

Article

# Religion and crime in England and Wales: February 2020

An overview of published statistics about crime and religion in England and Wales.

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# 1 . Other pages in this release

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## 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.)

## Scope of this article

The following sections contain statistics about crime and religion, which have been previously published by either the Home Office or the ONS.

On the whole, crime data in England and Wales are based on two sources of information: police recorded crime (PRC) data and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Each source has different strengths and limitations but together they provide a more comprehensive picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone. This is also true for crime and religion. The most relevant data relating to crime and religion relate to hate crime, although the Crime Survey collects information on a wide range of crime-related topics.

Published tables on crime and religious belief from the CSEW have not included [confidence intervals](#) alongside its estimates. This means that it is not possible for readers to distinguish findings that are [statistically significant](#) from those that are not. All differences reported in this bulletin have been formally tested and are statistically significant at the 5% level unless stated otherwise. These statistical tests infer with a given degree of confidence that the differences are likely to be real.

Although there is value in showing simple victimisation rates by religious affiliation between groups there is almost certainly a set of strong inter-relationships between people's religion and a range of other characteristics such as ethnicity, age and where a person lives. These characteristics may also be associated with whether or not a person is a victim of a crime. As the reports referenced here look solely at the relationship between religious affiliation and being a victim of crime, these compounding factors are ignored. The true relationship between a person's religious affiliation and victimisation is therefore unclear and the results presented should be interpreted with caution.

## Police recorded hate crime data

The police recorded hate crime collection covers a range of offences in which the police have identified racial or religious hatred as an aggravating factor. Hate crime in these circumstances is defined as “any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic.”

There are five centrally monitored strands in PRC data, one of which is “religion or beliefs.” The other four hate crimes are: race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity. Publications and datasets relating to police recorded hate crime on “religion or beliefs” are covered in Section 3, Police recorded hate crime.

In addition to police recorded hate crime collection, the police also record five specific offence types that have a racially or religiously motivated element to them. These are:

- racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury
- racially or religiously aggravated assault without injury
- racially or religiously aggravated harassment
- racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress
- racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage

These are published on a quarterly basis by the ONS alongside other offences recorded by the police. See [Appendix Table A5](#).

## Crime Survey for England and Wales

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), is a face-to-face victimisation survey in which adults resident in households in England and Wales are asked about their experiences of a range of crimes in the 12 months prior to the interview. Further information about these incidents are collected at the same time. This includes whether the respondent believed that the incident was motivated by “your religion or religious beliefs”.

The survey also covers various attitudes towards different crime-related issues, such as the police and the Criminal Justice System, and perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour. These are covered in Section 5 CSEW perceptions of crime.

Detailed information on the CSEW can be found in the [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

Following a methodological change to the handling of repeat victimisation, data published after January 2019 are not comparable with data published previously. For more information see [Improving victimisation estimates derived from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#).

## 2 . Main points

- In 2018 to 2019, there were in total 103,379 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 10% compared with 2017 to 2018 (94,121 offences); these increases have been mainly driven by improvements in crime recording by the police.
- In 2018 to 2019, the police recorded 8,566 hate crimes offences related to religion; these offences accounted for 8% of all hate crimes recorded by the police.
- Half (50%) of the religiously motivated hate crimes recorded by the police were for public order offences (for example, causing fear alarm or distress).
- According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), adults with an Asian ethnic group were found to be more likely to be victims of a religiously motivated hate crime than adults of White ethnic group (0.5% and less than 0.1% respectively, 2015 to 2016, to 2017 to 2018 CSEW).

## 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 . Police recorded hate crime

Police recorded hate crime statistics can be found in the Home Office publication titled [Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2018 to 2019 \(PDF, 1.42MB\)](#).

In 2018 to 2019, there were in total 103,379 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 10% compared with 2017 to 2018 (94,121 offences). In all, 8% of hate crimes were related to religion, an increase of 3% on the previous year (to 8,566 offences), with most hate crimes related to race (76%; 78,991 offences).

