhs</b>	
Tower Hamlets	34.5%		Slough	10.6%
Newham	32.0%		Wolverhampton	9.1%
Bradford	24.7%		Hounslow	9.0%
Luton	24.6%		Sandwell	8.7%
			Ealing	7.9%
<b>Hindus</b>			<b>Buddhists</b>	
Harrow	25.3%		Rushmoor	3.3%
Brent	17.8%		Greenwich	1.7%
Leicester	<b>15.2%</b>		Kensington and Chelsea	1.5%
Redbridge	11.4%		Westminster	1.5%
Hounslow	10.3%		Hounslow	1.4%
<b>Jews</b>			<b>'Other Religion'</b>	
Barnet	15.2%		Harrow	2.5%
Hertsmere	14.3%		Brent	1.2%
Hackney	6.3%		Wolverhampton	1.2%
Bury	5.6%			
Camden	4.5%			



## Ethnic and Other Differences

In particular local areas in the UK, members of different religions may also show one or more particular ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics. In some cases the majority of a religion may, for example, be Muslims from Pakistan or, in others, Muslims from Bangladesh, or even from particular regions and even villages within these regions. For example, in Preston the Muslim population is largely Gujarati, as are the local Hindus. With greater population mobility, such a strong relationship between religion and ethnicity may begin to lessen in the future, although it is also likely that, at least for the foreseeable future, broad differences will persist.

Together with demographic and ethnic differences, there are also significant differences in socio-economic profiles as between groups of people understood with reference to religion, in which those identifying as Muslim generally fare less well. The degree to which these socio-economic differences are rooted particularly in religious discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of religious identity, or else come about through pre-existing socio-economic factors shared by people in a particular group, is a matter of some debate.

What Census indicators do reveal is a consistent picture in relation to the relative vulnerability of Muslims as compared with people from other religious groups. The relatively better overall socio-economic position of the Hindu and the Sikh population, as compared to Muslims, arguably owes as much to the position of the forebears of these groups prior to migration to the UK as to what has occurred since their arrival. A significant (though much smaller proportion of the Sikh and the Hindu population) part of both populations had origins among those who fled from East Africa, where they had previously formed a professionalised middle class. In contrast, many among the original Muslim migrants came from a rural peasant background. Examination of the demographic and socio-economic profiles of the diverse religious groups of the UK is a reminder that in encountering religion or belief diversity, while religious identity, believing and belonging are of great importance, there are also other factors beyond religion which play a significant role and of which one should be aware.

# Humanism, Atheism and Other Philosophies

## Secularisation

As already noted briefly above, and seen clearly in the data presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, the increasing religious diversity of the UK is overlaid upon the pre-existing processes of secularisation that emerged from the nineteenth century, in which secular and humanist perspectives came to the fore, the impetus for which had accelerated during the 1960s. Thus, alongside increased religious diversity, there has also been increasing secularisation in diverse areas of personal, social and institutional life that has brought something distinctively and significantly challenging to all religions.

The development of secularity, the origins of which are to be found in the humanism of the Renaissance period, was accelerated by the Industrial Revolution and the urbanisation of life that it brought. Darwinism seemed to offer a new account of human beginnings; anthropology questioned the uniqueness of claims about religious revelation; and with Freud, psychoanalysis began to explain human mysteries in terms of sexuality. Technology and globalisation began to shrink the world as air travel became ever faster, cheaper and more popular. Communication by satellite and the development of the mass media brought the whole world into the living rooms of ordinary British people. Human beings left the earth in space flight and the first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin of the Soviet Union, declared that when had been in space he had not seen God.

The meanings associated with the concept of secularisation and the extent of the social reality that it attempts both to describe and to interpret are varied and contested. Some approaches see secularisation as a process in which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance. Other definitions see secularisation more as the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. In both approaches there is a shared analysis of the role that religion plays in the public sphere that do not necessarily depend on any position concerning an absolute decline in religious belief and practice of a kind that, from the 1960s onwards, has often been popularly associated with the concept of secularisation.

However, what is clear is that, compared with the 2001 Census, the 2011 results for England and Wales (both combined and separately) show a substantial rise in both the numbers of people and percentage of the population stating that they are of 'no religion'. This is especially so in Wales, where those reporting 'no religion' rose steeply from 18.5% in 2001 to 32.1% in 2011. The results also show substantial drops in both the numbers and percentage of those identifying as 'Christian', together with stability or rises in the numbers and percentages of the population of all those identifying with 'other religions' than Christian.

Other kinds of survey data based on samples of the population (such as NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey) suggest that the proportion of people in Britain who describe themselves as having no religion might have risen to its highest ever level, with more than half (53%) of the British public now describing themselves as having 'no religion', which is up from 48% in 2015, and from 31% in 1983 when the survey first began. This fall in religious affiliation has been at least partially driven by young people, among whom, in 2016, 71% of those aged 18-24 said they had no religion, which is up from 62% in 2015.

One of the consequences of this can be seen, for example, in the increasing emergence of humanist officiants for ceremonies and celebrations intended to mark significant life events such as births, marriages and deaths, where in the ordained Christian ministers had often conducted these even where individuals did not have an explicit Christian identity or beliefs.

At the same time, alongside the increasing profile of the specifically non-religious in the UK population, when the word 'belief' is encountered within the phrase 'religion or belief' in both contemporary law and social policy, it is intended to reflect and encompass not only those holding to atheist and humanist beliefs, but also those who may view themselves as being 'spiritual' but neither 'non-religious' nor of a specific religion.

## Understanding One's Church/Home Context

To find the religious composition of your city/town and neighbourhood area within that, go to <http://localstats.co.uk> where you can run searches in relation to a range of statistical data from the 2011 Census, including that of the religion or belief profile of each area.

## Further Materials on Religion and Belief in the UK

For a more extensive overview of Religion and Belief in the UK, see the chapter on 'The Religious Landscape of the UK', in P Weller, ed (2007), *Religions in the UK: A Directory, 2007-10*, Derby: Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby in association with the University of Derby, pp 21-89, to which acknowledgement is made for having drawn upon some of the materials in summarised and often updated form.

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