It is possible for a crime to have more than one motivating factor (for example, an offence may be motivated by hostility towards both the victim’s race and religion). The report states that around 12% of hate crime offences in 2018 to 2019 were estimated to have involved more than one motivating factor; the majority of these were hate crimes related to both race and religion (based on data from 29 of the 43 forces).

The report states that increases in hate crime over the last five years have been mainly driven by improvements in crime recording by the police, although there have been spikes in hate crime generally following certain events such as the EU referendum in 2016 and the terrorist attacks in 2017. The report also suggests that part of the increase over the last year may reflect a real rise in hate crimes recorded by the police. The data the Home Office receive from the police in the main police recorded crime return for racially or religiously aggravated offences are available on a monthly basis, which allows in-year trends in these offences to be seen around the time of particular incidents.<sup>1</sup>

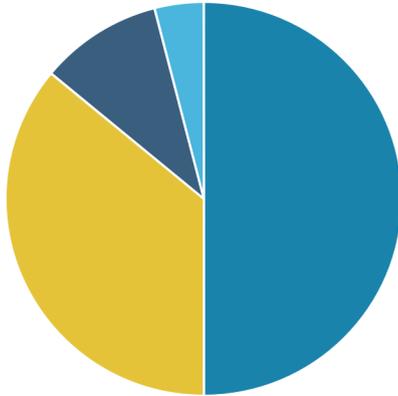
Half (50%) of the religiously motivated hate crimes recorded by the police were for public order offences (for example, causing fear, alarm or distress) and a further third (36%) were for violence against the person offences (Figure 1). Together, these offence categories accounted for the vast majority of all hate crimes recorded by the police.

## Figure 1: Half of police recorded religiously motivated hate crime offences were for public order offences

Distribution of offences flagged as religiously motivated hate crimes, England and Wales, 2018 to 2019

### Figure 1: Half of police recorded religiously motivated hate crime offences were for public order offences

Distribution of offences flagged as religiously motivated hate crimes, England and Wales, 2018 to 2019



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Other notifiable offences include crimes such as theft, burglary and sexual offences for example. For more information on notifiable offences see the [User guide](#).

#### Notes for: Police recorded hate crime

1. See Figure 2 [in Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2018 to 2019 \(PDF, 1.42MB\)](#).

## 4 . CSEW hate crime

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asks questions about whether an incident was perceived by the victim to be a hate crime.

Because of the low volume of hate crime incidents reported in the survey, the figures are not sufficiently robust to report for a single year of the CSEW. Therefore, three annual datasets are combined in order to provide a larger sample, which can be used to produce robust estimates for hate crime. Estimates from the survey were last published in [Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2018 to 2019 \(PDF, 1.42MB\)](#) and will next be published in the 2020 to 2021 statistical bulletin.

These data show that, in the three years ending March 2018, there were an estimated 39,000 incidents of religiously motivated hate crime in England and Wales per year. The split between personal and household incidents was 23,000 personal incidents and 16,000 household incidents.

Household crimes include incidents related to property belonging to the household as a whole, such as vehicle- and property-related crimes. An example of a household crime would be criminal damage to a car.

Personal crimes relate to all crimes against a specific individual and only relate to the respondent's own personal experience (not that of other people in the household). An example of a personal crime would be an assault. <sup>1</sup>

From these combined surveys, it is estimated that 0.1% of adults in England and Wales were victims of a religiously motivated hate crime in the 12 months prior to interview.

Adults with an Asian ethnic group were also found to be more likely to be victims of a religiously motivated hate crime than adults of White ethnic group (0.5% and less than 0.1% respectively, 2015 to 2016, to 2017 to 2018 CSEW).

### Notes for: CSEW hate crime

1. More information can be found in Section 2.5 of the [User Guide](#).

## 5 . CSEW perceptions of crime

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) also collects information on perceptions of the police, criminal justice system, crime and anti-social behaviour for adults aged 16 years and over by religious affiliation. These estimates can be found in the [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#).

Supplementary tables for the year ending March 2019 cover a range of information including:

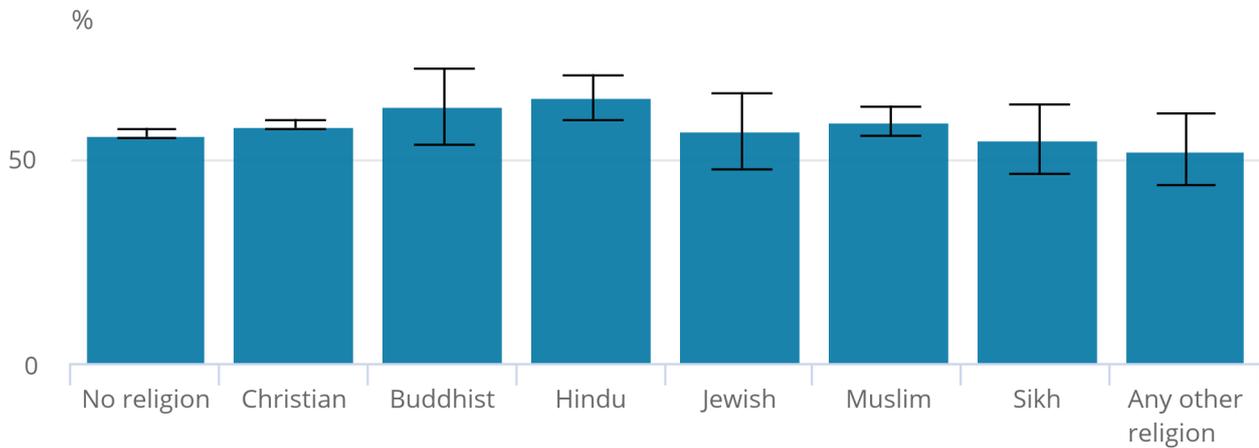
- perceptions of changing crime levels (locally): 46% of adults with no religious affiliation said crime has gone up “a little” or “a lot” locally in the past few years; this was lower than all other religious groups captured, except for Buddhist adults (46%, Table S29)
- perceptions of changing crime levels (locally): 68% of Sikh adults said crime has gone up “a little” or “a lot” locally in the past few years; this was higher than Christian adults (51%), Buddhist adults (46%) and adults with no religious affiliation (46%, Table S29)
- perceptions of changing crime levels (nationally): 90% of Sikh adults said crime has gone up “a little” or “a lot” nationally in the past few years; this was higher than Muslim adults (79%), Buddhist adults (74%) and adults with no religious affiliation (76%, Table S29)
- ratings of the local police: there was little variation across the religious groups for ratings of local police (Figure 2); there was a difference between Hindu adults and Christian adults, 65% of Hindu adults said police were doing a good or excellent job, this was higher than Christian adults (58%) and adults with no religious affiliation (56%, Table S2)

**Figure 2: There is little variation in ratings of the police between all religious groups and those adults with no religious affiliation**

Ratings of the local police by religion, England and Wales, year ending March 2019

Figure 2: There is little variation in ratings of the police between all religious groups and those adults with no religious affiliation

Ratings of the local police by religion, England and Wales, year ending March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Section 7.3 of the [User guide](#) has definitions of personal characteristics.

## 6 . Strengths and limitations

### Strengths

The article incorporates data both from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and from police recorded crime – together they provide a more comprehensive picture of crime.

The CSEW is a large nationally representative sample survey that provides a good measure of long-term crime trends for the offences and the population it covers (that is, those resident in households).

The survey covers crime not reported to the police and is not affected by changes in police recording practice, so is a more reliable measure of long-term trends and trends of higher volume crimes.

Police recorded crime has wider offence coverage and population coverage than the CSEW. It is the primary source of local crime statistics and is a good measure of offences that are well-reported to and well-recorded by the police, as well as lower volume crimes (for example, homicide).

## Limitations

Published tables on crime and religious belief from the CSEW have previously not incorporated [confidence intervals](#). This means it is not possible for readers to distinguish findings that are [statistically significant](#) from those that are not.

Small sample sizes observed for some religious groups result in greater variability surrounding the estimates, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis. Data based on combined surveys have not currently been published. However, there is a need to consider combining survey years to provide more accurate information for groups with smaller base sizes and provide greater distinction between religious groups.

A full list of the strengths and limitations of the CSEW can be found in the [Quality and methodology](#) section of the Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletin.