

March 2026

# Britons and Secularism

How the public approach the relationship  
between religion and society



**More in  
Common**



**National  
Secular  
Society**

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## About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public by helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our 'British Seven' segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public thinks and why. We've published ground-breaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering quantitative and qualitative research and are members of the British Polling Council.

This research was conducted in the Summer and Autumn of 2025. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

We are grateful to the National Secular Society for funding this research. More in Common has retained full editorial control over this report.

## About the National Secular Society

The National Secular Society is a membership-based organisation campaigning for a freer, fairer, more tolerant society. It promotes secularism as a vital principle that upholds individual freedoms, protects human rights, and fosters a fair and open society, in which people of all religions and none can live together as equal citizens

## The Seven Segments

This polling uses More in Common's new segmentation of the British public. Based on extended research into Britons' core beliefs, their values and behaviours, this segmentation allows us to look upstream not just at what different groups think, but why they think it. Going beyond a simple left-right spectrum, it reflects deeper differences in how people relate to authority, change, community and the future, which help explain why traditional party loyalties have weakened and political volatility has increased.

Segmentation is a particularly powerful way of detecting and understanding differences and commonality in people's values and in their broader orientation towards society and the big issues facing the country.

The analysis produces seven segments within the British population:

**Progressive Activists – 12 per cent of the population**

A highly engaged and globally-minded group driven by concerns about social justice. Politically active but feeling increasingly alienated from mainstream party politics, they prioritise issues such as climate change and international affairs. Occasionally outliers on social issues, they maintain a strongly held and sometimes uncompromising approach to their beliefs.

**Incrementalist Left – 21 per cent of the population**

A civic-minded, community-oriented group holding views which are generally left-of-centre but with an aversion to the extreme; they prefer gradual reform over revolutionary change. They trust experts and institutions yet are largely tuned out of day-to-day politics and can be conflict-averse, stepping away from issues they see as particularly fraught or complex.

**Established Liberals – 9 per cent of the population**

A prosperous, confident segment who believe the system broadly works as it is and who trust experts to deliver continued progress. They have a strong belief in individual agency which can make them less empathetic to those who are struggling. Institutionally trusting, they maintain faith in democratic processes and have a strong information-centric way of engaging with issues.

**Sceptical Scrollers – 10 per cent of the population**

A digitally-native group whose unhappiness with the social contract means they have lost faith in traditional institutions and seek alternative sources of truth online. Often shaped by their experience of the Covid pandemic, they prefer individual influencers over mainstream media and are increasingly drawn to conspiratorial thinking.

**Rooted Patriots – 20 per cent of the population**

A patriotic but politically untethered group which feels abandoned and overlooked by political elites and yearns for leaders with common sense, but does not want to overthrow the system as a whole. They are particularly concerned about community decline and the pressures of migration. Interventionist on economics but conservative on social issues, they have shaped much of Britain's politics over the past decade.

**Traditional Conservatives – 8 per cent of the population**

Respectful of authority and tradition, Traditional Conservatives believe in individual responsibility and established norms that have served them well. Nostalgic for the past but optimistic about the future, they are deeply sceptical of many forces of change such as immigration or the path to net-zero.

**Dissenting Disruptors – 20 per cent of the population**

Frustrated with their circumstances and with an appetite for radical solutions, Dissenting Disruptors crave dramatic change and strong leadership. Highly distrustful of institutions, opposed to multiculturalism and feeling disconnected from society, they are drawn to political movements that promise to overhaul the status quo and put people like them first.

## Foreword

The United Kingdom today is a place of extraordinary religious diversity, alongside rapidly increasing irreligiosity. Our society has been transformed by migration, generational change and shifting beliefs. Yet while Britain has moved on, the formal relationship between religion and the state has remained largely frozen in time. From automatic seats for bishops in the House of Lords to the monarch's role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, our constitutional arrangements reflect yesterday's Britain, not today's. Democratic renewal in this area is long overdue.

At the same time, growing tensions between religious orthodoxy and secular liberalism highlight one of the defining challenges of our age: how we manage deep religious and cultural diversity while preserving shared civic values. These tensions raise difficult and sometimes controversial questions about freedom of religion or belief – its scope, and its limits. The research published here by More in Common makes a vital contribution to that national conversation.

Although the UK is not currently a secular state, polling consistently shows that the public – including religious believers – broadly support secularist principles. This research reinforces what many of us already recognise: that the British public is largely characterised by its indifference to religion. We are not a nation of religious zealots, nor are we instinctively anti-religious. But there is clear public unease when religion seeks to impose itself where it is not wanted, or when it is used to obstruct the rights and freedoms of others.

Secularism offers something important: the ability for citizens to live peacefully alongside those with different beliefs. History shows that religious conflict and sectarian grievances can tear societies apart. Secularism addresses this not by excluding religion from public life, but by separating religious institutions from the state and ensuring a public sphere in which religion may participate without dominating.

A society in which people of all religions or none live together as equal citizens is best supported by a foundation of secular principles. The need to live together across differences of belief and background is as pressing today as ever. Yet in England, around a third of state-funded schools are faith schools, many of which separate children by religion and, in practice, often by social background as well. In a society that aspires to cohesion, dividing children according to their parents' faith is, at the very least, open to serious question.

Across the world, authoritarianism and religious nationalism appear resurgent. In the UK, these trends are less pronounced, but their influence is increasingly visible in debates about identity and the role of religion in public life. When fundamentalist or sectarian politics go unchallenged, hard-won freedoms can be put at risk. In times of change and uncertainty, secularism offers not merely restraint, but protection: safeguarding the values that underpin our democracy for the future.

This research also reveals a limited public understanding of what secularism really means. Britain's system of religious establishment has normalised privilege, and too often secularism is misrepresented as hostility to faith. In reality, it is a principled defence of personal freedom and equality. If the UK is to remain a liberal, pluralistic democracy, we must modernise our constitutional relationship with religion. Secularism offers a framework

through which people of all religions and none can live together as equals under a shared civic identity.

**Stephen Evans**

Chief Executive, National Secular Society

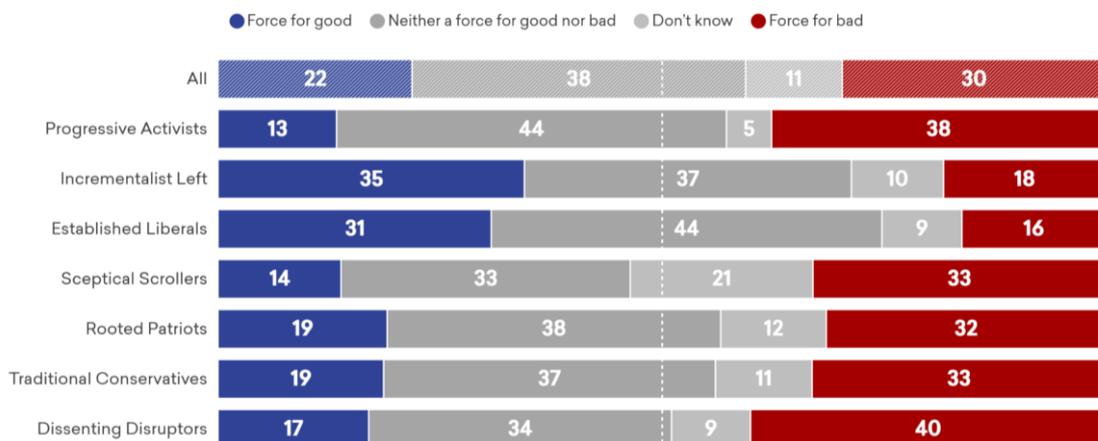
## Executive Summary

Britain today is characterised by growing religious diversity alongside rapidly increasing irreligiosity. While Christianity has historically shaped Britain’s institutions, culture and constitutional arrangements, most Britons no longer practise religion and say it plays little role in their personal lives. Yet religion continues to exert influence through public institutions, law, education and community life. This research explores how the British public understand and navigate the relationship between religion, the state and society at a time when those arrangements appear increasingly misaligned with contemporary attitudes.

Based on nationally representative polling of over 2,000 Britons and in-depth focus groups, the findings reveal a public that is neither strongly pro-religion nor instinctively hostile to faith. Instead, attitudes are defined by ambivalence, low salience and a preference for moderation. Most Britons view religion as a private matter that can offer meaning and community, but are uneasy when religious institutions exercise political power, receive special privileges, or are perceived to infringe upon individual freedoms or equality.

**The defining feature of religion in Britons’ personal lives is an increasing irreligiosity combined with a respect for personal faith.** Almost two-thirds of Britons state that religion is not important in their own lives, and the public is slightly more likely to view religion as a force for bad than a force for good. Most of the public are neutral about the overall impact of religion on society. There is a clear consensus that religious expression should be tolerated, but this is accompanied by unease when religion seeks to impose itself where it is not wanted or used to obstruct the rights and freedoms of others.

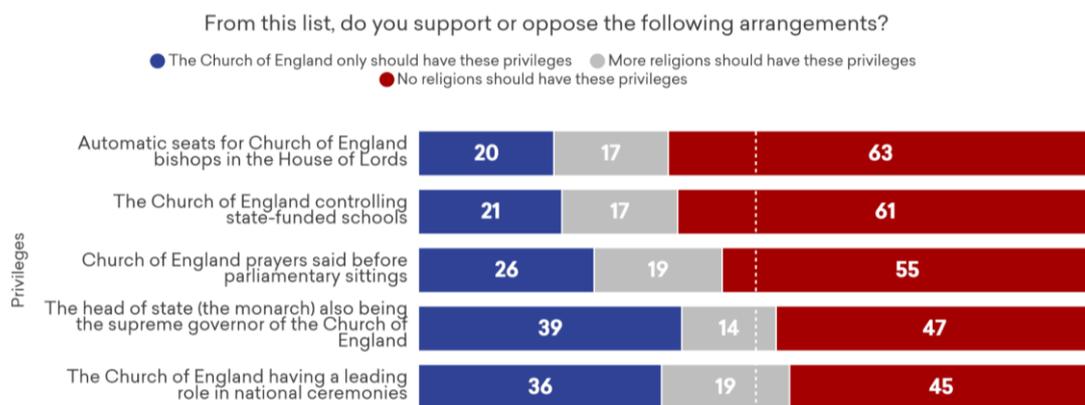
Overall, do you feel that religion is a force for good or a force for bad in the UK today?



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Britons see many of the UK’s traditional constitutional privileges as outdated and in need of reform. There is widespread opposition to the automatic seats for bishops in the House

of Lords, with two-thirds of the public and a majority of every population segment believing this practice should end. While many Britons say they are comfortable or ambivalent about the current relationship between the Church of England and the state in a general sense, they are much more likely to oppose specific privileges when asked, even if these concerns are not always salient. Britons tend to want to find a balance between addressing what they see as unfairness in the current settlement between church and state, without necessarily tearing up historic institutions completely or completely rupturing from the status quo.



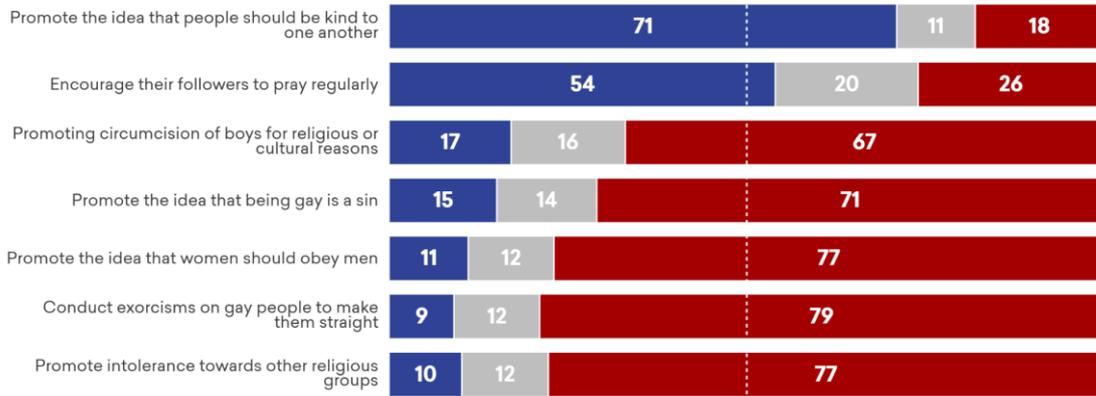
**Mixed views on faith schools and the actions of religious charities.** While some think that the existence of faith schools is good for parental choice, there is significant concern that faith schools separate children by religion and social background. Many Britons worry that faith-based selection fails to prepare children for life in a diverse society and leaves them vulnerable to religious indoctrination. The public are more likely to oppose faith-selective schools in particular when they are state-funded – 61 per cent oppose the ability for state schools to select students based on their faith.

Additionally, while there is respect for the work of religious charities, the public draws a clear red line against any blurring of charity work and evangelism and believe that the promotion of religion should not automatically grant charitable status or public funding.

## Support for various activities of religious charities

Do you think the law should allow religious charities to do each of the following?

● Religious charities should be allowed to do this ● Don't know ● Religious charities should not be allowed to do this

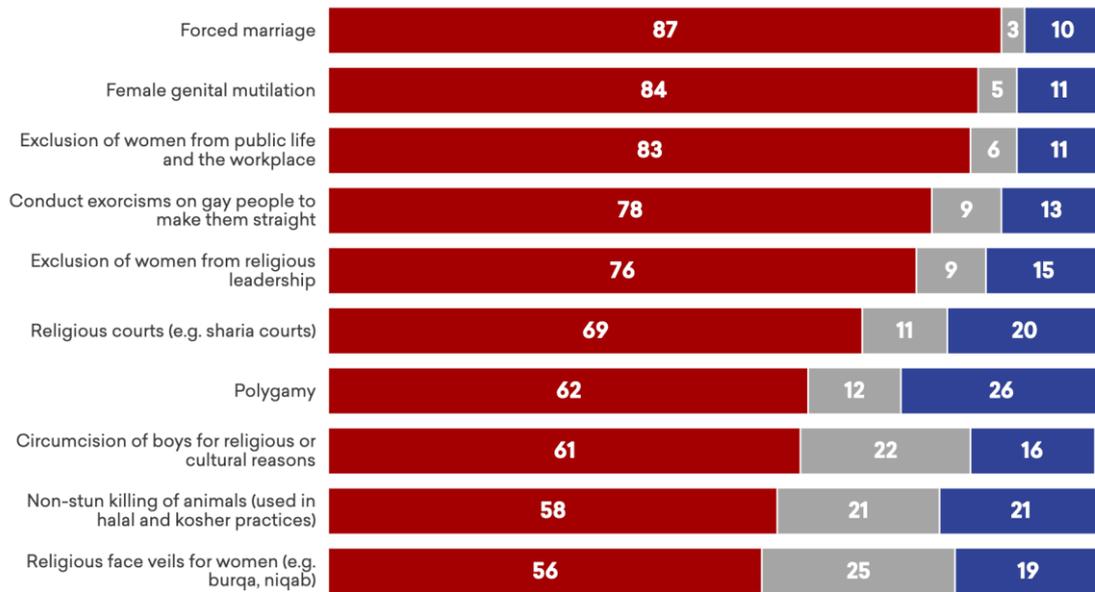


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Shared civic values, such as equality and the rule of law, take precedence over unrestrained religious freedom in the public mind. Britons hold a strong stance against religious practices that are perceived to conflict with liberal values, such as those regarding gender equality and animal welfare. A large majority of the public opposes the use of religious courts like sharia courts in the UK. Similarly, there is strong opposition to practices such as non-stun slaughter and the wearing of face veils in public.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted

● Should be prohibited ● Should be permitted ● Don't know

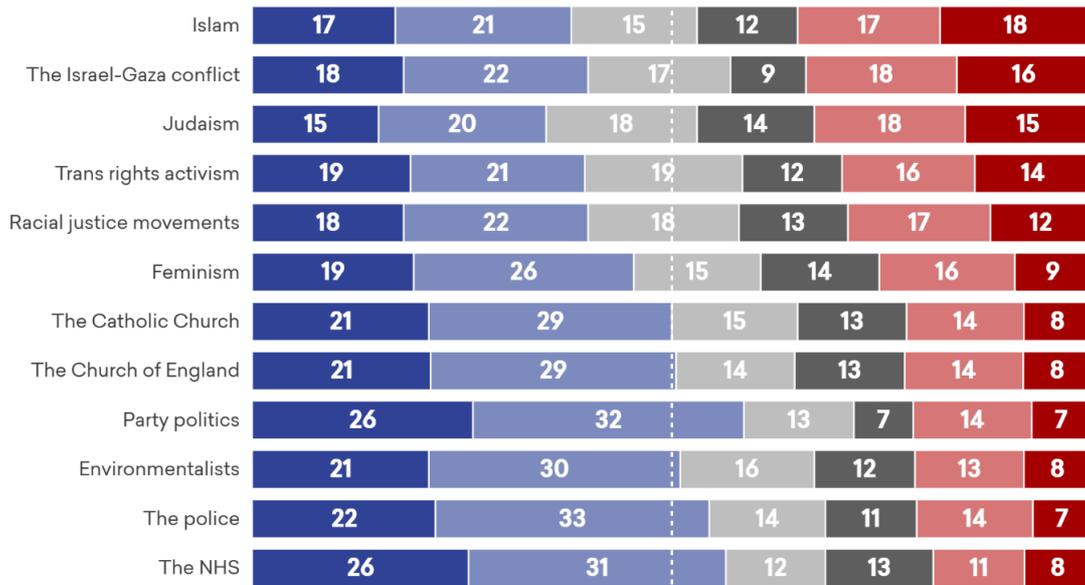


Source: More in Common • July 2025

A majority of Britons believe in the fundamental right to criticise religion, even as they report feeling it difficult to do so themselves. Fifty-five per cent of the public think it should be legal to criticise religion even if it causes offence. However, many people express discomfort when actually doing so, particularly regarding non-Christian religions, for fear of causing offence or being labelled intolerant.

With regards to the following subjects, how comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel criticising them in discussion with those who disagree with you?

● Very comfortable  
 ● Somewhat comfortable  
 ● Don't know  
 ● I see no need to criticise this ever  
● Somewhat uncomfortable  
 ● Very uncomfortable



## Introduction | Why the relationship between religion and the state matters now

In many ways, Christianity has been the trellis which has supported the growth of British society for centuries, but in recent years its role has appeared to diminish. Leaving aside some claims of a slight post-pandemic increase, Britain has seen a steady decline in church attendance for several decades now, and the proportion of the country who identify as Christian has also fallen. Almost two thirds of Britons (63 per cent) say that religion is not important in their life. However, many still say that Christian norms, values and traditions play an important role in British society today.

Religion, once a key organising structure in British life, now plays a different and less clearly defined role. Given that most Britons are not devoutly religious, there are now some aspects of religious life that are coming into conflict with the expectations and norms of a largely nonreligious society. This report seeks to explore how Britons navigate these tensions, and what role the public sees for religion in the state, even when individuals themselves are becoming less religious.

Alongside this, migration has increased the influence of non-Christian religions in Britain. The growth of Britain's Muslim population in particular is reshaping attitudes to religion and politics. Electorally, the 2024 General Election saw a record number of independent MPs, many in areas with high numbers of Muslim constituents. Concerns about anti-Muslim hate have prompted calls for the Government to adopt a definition of Islamophobia, while others worry that such a definition would prevent legitimate criticism of religious practice or shield certain communities from scrutiny.

Britons across society believe in tolerance and freedom, and religious expression is no exception to that rule, but they similarly are concerned about religious groups infringing on the liberty of other groups in the UK, for example by enforcing rigid gender roles or suppressing freedom of expression. In some cases, Britons worry that religious tolerance has come at the expense of community integration, particularly when some religious communities are perceived to be enforcing practices that run against British values.

At the same time, spill over from foreign conflicts has increased inter-faith fault lines in the UK. Recent years have seen antagonisms between Britain's Muslim and Hindu communities in cities such as Leicester. Meanwhile the war in Gaza has fuelled tensions between communities, most recently culminating in a fatal Islamist terror attack at a Manchester synagogue.

This report explores how Britons understand the relationship between religion and our politics and Government, both constitutionally and in day-to-day practice. Based on polling of over 2,000 Britons and focus groups with religious and non-religious Britons alike, this report explores Britons' red lines when it comes to the balance between protecting religious freedoms and the need for community cohesion. This research goes beyond the loudest and most hardline voices in the religious and non-religious communities, using the British seven segments to help identify a broader range of views than tends to be visible in a debate that is often dominated by the most engaged voices.

## **Methodological notes**

The polling and focus groups for this study cover Great Britain, and exclude Northern Ireland, where attitudes to religion and the role of religion in public life take on a much more distinct character. Our team in Northern Ireland is currently exploring similar work.

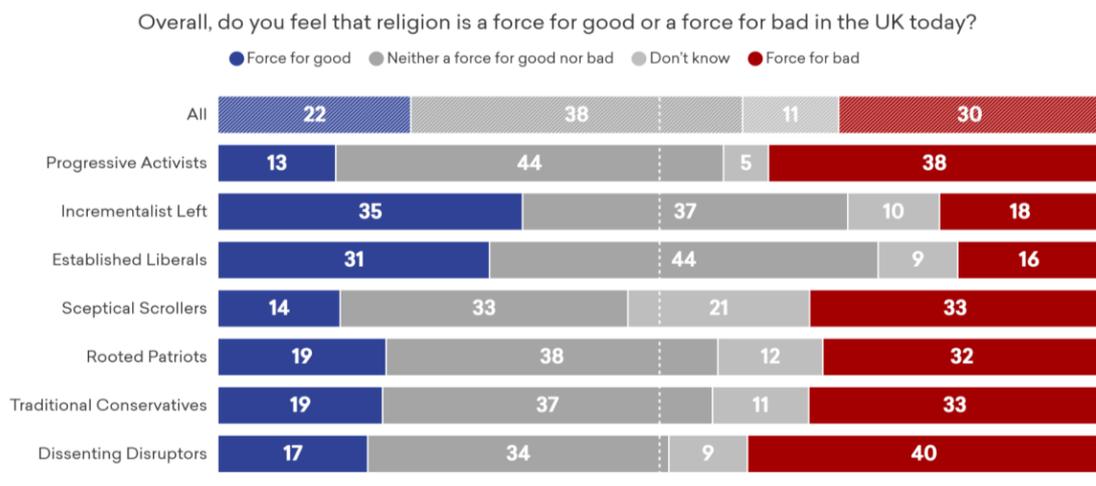
The primary aim of this research is to focus on Britons' views of religion using nationally representative polling and targeted focus groups. Where useful, we have drawn out responses from our Christian and Muslim subsamples. However, some caution should be taken with interpreting these subsamples, as the sample sizes are relatively small and there is still work to do to improve participation of minority ethnic and religious groups in polling and social research more broadly.

Still, the quality of our Muslim and Christian subsamples is sufficient to highlight some of the distinctive attitudes of those religious groups, even if the margin of error is slightly larger than with other subsamples.

# Chapter one | The role of religion in Britain today

Public attitudes towards religion in Britain are characterised less by strong conviction than by ambivalence. Most people neither actively champion nor oppose religion as a social force; instead, they hold a qualified view that recognises both its benefits and its harms. Many see religion as deeply personal, something that can provide meaning and community for some, while also occasionally being a source of division or controversy. Most Britons are inclined towards cautious neutrality on the role of religion rather than towards support for or opposition to different faiths.

Asked if religion is a ‘force for good or bad for the UK today’, almost half of Britons take that neutral or non-committal stance (49 per cent say neither bad nor good, or don’t know). A third of Britons say a force for bad (30 per cent) and slightly fewer say a force for good (22 per cent).



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Across the seven British segments, there is limited division on the overall role of religion in society. The views of the segments show greater diversity on more divisive topics such as migration or net zero. Given the broad span of religions and religious practice in the UK today it is understandable that many find it either too difficult, or not that useful, to categorise religion overall as a force for good or for bad. When asked the same question in focus groups, participants quickly turned to the difficulty of such a question and their struggle to accurately pin down what the impact of religion actually is, or even what religion is itself.

**“So it's quite a difficult one to answer really. I think religion is a very personal thing for individuals or communities of say that religion. So I just think it all depends really”.**

**Hardeep, non-religious, Bristol**

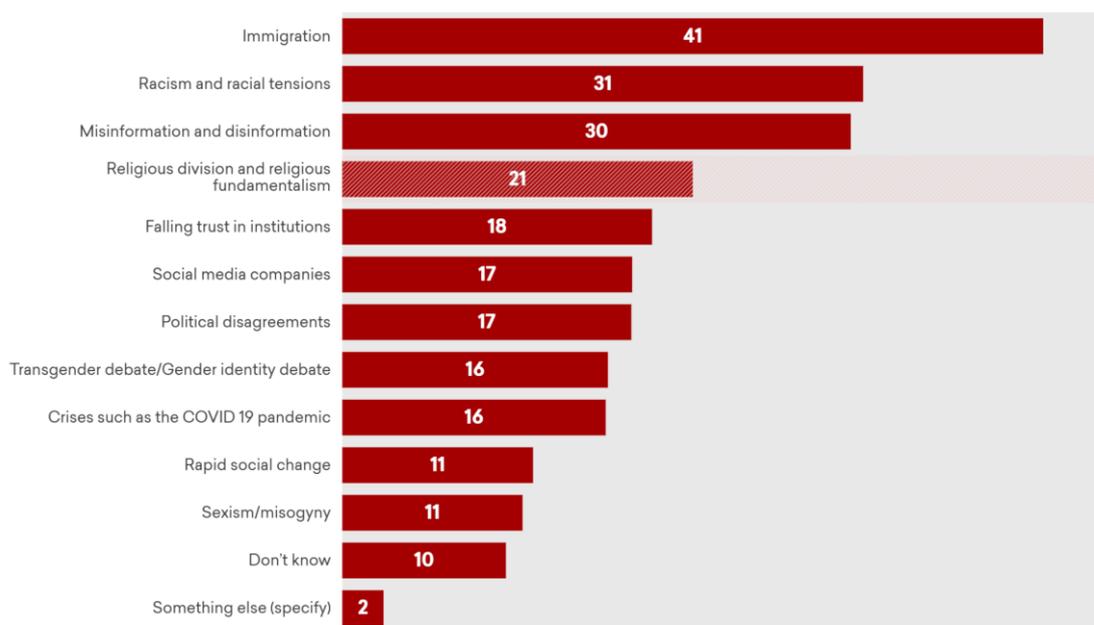
**“I think it can be both a force for good and bad. It's kind of less about what the values of the religion are, but more about the behaviour that those values can lead to. So yeah, it can be both really. I think it's less of a... I mean it's just global. I don't think it's particularly good or bad in just Britain. It can be good or bad anywhere.”**

**Martha, non-religious, Sheffield**

Even if few Britons today consider themselves actively religious, focus group conversations show the ways in which Britain’s religious past continues to shape Britons’ lives in the present. Many see British society today as having been crafted by Christian faith and practices, from Christian celebrations to the moral foundations of our law and cultural norms.

Concerns about the role of religion arise in other debates too. For example, when asked about the factors which negatively impact social cohesion in the UK, religious divisions and religious fundamentalism rank in the top three for a fifth of Britons (at 21 per cent) – after immigration, racism and racial tensions and misinformation and disinformation, but above other influential factors such as social media. Britons are more likely to say that religious division and fundamentalism are a cause of division than to say the same for social media or political disagreements.

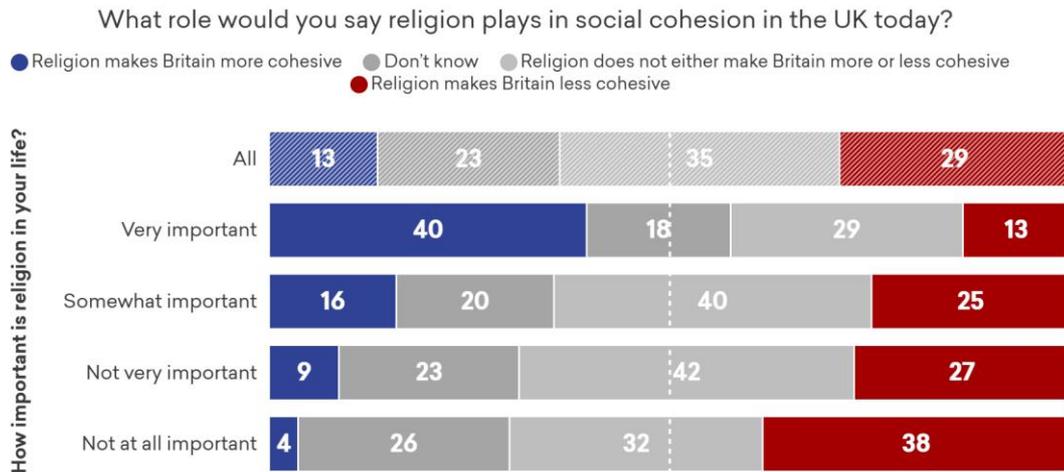
From the following list, what would you say has the most **NEGATIVE** impact on social cohesion in the UK today?  
Select up to three.



Source: More in Common • August 2025

Asked specifically about the impact of religion on social cohesion, Britons are twice as likely (29 per cent) to say that religion has a negative impact on social cohesion than to say it has a positive effect (13 per cent). However, Britons are more likely still to say they ‘don’t know’ or that religion has no overall impact on social cohesion. More religious Britons are more likely to say that religion has a positive impact on cohesion, but over a third of Britons

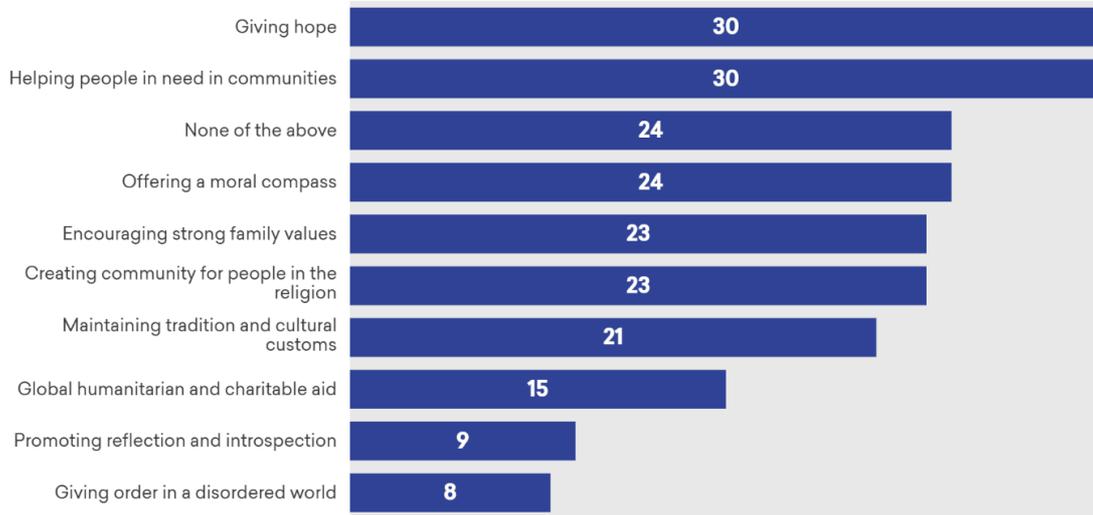
who say religion is not at all important in their lives believe that religion is having a negative impact.



That most Britons do not take a positive or negative overall view on the impact of religion in society today does not mean they don't have opinions on it. Instead, most Britons see both benefits and drawbacks in the role religion plays in society. On the positive side, many enjoy the cultural sense of belonging that religion offers and the way it shapes British culture, while a significant minority take great comfort in the role of faith in their lives. Conversely, while few Britons are explicitly anti-religious, many - including people of all faiths and none - have concerns about the role and influence of what they perceive as outdated, and sometimes discriminatory, attitudes influencing society today. This is particularly the case when such attitudes are regarded as infringing on the rights of others.

Of course, Britons see religion as having some benefits to our society at large. Giving hope and helping communities in need being the main benefits perceived by the public. In conversation people raise the important role that religion plays in offering meaning to their lives, and the lives of those around them. However, 24 per cent of the public say that they do not see religion as offering them any of the benefits listed below.

What are the main ways in which religion benefits our society? Select up to three.



Source: More in Common • July 2025

What emerges is a mixed outlook, yet with some clear limits. Britons are generally respectful of the right to hold different worldviews and religious expressions, yet this does not translate into an “anything goes” attitude. Instead, Britons emphasise fairness, individual freedom and boundaries that protect wider society. These tensions are explored in the next chapter, which examines more closely the flash points where religion intersects with government and public institutions.

## Chapter two | Church and State

For most Britons, the relationship between church and state is not something they think about day to day. Awareness of the constitutional arrangements that shape this relationship is low, and few hold strong, fully-formed views about it in the abstract. Yet when people are prompted to consider specific issues, from the role of religion in politics to the privileges afforded to the Church of England, some wariness emerges. The public is broadly respectful of faith as a personal matter, but is often uneasy about religious institutions exerting influence in politics or enjoying special status within public life. This chapter explores this gap between low salience and latent concern and how seemingly settled arrangements become more contested once they are brought into the foreground of people’s awareness.

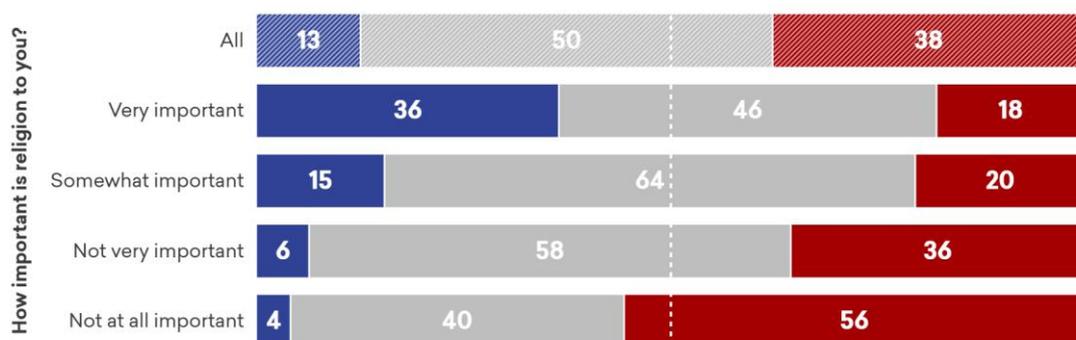
### The role of religion in politics

Overall, Britons are most likely to say that religion should have no more or less influence over the decisions of government and lawmakers than other institutions do. Just 13 per cent say religious institutions should have more influence than other institutions in civil society. Opposition to greater involvement of religious institutions extends even to the most religious people in Britain: only a third of those who say religion is “very important” in their lives would like to see religious institutions have more influence in government; people’s personal faith often does not extend to a greater demand for religious institutions to play a larger role in politics.

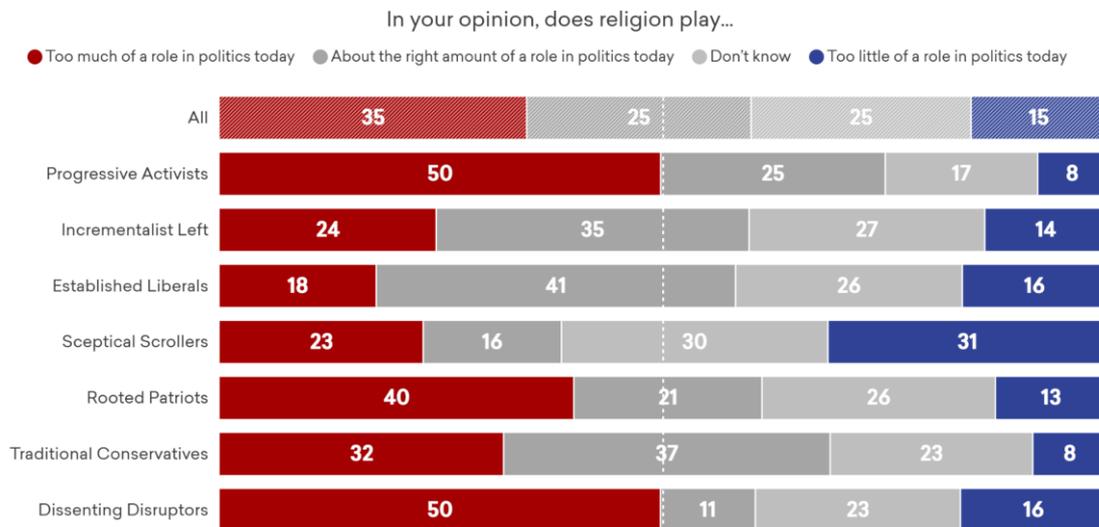
Almost four in ten (38 per cent) would like to see religious institutions have less influence over government and lawmakers than other institutions. Not surprisingly, this includes a majority of people who identify as completely non-religious. However, the largest group of Britons (50 per cent) think that religious institutions should have neither more nor less influence than other institutions.

How much influence, if any, do you think religious institutions should have in informing the decisions of government and lawmakers compared with other institutions in our society?

● They should have MORE influence ● They should have NO MORE OR LESS influence ● They should have LESS influence



Britons are twice as likely to think that religion plays too much of a role in politics today as they are to think that it plays too little of a role (35 per cent to 15 per cent), although half take no clear view either way – saying it plays the right role or that they don't know.



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Sceptical Scrollers are the only segment who are more likely to think that religion plays too little a role in politics today. In focus groups, Sceptical Scrollers suggested they believed faith would give politicians some moral grounding. Sceptical Scrollers have higher levels of distrust in the political class, so a more religious politician may make Sceptical Scrollers feel they are less 'in it for themselves'.

Dissenting Disruptors and Progressive Activists are in agreement that religion plays too much of a role in politics today. Both these groups are among the most disgruntled with the status quo, would rather see revolution than reform of institutions and are the most distrustful of politicians' motives; it is no surprise they are sceptical of religions' influence. However, other segments are more ambivalent, tending either to believe that religion plays about the right role in influencing public life or to not have a view.

Those who think that religion has the right amount of influence on politics are typically unconcerned that politicians have religious beliefs as part of their private life, but at the same time believe politicians' faith should not overly influence the decisions they make in office.

**“I don't understand why politics gets brought into religion. If you go to chapel or church or whatever, that's your faith, nobody else's, it's your choice. So what is got to do with anyone else? I don't understand. I'm not religious but I know people are and that's their choice.”**

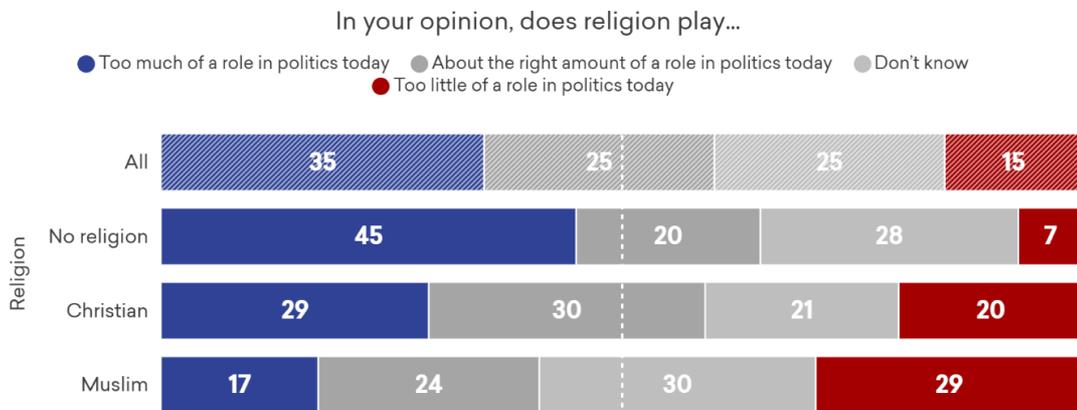
**Graham, non-religious, Glasgow**

Others take the view that, given the wider decline of religion, it would be difficult for a politician with devoutly and publicly pious views to make it very far in politics.

**“I don't think it's that important. I think when you tend to see an MP or a politician whose very strong in their religious views, I think it will alienate a lot of people. And a lot of people then start to vote not necessarily for the right reasons, but they want religion and politics to be separate.”**

**Chris, non-religious, North Yorkshire**

Some are more concerned about the role of religion in politics – especially the prospect of religious fundamentalism and its potential to constrain how people can live their lives.



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(‘Christian’ includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Even among those who say they actively follow a religion there is little appetite for religion to play a greater role in politics. Only 20 per cent of Christians say that religion plays too little a role in politics, while a further 28 per cent say that it plays too great a role. Muslim poll respondents, at 29 per cent, were slightly more likely to say that religion plays too little of a role in politics today. Yet, it is a minority of both faith groups that want to see religion have a greater influence in British politics.

While just over a third say religions play too much of a role in politics today, there is some concern that increasing the role of religion in politics could cause democratic backsliding or a return to outdated cultural values. Some focus group participants pointed to the United States of America where religion plays a greater role in political life and expressed worry that this was a trend that might cross the Atlantic to the UK.

This has been particularly visible in recent elections in Britain, where political candidates in areas with large Muslim populations have used specific messaging that resonates with the Muslim community. For example, in the 2024 General Election, Muslim independent candidates drew significant vote shares in certain areas by talking specifically about Gaza and in some cases using mosques and other Muslim community networks as tools for canvassing. This resulted in Labour losing significantly more votes in seats with larger Muslim populations and hints at a rise in sectarian-style politics in some more religious parts of the UK.

## The role of religion in the constitution

Even many of those who are not religious tend to value many of Britain's Christian cultural traditions and would like to see them preserved. At the same time, few are aware of the specific roles religious institutions hold, from the established status of the Church of England to the operation of state-funded faith schools.

When these roles are explained, many Britons are sceptical about them, questioning whether the state should continue affording the church these constitutional privileges and expressing concern about an 'unequal playing field' for people of different religions or of none. For most people, faith is a personal matter rather than something that should shape political or civic life.

Most Britons do not want religious institutions to have more influence in politics, and a significant minority would prefer them to have less influence. Awareness of religious privileges such as automatic House of Lords seats for Anglican bishops is low and reform of such practices is not a priority issue for many. Yet when the topic is raised, many are uncomfortable with the idea.

Taken together, these findings suggest many Britons - while not holding strong views on these topics - are wary about religion spilling over into politics or public institutions and instead prefer an approach that treats religion as a matter of individual choice rather than of political authority.

**"I think historically perhaps government also had a group of people who were automatically brought into the Houses of Parliament. So the separation of the state and religion I think is a better way to go".**

**Michael, non-religious, Wales**

## Legal protections and privileges for religions

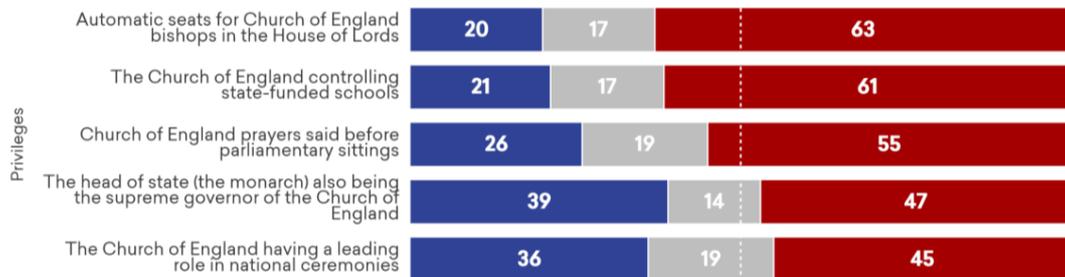
While Britons do not have strong views about the role of religion in the abstract, they are more opinionated on the role of specific elements of the constitutional settlement between Church and state.

The majority of Britons do not support the allocation of seats to bishops in the House of Lords, the reading of Anglican prayers at the start of each parliamentary sitting, or the Church of England controlling state-funded faith schools. The public is more divided on whether the monarch should be the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, who has been titled 'Defender of the Faith' since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

While most Britons then seem content with the cultural presence of Christianity in British life, they are more uneasy at the concept of religious privileges and influence in public life. Some members of the public (14%-19%) are less likely to accept constitutional privileges for the Church of England if they are not extended to other faiths.

From this list, do you support or oppose the following arrangements?

● The Church of England only should have these privileges ● More religions should have these privileges ● No religions should have these privileges



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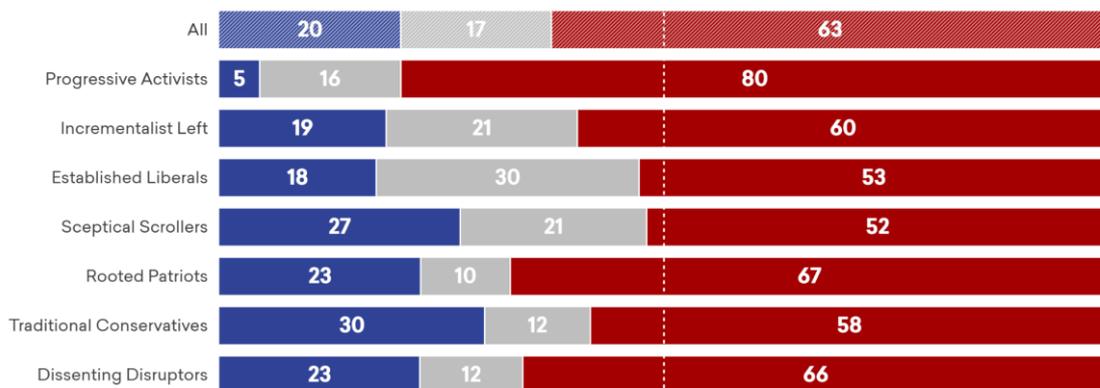
## Bishops in the House of Lords

Opposition to the seats in the House of Lords set aside for bishops of the Church of England is widespread: two-thirds of Britons are opposed and, critically, a majority in every single segment opposes the privilege being reserved bishops. Opposition is highest among Progressive Activists and Dissenting Disruptors, but even Traditional Conservatives tend to oppose seats reserved for the bishops. For the public, historical precedent—often framed as a historic privilege—goes against other strongly held British values such as fairness, democracy, and the equal distribution of rights.

From this list, do you support or oppose the following arrangements?

### Automatic seats for Church of England bishops in the House of Lords

● The Church of England only should have these privileges ● More religions should have these privileges ● No religions should have these privileges



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The strongest opposition to the automatic right to seats for bishops in the Lords is among the over-55s, almost three-quarters of whom want to abolish the privilege. At the same time, the majority of Christians say that no religion should have these privileges.

In focus groups, a split emerged between Christians and Muslims, with some Christians more interested in a move towards greater interfaith representation and some Muslims more relaxed about what they see as a historic settlement of bishops in the House of Lords.

**“So we tend to hang on to traditions, but maybe that needs to be looked at. I'm not sure how I feel about it. We need to be open to more leaders of faith, maybe a faith community, rather than Church of England dominated.”**

**Debbie, Christian, London**

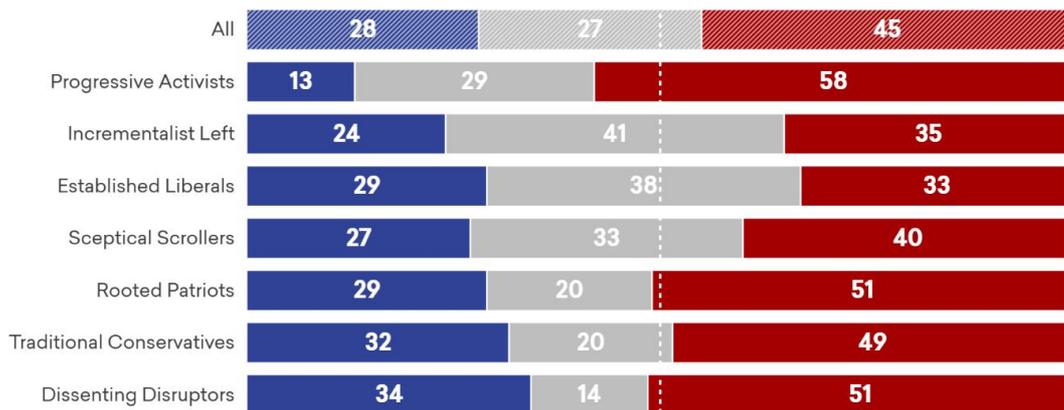
**“Bishops in the House of Lords is an anachronism that probably is overdue to be changed.”**

**Len, Christian, Southend-on-Sea**

When this same question of automatic seats in the House of Lords is reframed from a lens of ‘fair or unfair’ to a lens of ‘change or continuity’, the British public are noticeably less supportive of changing the current system. Asking whether Britons would rather remove all automatic seats for bishops in the Lords, adding more faith leaders, or keeping the system as it is, 45 per cent of Britons support removing the automatic seats (a decline of 18 points). While twenty eight per cent of Britons say that the Church of England should be the only faith given these privileges and a further 27 per cent say more faiths should be given this privilege.

Bishops are automatically given 26 seats in the House of Lords. Some say that this unfairly favours the Church of England, while others claim that it is an important historic tradition. In your opinion the House of Lords should do which of the following...

- Keep the Bishops in the House of Lords and do not add any more faith leaders
- Keep the Bishops in the House of Lords and give seats to other faith leaders
- Remove all seats for Bishops in the House of Lords



The drop in support for removing the bishops comes mostly from the Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals, the segments which are most trusting in British institutions and systems. While many Britons would not choose to have the automatic seats in the House of Lords were they designing the system today, for groups most attached to the status quo

there is a low sense of urgency around changing British systems that are broadly seen to ‘work’, especially when they perceive the nation to be facing many more pressing issues.

## The head of state as Supreme Governor of the Church of England

Views on the position of the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England divide the public more than many of the other constitutional privileges afforded to the Church of England.

In five of the seven segments, no more than half take a view either way on whether the Church of England should have this privilege. However, Progressive Activists take a different view, being far more likely than any other group to see the dual role as at best an anachronism and at worst an injustice.

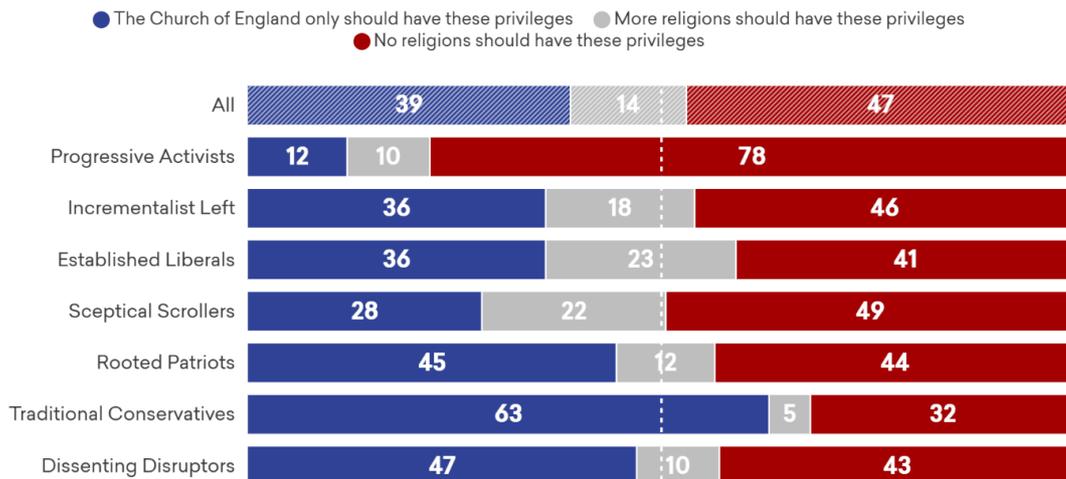
Other segments are more split on the monarch’s role. Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors are more patriotic and proud groups who view the role favourably as a way of elevating the monarch’s position in society and the unique role of the Church of England. Established Liberals and the Incremental Left are more evenly split.

**“So I think it's still good that we identify ourselves as a Christian country and use Christian morals as our foundation. But I don't think it should be forced upon anybody. I don't think it should be a case of, oh, well if you're not Christian in the UK you are weird. I just think it's good to have that identity as a Christian country, but not to force it on people, if that makes sense?”**

**Chris, non-religious, North Yorkshire**

From this list, do you support or oppose the following arrangements?

### The head of state (the monarch) also being the supreme governor of the Church of England



Traditional Conservatives are the most supportive of the monarch as the ‘Supreme Governor’ of the Church of England. This is explained by their strong attachment to British

cultural heritage and scepticism of ‘unnecessary’ constitutional change. For this group scepticism is often motivated by the idea that the ‘alternatives could be worse’.

**“I think we're really lucky to have both and our history does come from the royal family and all the different things that we've got in Britain. I just don't think we have any problem as it is at the moment and I don't see an issue with how it is”.**

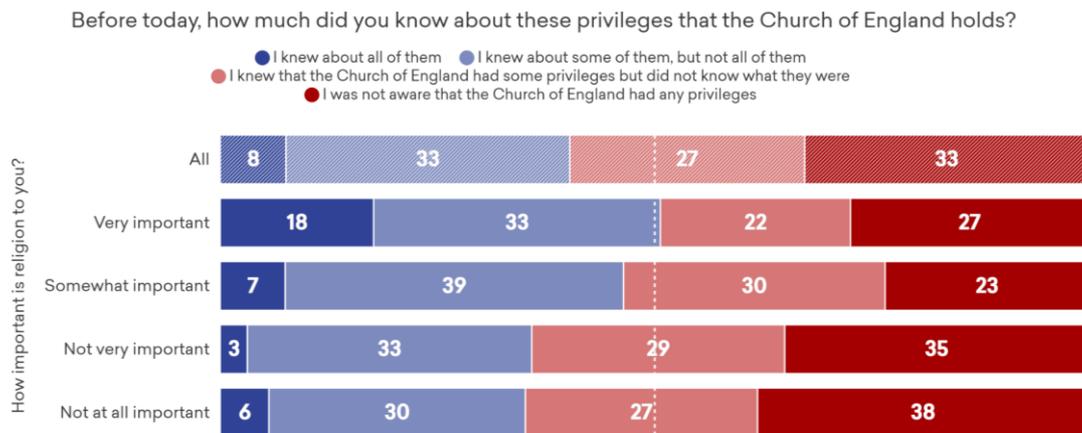
**Georgia, non-religious, Wiltshire**

**“As a Muslim, I don't think we should be in a secular society. I think if the UK has a church as its head, it should stay there. Whether it's the Church of England after Henry VIII or whether it goes back to following Catholicism”.**

**Amtal, Muslim, London**

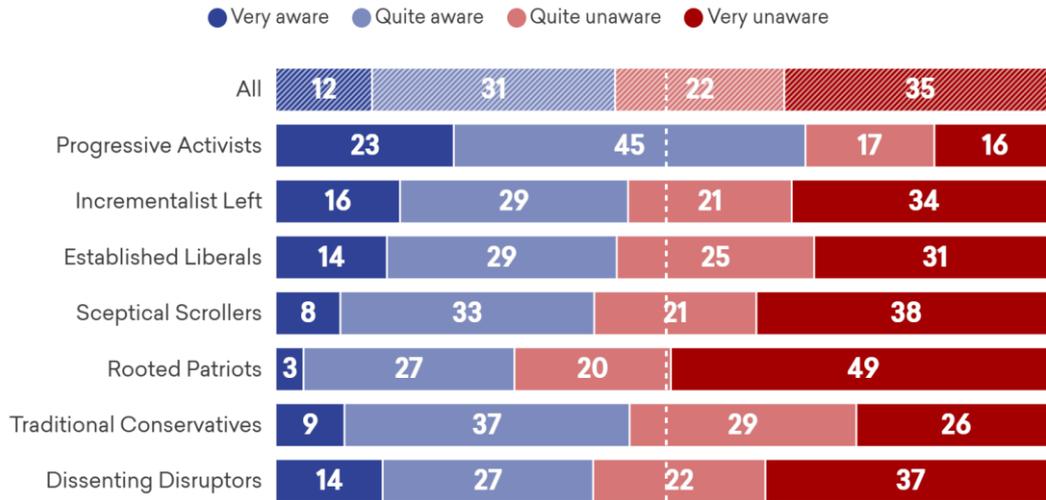
### Awareness of constitutional status and understanding of ‘secularism’

Despite these topline views, few Britons are actively aware of the specific constitutional privileges granted to the Church of England. Fewer than one in ten Britons are aware of the privileges of the Church of England, with a third being completely unaware that the Church had any of them (for a full list of the privileges, see the appendix). Even among the most religious people in the UK, only half are fully aware of what the establishment of the Church of England actually means in practice. Younger people aged 18-24 are the least aware, with just one in 20 (five per cent) being aware of all the privileges they were asked about.



The public also has a low awareness of what ‘secularism’ means. In focus group conversations, Britons often express familiarity with the word but often struggle to offer a definition and often confuse it with other meanings. Only one-third of Britons can correctly identify the term from a multiple-choice list, with another third selecting ‘don’t know’ as their first choice.

### How aware are you of the idea of secularism?

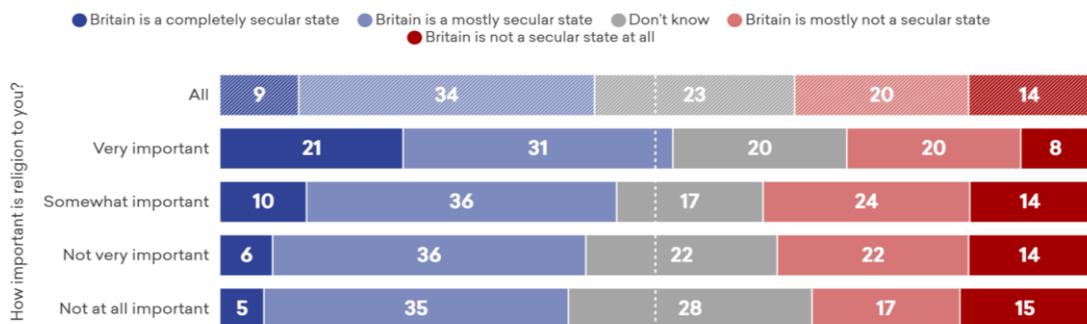


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Fewer than half of Britons claim to be very or quite aware of the concept of secularism; just 3 per cent of Rooted Patriots say they are very aware of the concept, compared to 23 per cent of Progressive Activists.

Offered an explanation of what a secular state might mean, just one in 10 Britons think that the UK is a completely secular state and just over a third say that Britain is a mostly secular state. Those who are more religious are more likely to say that Britain is a secular state, while those who are not religious at all are more likely to say that Britain is not secular, tending to select 'mostly not secular' or 'not at all secular'.

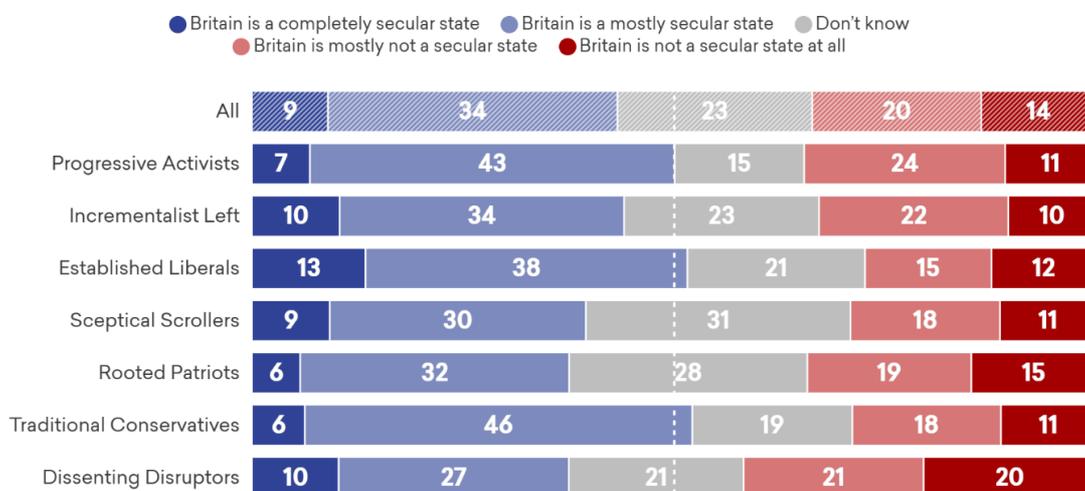
Secularism is the principle of separating religion and state. A secular state is one where religion does not receive special treatment from the government and citizens of all religions and beliefs are treated equally. To what extent do you believe that Britain is secular?



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Across the seven segments, few Britons think that Britain is either entirely secular or not secular at all. Instead, most place the country somewhere in the middle - that Britain is mostly secular and mostly not secular, with about a quarter of Britons unsure.

### To what extent do you believe Britain is a secular state today?



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**“I mean this is really difficult actually. I think what I want to say is I think we are a bit of both because I think a lot of our education, there's a lot of stuff that we learn at school, which is kind of religious and it could be multi-faith as well. So it's not necessarily one way, but yeah, I'm struggling. I think it's actually both, if that's remotely possible.”**

**Gina, non-religious, Norwich**

**“I know it's known as a Christian country, but I would say it is quite secular because if you look at the people in charge who claim to have faith, does their lifestyle reflect a faith-based living? And I would say no. I would say only in name are they... And so to me that's just secularism because you are not living a Christian lifestyle. You're not living how the Bible teaches you how to live.”**

**Lauren, Christian, London**

Taken together, these findings suggest that what many Britons want is not a strict or absolutist form of secularism, but a distinctly British approach. This reflects a preference for reform over rupture, maintaining long-standing institutions while reducing visible religious privileges and ensuring a level playing field in key areas of public life, regardless of faith or an absence of faith, for all people involved. The aim is not necessarily to remove religion from public life altogether, but to keep it low-key and balanced, avoiding both political overreach by religious institutions, unnecessary change where it is not needed and avoiding the risk of cultural confrontation.

## Is there an ideal relationship between religion and state?

Asked about the overall ideal relationship between the Church of England and the state, there are mixed views among the public. Almost half of Britons believe that religious

institutions should have no more or less influence over the decisions of the government; many Britons are happy with the relationship between Church and state when not asked about specific features of this relationship. That said, the public are much more likely to oppose specific constitutional privileges afforded to the Church of England, such as the automatic placing of bishops in the House of Lords.

In focus groups, some suggest that a wholly secular society might end up going too far and undermine attempts to create a multicultural and religiously diverse society. Some fear *forced* secularity and suppression of religion, rather than separation of religious institutions and government. A number of people also mentioned that constitutional change might upset the current balance between state and religion, resulting in something much worse, rather than in something better.

**“I feel that we should be careful about what we wish for because thousands of years of history has formed... kind of what we are. And we are actually really tolerant here. I know that we get problems with, we hear stuff on the media, but generally speaking, if you look at it across the world, we're an incredibly tolerant society and very welcoming. And that's probably come from all of that history and we have the best of both. So if it ain't broke, don't fix it.”**

**Georgia, non-religious, Wiltshire**

**“Religions in the UK live in peace, in respect. There is no imposition or compulsion to choose a certain religion or to change religion or whatever. And this is the important for everyone that we have freedom of choice, choosing the faith and practising the faith. And this is the diversity that we live here in the UK.”**

**Bilal, Muslim, Doncaster**

## **The seven segments and their views towards the role of religion in society.**

**Progressive Activists:** For this young, metropolitan and highly educated segment, concerns about social justice and injustice shape their view of religion. They want to see the influence of religion curtailed in establishments and institutions, but are concerned about the persecution of religious minorities.

**Incrementalist Left:** The larger, liberal cohort of this left-leaning segment tend to be concerned by the potential threats of religious extremism, such as radicalisation and terrorist attacks. However, they are also one of the most religious segments, and want to ensure that personal religious freedoms are protected, while being concerned about issues such as gender equality and institutional abuse.

**Established Liberals:** Established Liberals are institutionalists, who are by and large happy with the status quo. They come from a wider array of religious backgrounds than the general public and want to see a society which reflects this multiculturalism. They are mostly concerned with radicalisation and fairness across marginalised groups in Britain.

**Sceptical Scrollers:** This group are young, relatively nonreligious but also the most disconnected from traditional social structures. However, they are more permissive of religion than other groups and take a broadly relaxed approach to the role of religion in society. That said, like other segments they would like to see the removal of many specific privileges afforded to religious institutions.

**Rooted Patriots:** This segment is the most likely to be culturally Christian, in that they value Britain's cultural and religious heritage, but are less sure about the Church's role in modern Britain, are particularly dismayed by revelations of historical abuse, and worry about religious indoctrination. They are concerned about the erosion of British values by religious fundamentalism abroad, and often see change through the lens of threat.

**Traditional Conservatives:** The most averse to rapid change, they tend to be nostalgic and national pride tends to be intertwined with how they feel about Britain's relationship with the Church. At the same time, Traditional Conservatives believe in respect for others and individual choice, of which religious expression is a key part. A concern for this group would be that British values are undermined by the tenets of some other minority religions - particularly Islam.

**Dissenting Disruptors:** Have three concerns which shape their attitude to religion and which often relate specifically to Islam: the dilution of British values, the fear of religiously motivated terrorist attacks and worries about radicalisation. Dissenting Disruptors are more nationalistic than other segments and want to feel that British values and principles, as well as the law, are being respected, with no exceptions.

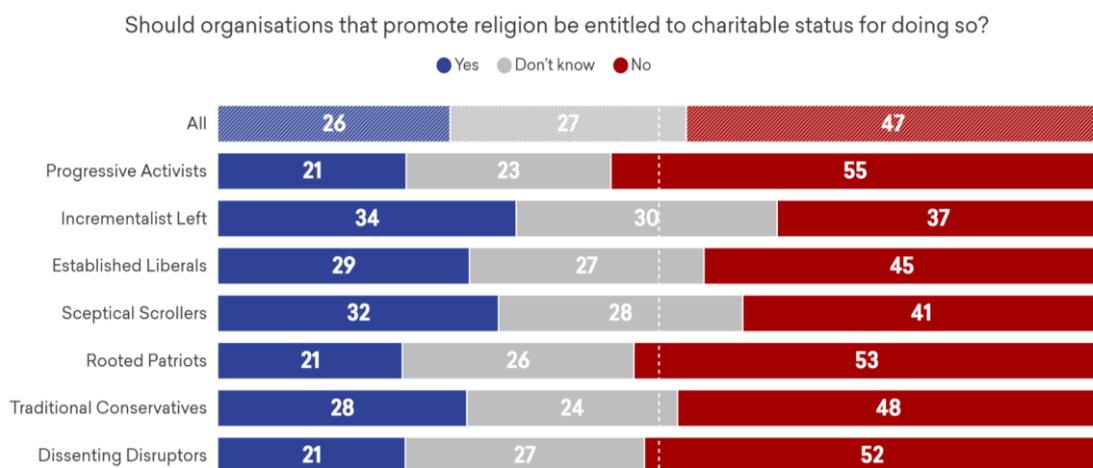
## Chapter three | Religious organisations, charities and schools

This chapter examines public attitudes to religious organisations in Britain, focusing on both charities and state-funded faith schools. It explores how Britons view the freedoms, privileges and responsibilities of religious institutions, including the kinds of activities they should be allowed to carry out and the limits that should be imposed. The chapter considers opinions on charitable status, the role of religion in publicly funded services, and the place of religion in education, highlighting where the public sees room for religious contribution to society and where concerns about discrimination, indoctrination or inequality arise.

### Religious charities

While many people welcome the positive societal contributions of religious charities, some are uneasy when religious activity extends into proselytising, discrimination or practices seen to conflict with core British values.

Currently, organisations in Britain can register as charities if they exist for “the advancement of religion”. Britons are almost twice as likely than not to think that religious groups should not be automatically entitled to charitable status and associated tax breaks. Almost half the public, 47 per cent, thinks that organisations that promote religion should not be entitled to charitable status for doing so, with a further 27 per cent unsure on the matter.

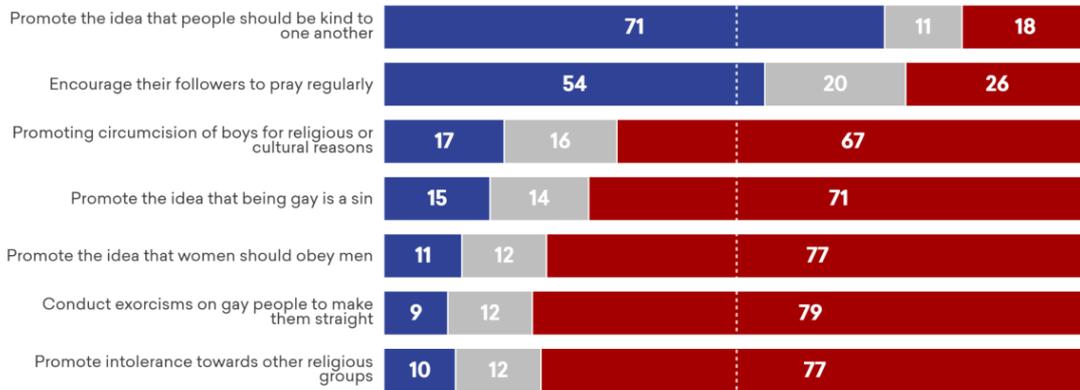


That is not to suggest that Britons are against the idea of religious charities in general. Clear majorities support the idea that religious charities should be allowed to promote ideas such as kindness and empathy, or encourage their followers to pray regularly. However Britons do think there should be restrictions on the types of organisations given charitable status - almost eight in 10 Britons think the law should not allow religious charities to promote anti-gay messages or messages which undermine gender equality or promote intolerance between religious groups.

## Support for various activities of religious charities

Do you think the law should allow religious charities to do each of the following?

● Religious charities should be allowed to do this ● Don't know ● Religious charities should not be allowed to do this

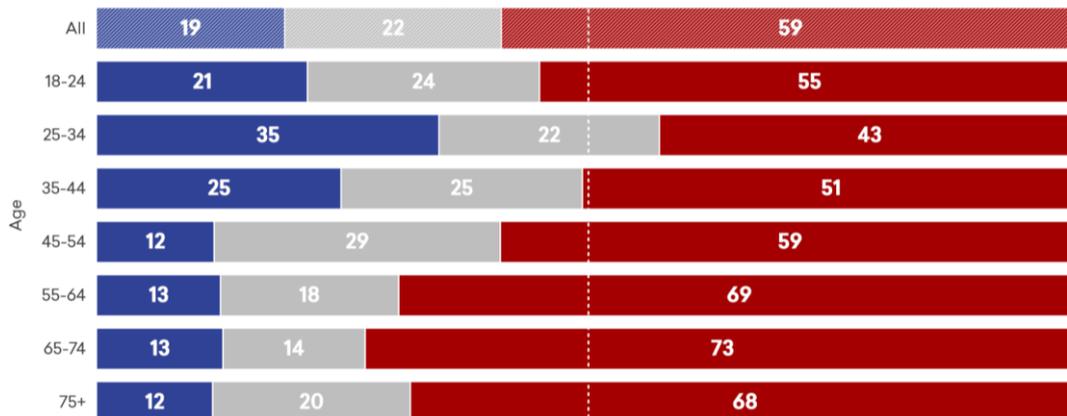


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Britons of all ages do not believe that religious organisations should be allowed to register as charities if they spread ideas that are homophobic or misogynistic, although one-third of 25-34 year olds do believe this should be allowed. A majority of every other age bracket think that religious organisations should not be able to become charities if they discriminate against women or LGBT people.

Which comes closest to your view...

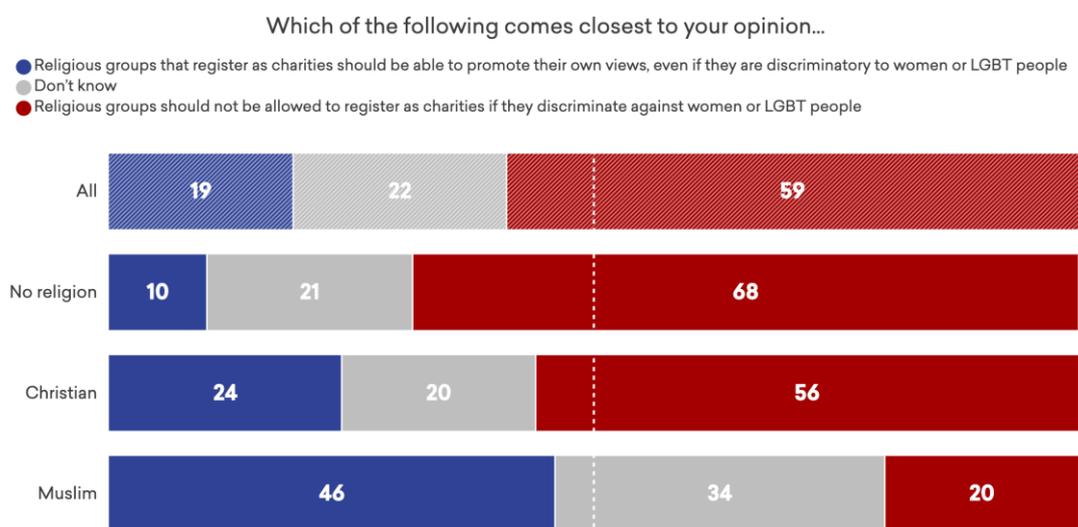
● Religious groups that register as charities should be able to promote their own views, even if they are discriminatory to women or LGBT people  
 ● Don't know ● Religious groups should not be allowed to register as charities if they discriminate against women or LGBT people



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A majority of Christians also believe that discrimination should not be permitted in religious organisations (55 per cent), while a quarter say it should be allowed and a fifth are unsure. Many practising Christians believe in tackling homophobia and embrace a permissive approach of co-existence between the LGBT communities and their faith. On the other

hand, Muslim respondents are more likely to say that discrimination against LGBT communities and women should be permitted by religious charities.

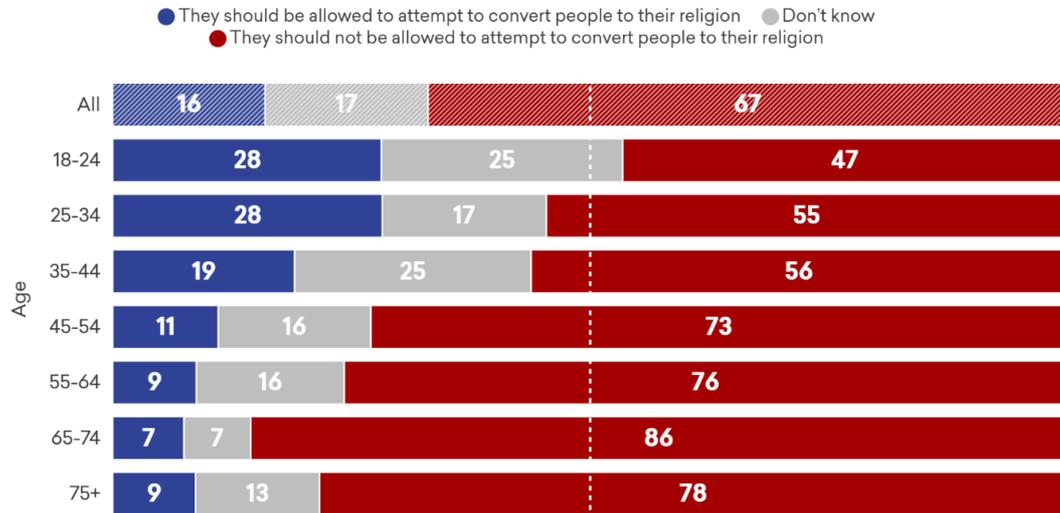


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Many focus group participants condemn misogyny and homophobia - areas where they sometimes see more fundamentalist religious teachings standing in opposition to British values and equality. To many it seems unfair that the rights of a religious group could encroach upon the rights of another group, such as women or gay people. Islam is the main focus, but there are concerns about Christianity too. Most are concerned about the behaviours of adherents, rather than any religious teaching or text in the abstract.

In addition to their concerns about religions being automatically entitled to register as charities, the public is largely opposed to religious organisations being able to evangelise while doing publicly funded community work. Only 16 per cent of Britons agree that charities should be able to convert people as part of this aspect of their work. Two-thirds of Britons think that this should not be allowed. Once again, younger people seem to be more permissive of evangelising as a quid pro quo for charitable works, 28 per cent of 18-34 year olds think that evangelism as part of publicly funded community services should be allowed, compared to 16 per cent of the country as a whole.

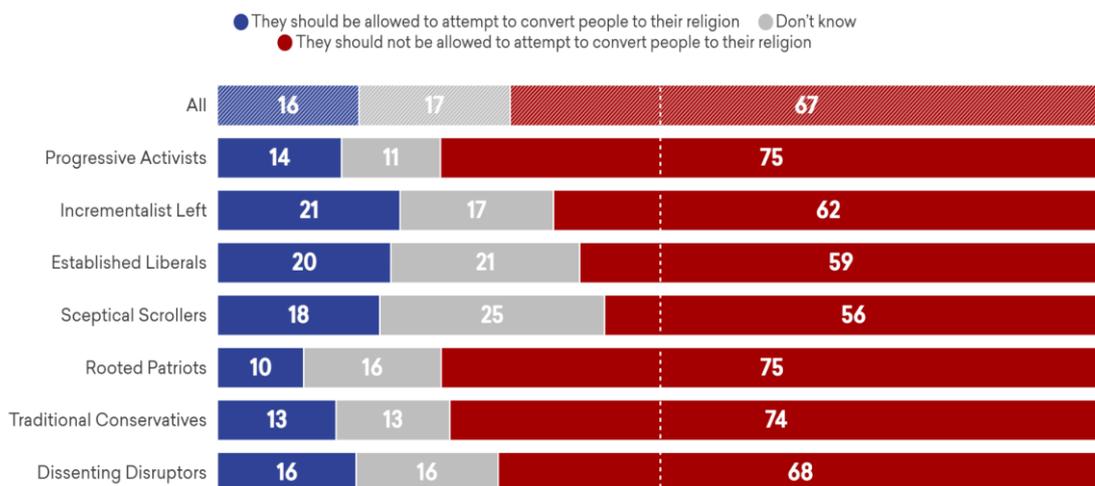
When religious groups carry out publicly funded services in their community (such as giving out food), do you think...



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The majority of every segment says that religious groups should not be allowed to attempt to convert people to their religion while doing publicly funded community service. The segments most opposed are Progressive Activists and Rooted Patriots at three-quarters each. The least opposed are Sceptical Scrollers, whose low trust might lead them to conclude that the agenda of a religious organisation is no different to the intention of any other charitable organisation with a particular set of values they believe in.

When religious groups carry out publicly funded services in their community (such as giving out food), do you think...

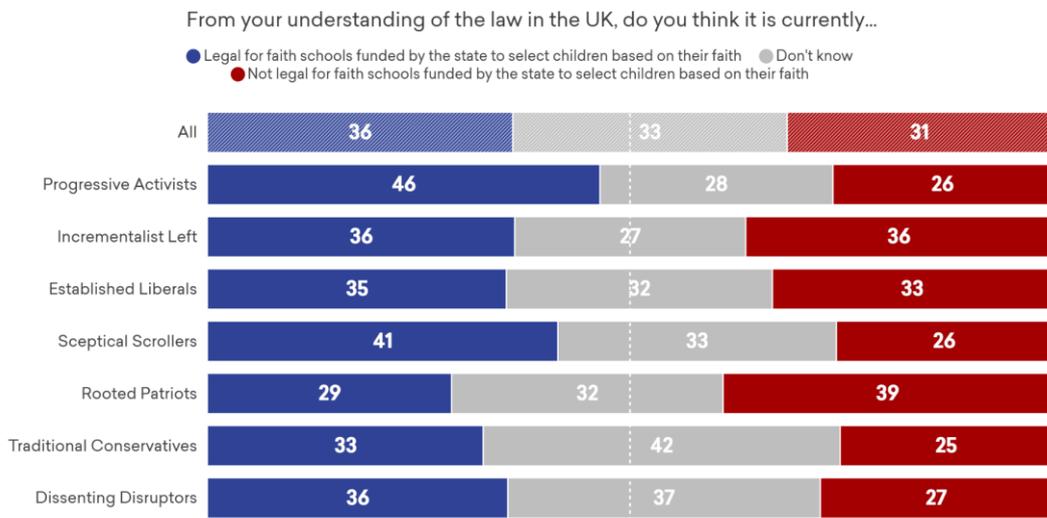


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## Religious schools and religious education

State-funded faith schools provoke some unease among Britons, though the intensity of concern varies considerably depending on context. Few people have given much thought to the fairness or unfairness of, for example, a small Church of England primary school in their local village. However, broader questions about faith-selective admissions do generate significant concern, with many Britons questioning whether selecting children by religion is fair, whether it undermines social cohesion, and whether public money should be used to advance religious goals. At the heart of these concerns is a worry about preparation for life in a multicultural Britain: that children educated separately by faith may not be equipped to live and work alongside people of different beliefs and backgrounds. At the same time, there is support for religious education that provides children with a broad understanding of different faiths and worldviews, rather than immersion in one tradition alone.

Most Britons are not aware of the fact that taxpayer funding supports state-funded faith-based schools which select based on a child's faith, with almost two-thirds either unsure of this admissions procedure or who do not believe they exist. Only 36 per cent of Britons are aware that it is legal for state-funded faith schools to select children on the basis of religion, a further 31 per cent don't know.



When made aware of it, the existence of schools that select on the basis of religion is quite unpopular, with over half of Britons believing that faith-selective schools should either be privately funded (22 per cent) or abolished altogether (39 per cent). Just 21 per cent say that state schools should be able to admit children on the basis of their religion. In focus groups participants discussed religious freedom as a core tenet of British society and were uncomfortable with the idea that school might force a specific religious viewpoint on young people. The median view was not to want religion removed from schools entirely, but rather to ensure that schools do not endorse any particular religion.

“We need to teach about inclusivity. So if it's just being taught about Christianity and their religion and their beliefs or their prayers, we're not being a very inclusive society. So it's really important that if faith is being taught in school, it's taking into account all the different types of religion, not just Muslim and not just Christianity, but all the other different religions. So it needs to be an inclusive society rather than just one single religion that's being taught.”

Fatiha, Muslim, London

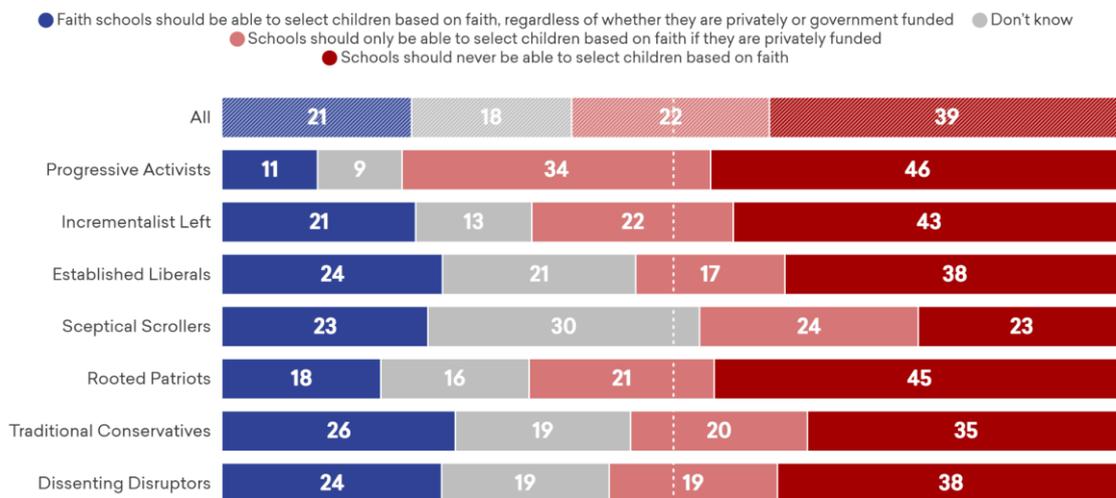
“I believe in faith based schools. It would be good if children could go to schools and be taught both academic and technical things alongside moral things. But at the same time it also creates some divide... so maybe a proposal here might be the government arranges faith based schools, but so that everybody can attend. That way cohesion starts from the grassroots.”

Uchenne, Christian, Manchester

“I actually went to a Church of England school. I've never been religious and I'm not religious now. I remember doing things like grace and singing hymns and praying and assembly and things with the group. And I think the world has come on so much in terms of having a multicultural society and I don't think it should be forced upon anybody. I think religion is down to personal choice.”

Georgia, non-religious, Wiltshire

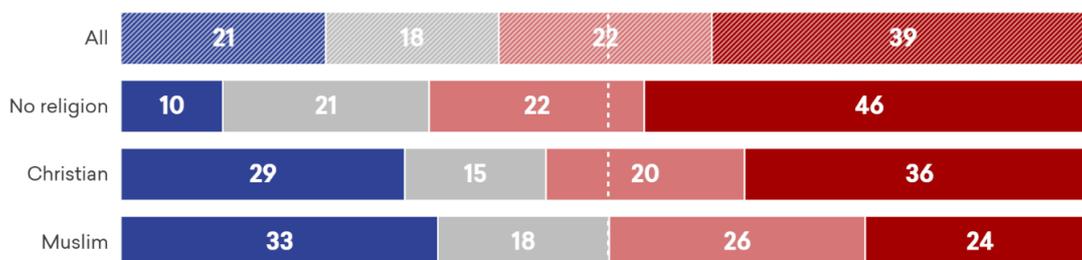
Which of the following best describes your position:



Even those of faith are unlikely to think that state-funded faith schools should be able to admit students based on religion with more Christians thinking that the faith-selective state schools should be abolished rather than permitted.

Which of the following best describes your position:

- Faith schools should be able to select children based on faith, regardless of whether they are privately or government funded
- Don't know
- Schools should only be able to select children based on faith if they are privately funded
- Schools should never be able to select children based on faith



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 ('Christian' includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

However, in longer focus group conversations, some agree with the rights of parents to choose a faith-based school for their child.

**“If you go to a Christian school for example, then the parent would know that they're sending their kid to that school as well. So I don't have a problem with that. I don't think that's inherently bad.”**

**Adam, non-religious, York**

The majority of participants however, express a myriad of concerns about the potential implications of faith-based schooling. Some express the fears that religious schools would continue to perpetuate social divisions, particularly between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**“I think it's wrong because it could be just brainwashing and not giving them [children] the understanding that other people have and that's never going to go away. Of course, you should always have respect. But this has happened for years and years, Catholic schools Protestant schools and if you keep going down that line, it's never going to end, it's never going to be right.”**

**Graham, non-religious, Glasgow**

**“I'm not a fan of it. In Glasgow obviously it is a big thing. The Protestant schools, Catholic schools, and in my opinion, as long as you've got Protestant schools and Catholic schools, they're all going to be sectarian. What you've got to do is you've got to have everyone together, everyone learns to get along with each other. Everyone learns that each person is a person regardless of what school or what faith or whether they're Muslim.”**

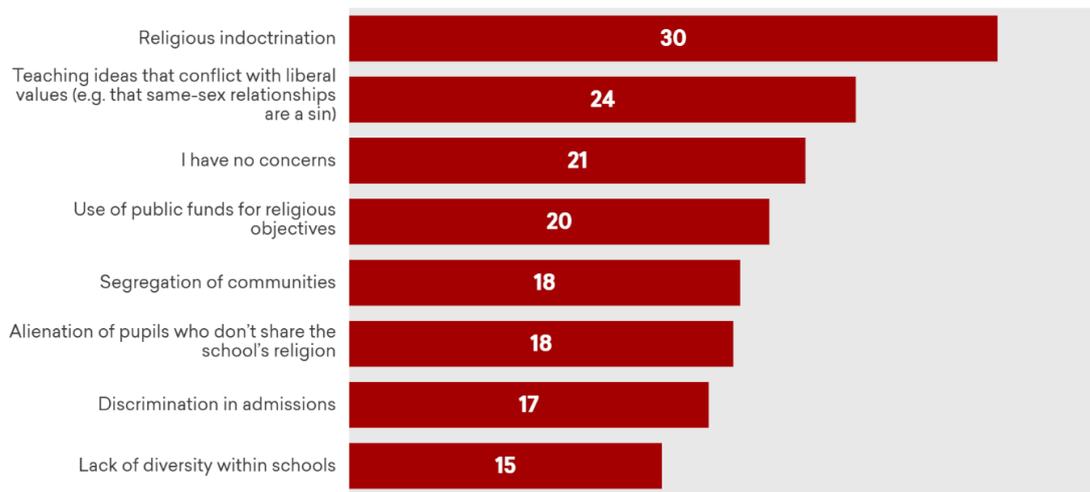
**Audrey, non-religious, Glasgow**

Participants also suggest this segregation of children would not adequately prepare children for adult life in a society where people have differing religious beliefs and values.

**“You should be able to live in harmony with other religious people with different views to you in one school. Because in the real world when you leave school, you are not going to be around just that one religion. You're going to be around the whole society with all these differing beliefs and values. I don't think it's going to help”.**

**Georgia, non-religious, Wiltshire**

What would you say are your main concerns, if you have any about state funded faith schools? Select up to two:



Source: More in Common • July 2025

Concerns about faith schools are driven by a number of factors. First is that children would be vulnerable to religious indoctrination, followed by concerns that faith schools would teach ideas that conflict with liberal values, such as the ‘sinfulness’ of same-sex relationships. The value the public places in freedom and choice was a red line in focus groups when it came to tolerating religious practices. Christians share quite similar concerns with those of no religion in the UK, with both Christians and the non-religious sharing those top two concerns of religious indoctrination and the teaching of ideas that conflict with liberal values.

The seven segments add another perspective to diverging perspectives on faith schools. Progressive Activists are the most concerned by the idea that faith-based schools might teach ideas that conflict with liberal values, given their own highly socially liberal beliefs. Established Liberals are most likely to say that they have no concerns with faith-based schools, a view likely to reflect their low-threat perception and more utilitarian view of efficacy - that if the school teaches the children well there is not a problem.

**“Both of my nephews go to a C of E school. They live in a very small village, and if they didn't go to a Church of England school, then they would have to travel probably an hour or 45 minutes to get to a non-faith school. But ultimately what it comes down to is education and what kids are at school for”.**

**Tom, non-religious, North Yorkshire**

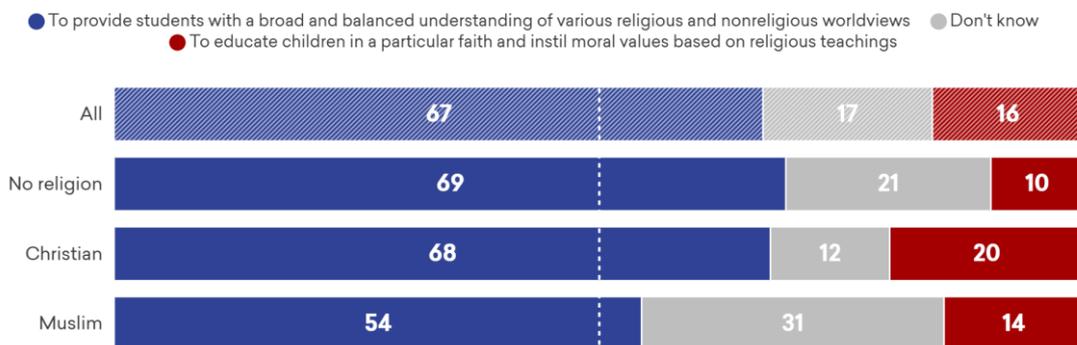
The Incrementalist Left are most likely to be concerned about discrimination in admissions due to their belief in equality across groups. Traditional Conservatives and Dissenting Disruptors are most concerned about religious indoctrination and the use of public funds for religious purposes.

**“It's a bit of over controlling. You're saying you have to follow our religion to get in our school, which I think is wrong. That should be something which people choose themselves rather than trying to force that upon people”.**

**Adam, non-religious, York**

While the public has concerns about faith-based schools, this does not mean that people want religion to be ignored in education. When asked about the purpose of Religious Education (RE), two-thirds of Britons think that the role of RE should be to give children a broad understanding of multiple religions, worldviews and values, rather than picking one worldview over another. Even those of a single faith did not want to see RE becoming about a mono track approach to theology and spirituality.

In your view, what should be the purpose of religious education (RE) in schools be?



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 ('Christian' includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

**“I definitely think people should learn about religions. I think it's good to learn about all of them, to be honest, and you can be more respectful and more understanding for any religious people's practices.”**

**Adam, non-religious, York**

Taken together, these findings point to a fairly consistent public sentiment. Britons are comfortable with religious groups contributing to the common good and, in principle, with

people learning about faith in school. But they resist special privilege and any blurring of charity work and evangelism, and draw clear red lines against teachings they see as discriminatory. The median public instinct is for an equal playing field: freedom of belief and association, yes; but no automatic entitlement to charitable status, no evangelism tied to the delivery of services, and no public money used in ways that are seen to compromise fairness in education.

As the next chapter explores, these boundaries are tested most sharply when religion intersects with more controversial practices, particularly those more commonly associated with non-Christian religions which represent a growing part of the British population.

## Chapter four | How the public navigate controversial religious practices

Across both focus groups and polling, many Britons expressed their concerns about specific religious practices that they feel run against their values or British values more generally.

When asked about the negative impacts of religion on society, the public did not place more abstract problems or constitutional questions relating to the relationship between Church and state at the top of the list (see Chapter 1). The issues explored in this chapter and the next - extremism and potential for religious oppression - were far more salient.

Some of the practices discussed in this chapter are most commonly associated with some parts of Islam by the British public, and some are explicitly related to Islam, such as the wearing of burqas or the use of sharia courts. Many of these practices are unpopular with the British public.

For most Britons who oppose these practices, the concern is not borne out of anti-Muslim sentiment but instead stems from concerns around personal liberties, gender equality in particular. However, there is a smaller group for whom the views are also informed by negative and prejudicial views towards Muslims themselves: our previous research<sup>1</sup> identified about five per cent of the public who strongly believed a range of anti-Muslim stereotypes.

The fact that a minority's views on religious practices associated with Islam are informed by their own prejudices against Muslims should not prohibit wider debate about whether these practices should be allowed in a tolerant and liberal society. The debate needs to be treated with care and to separate concern about liberal values from prejudice. Yet the evidence from other similar debates is that simply shutting down these discussions and failing to provide opportunities for explanation, education and conversation only serves to cede the debate to those with the most hard-line attitudes on these practices. Britons are clearly concerned about some religious practices; ignoring this fact will not help tackle religious discrimination, and instead is only likely to lead to growing frustration.

When it comes to religious practices which may be seen as misogynistic, or infringing on the liberties of women specifically, such as forced marriage or female genital mutilation, there is a strong opposition. Similarly a large majority oppose religious practices that exclude women from the workplace or from religious leadership, and believe these practices should be prohibited. Britons take a strong stance opposing the use of exorcisms as a form of gay conversion therapy, with 78 per cent saying this should be prohibited. In all of these cases, Britons' generally tolerant approach to religious freedom lays down a clear red line when it comes to equality for women and gay people.

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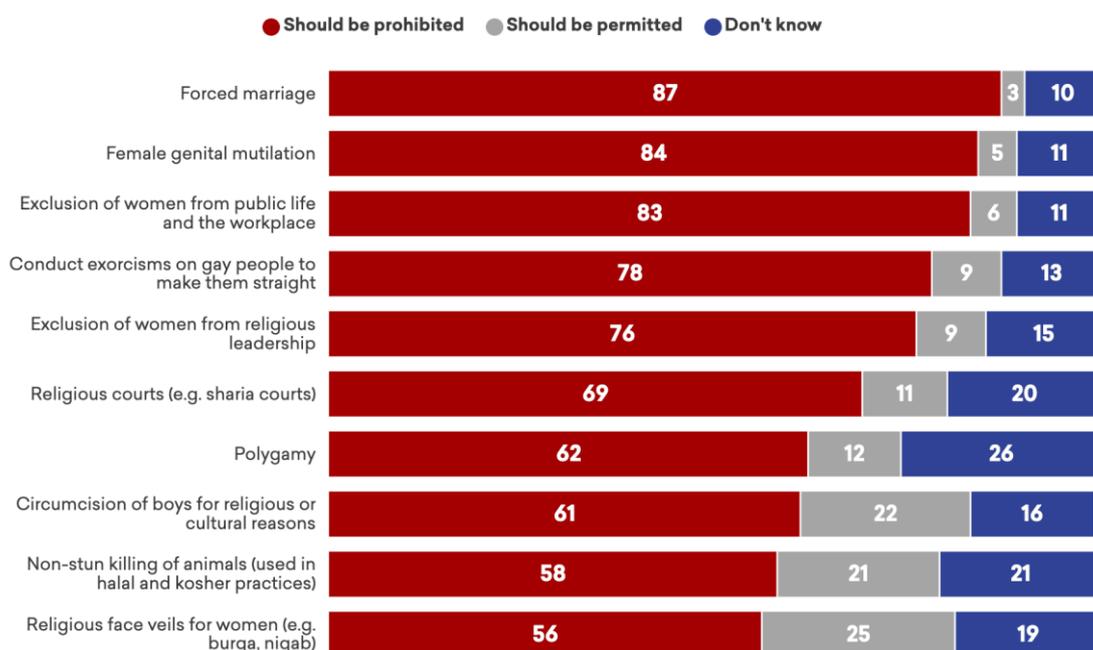
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/blog/how-prevalent-is-anti-muslim-prejudice-in-the-uk/>

On other issues, such as the wearing of face veils and non-stun killing of animals for halal and kosher meat, the public is more divided, although a majority of Britons also believe both practices should be prohibited.

**“Legally, in terms of the police and everything, they’re two very separate things. Organising that your daughter marry at the age of eight is a forced marriage, whereas arranged marriages, the people have a choice. The people getting married have a choice to do that”.**

**Hannah, non-religious, Hampshire**

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted



Source: More in Common • July 2025

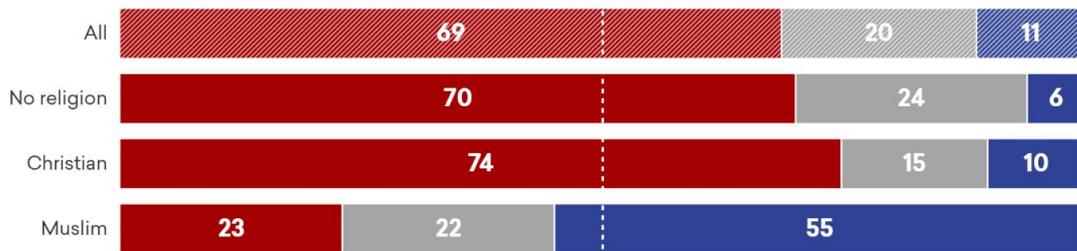
## Religious courts

The majority of the public (69 per cent) are opposed to the use of religious courts, such as sharia courts, in the UK. Christians are even more likely to want to prohibit the practice, with 74 per cent opposed. On the other hand, the practice has greater support among the Muslim community, where a majority support religious courts.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.

### Religious courts (e.g. sharia courts)

● Should be prohibited ● Don't know ● Should be permitted



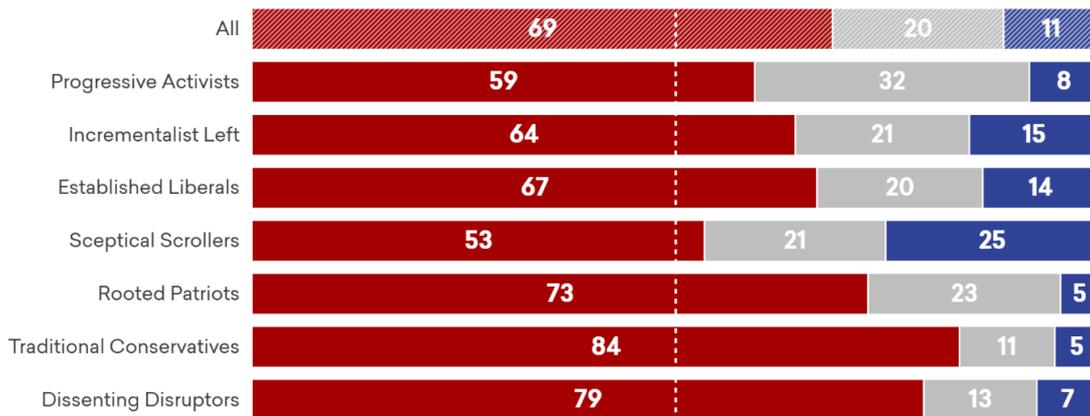
More in Common • July 2025  
(‘Christian’ includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Notably, a majority of every segment of the population believe that religious courts should be prohibited in the UK. The most opposed to such courts are the Traditional Conservatives. Alongside their generally more negative views of Islam, their respect for the authority of British courts is affronted by an acceptance of a rival jurisdiction to the UK courts and legal system. The most permissive segment is the Sceptical Scrollers who, because of their distrust of the British court system are unlikely to see an alternative one as any different. Nevertheless, a majority of Sceptical Strollers would still choose to prohibit religious courts.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.

### Religious courts (e.g. sharia courts)

● Should be prohibited ● Don't know ● Should be permitted



More in Common • July 2025

## Religious face veils

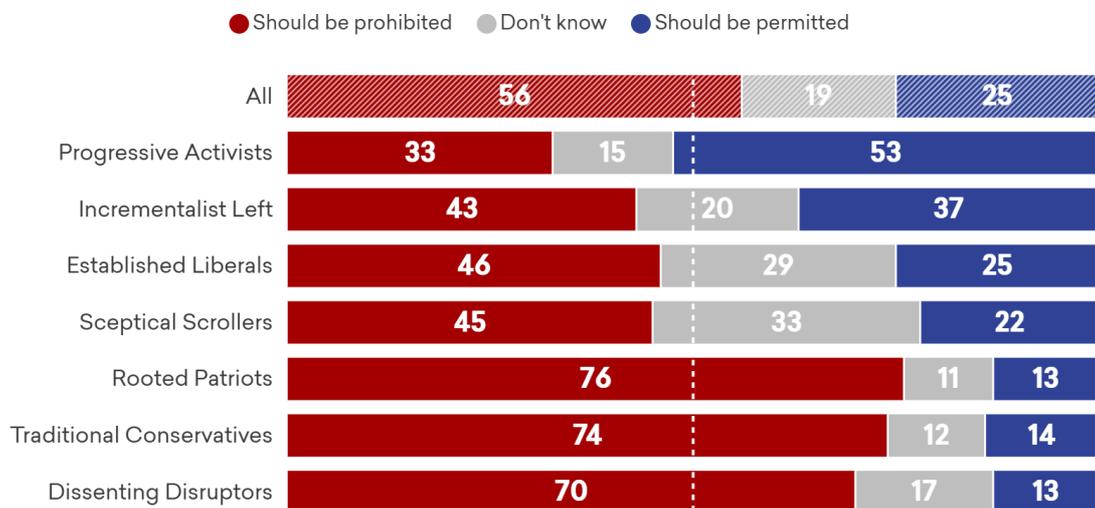
Permitting or prohibiting the wearing of face veils (such as the burqa or niqab) is a much more divisive topic in the UK than religious courts. While the majority (54 per cent) of Britons would prohibit them being worn, a further third think that they should be permitted (30 per cent) and 16 per cent are undecided - differences that are much more visible when looking at the segment breakdowns.

Among the segments, Progressive Activists are the most in favour of permitting face veils, perhaps because they are the segment most concerned about policy proposals seen to be targeting Muslims. Meanwhile, there is also more support than opposition from the Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals, two of the most religious segments, who believe in individual choice and liberty of religion and are unafraid that expressing one's faith via the veil has a negative impact on society as a whole.

The segment most opposed to the wearing of face veils are the Traditional Conservatives, who are likely to feel concern about face coverings and how they deviate from British cultural norms. Strong opposition also comes from Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors, whose are more resistant to visible deviations from UK cultural norms.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.

### Religious face veils for women (e.g. burqa, niqab)



British Muslims are the religious group most likely to support permitting face coverings (77 per cent support). Meanwhile, Christians are more supportive of prohibition than the general public: 60 per cent are in favour of a ban compared to 54 per cent of the population as a whole.

Supporters of a burqa ban tend to be older: over-75s are more than twice as likely to support a ban than under-25s. In fact, 18-24 year olds are the only age group more likely to oppose than support a ban.

The primary driver of support for a ban is that the burqa obscures faces. Asked why they would support a ban, proponents are most likely to say that you shouldn't be allowed to cover your face in public (32 per cent). For others it's a view that burqas are being used to oppress women (27 per cent), or that it's bad for community relations not to see people's faces (26 per cent).

Opposition to religious face coverings in public does not greatly depend on the context in which the covering is being worn. Those who want a ban on the burqa oppose religious face coverings in public-facing jobs alongside in public settings such as restaurants and on the street. Although few take issue with people wearing face coverings in religious buildings or at home.

## FGM

Another practice that receives widespread condemnation across the British public is female genital mutilation (FGM). Eighty four per cent of the public, including majorities of every age group, voter group and segment think it should be prohibited, while just five per cent think it should be allowed.

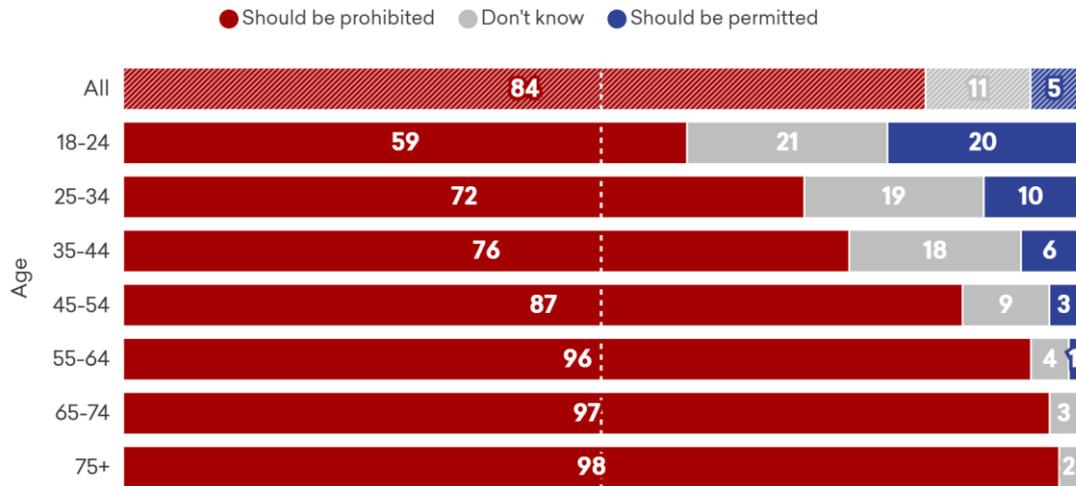
**“Arranged marriages, sharia law, genital mutilation, lots of things. There's so many things that the government, we have laws and we should be sticking by the laws regardless of your religion. Everyone should be following British law. That is what our country is set on as laws and there should be no exceptions. We should not be letting people do things which are illegal. Doesn't matter what religion you are, we should all be following the law.”**

**Audrey, non-religious, Glasgow**

Intriguingly - and perhaps worryingly - younger Britons are notably more permissive of FGM than older generations. Younger Britons are generally more permissive of all the practices explored via polling than their older counterparts, but the fact that this permissiveness extends to FGM is worrying. More could definitely be done to ensure that education about the harms of FGM is reaching these age groups to avoid FGM losing the widespread condemnation that it currently experiences.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.

### Female genital mutilation



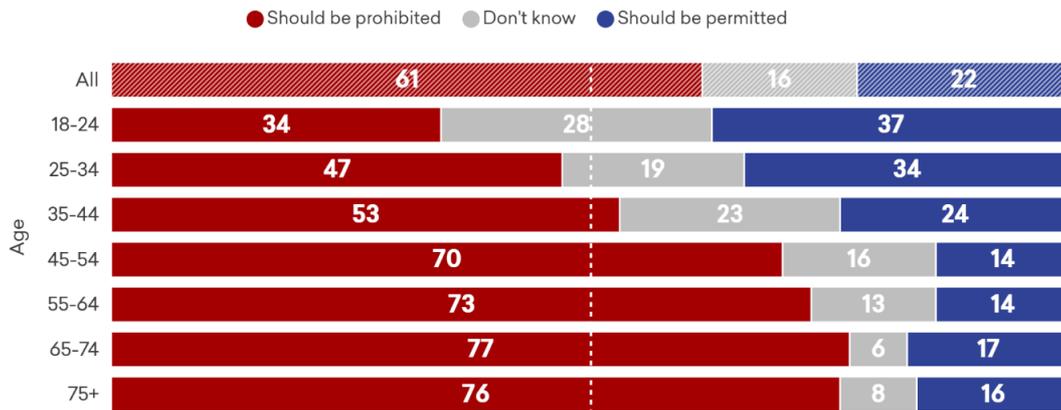
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### Male circumcision

The circumcision of boys is considerably less stigmatised in Britain than FGM, and from the focus groups it is clear that while FGM is met with horror, many Britons have not given much thought to the ethics of male circumcision. That said, when asked in the poll there is also notable (although less prevalent) opposition to this practice. Sixty one per cent of Britons think male circumcision should be banned, and just 22 per cent think it should be permitted. Again, and as with all the other practices tested, younger people are more permissive, with 18–24-year-olds being the only age group more likely to say that circumcision should be permitted than prohibited.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.

### Circumcision of boys for religious or cultural reasons



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In focus groups, participants are resolute in their condemnation of FGM on girls and women. They spoke of male circumcision very differently - some were concerned that children are subjected to circumcision without their consent, but concerns were lower than those about FGM because people saw it as having a less severe impact on people's lives.

**"I think circumcision, it's somewhat different to FGM because I think with circumcision you can still have your normal life."**

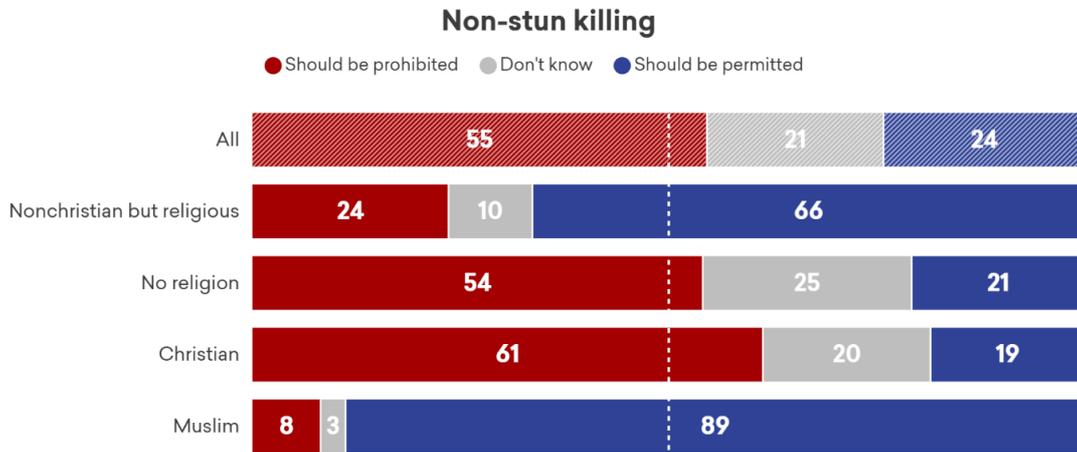
**Gina, non-religious, Norwich**

## Non-stun slaughter

Among other controversial religious practices is the production of halal and kosher meat using non-stun killing, a process in which an alert animal's throat is cut without it having been being stunned before slaughter.

The majority of Britons oppose the production of halal and kosher meat using non-stun killing. However, most Muslims support non-stun slaughter, whereas most other groups are opposed on the grounds of animal welfare.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.



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('Christian' includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Dissenting Disruptors and Traditional Conservatives are the most likely to want to prohibit non-stun killing in the UK with 69 per cent and 70 per cent supporting a ban, respectively. In focus groups, participants from the right of centre are shocked by the idea of non-stun slaughter using language such as 'disgusting' or 'horrifying'.

**“I don't believe that (non-stun killing) should be happening in our country. That is what happens in a majority of Muslim countries. I know, but I find it quite horrific what they do.”**

**Tracy, non-religious, Wales**

At the same time, younger and more left-of-centre participants view the issue in the context of their disdain for the broader issue of industrialised methods of agriculture.

**“I don't think there's a nice way to kill an animal. Well, there's horrible ways, but there isn't a nice way of doing it, so... I don't think... I don't think it makes a lot of difference”.**

**Chris, non-religious, North Yorkshire**

**“Eating animals is cruel in itself! Should we all be forced to be vegan? A majority of the people are still going to eat meat. That's you imposing your thoughts and feelings on a huge group of people. If you don't allow meat then you don't allow kosher meat and you've just ostracised a large two groups of people. And then you might as well say meat altogether is banned as well”.**

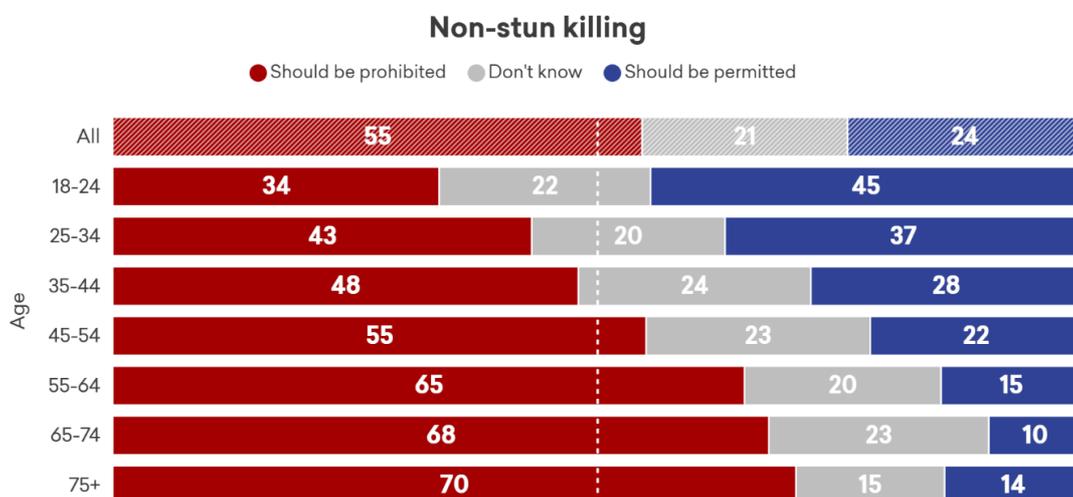
**Khalid, Muslim, London**

**“So if I'm going to follow my religion and if my religion is saying that this is something that I should do, then I will do it. And then it's not for any government to tell me what I can and cannot do that I'm very adamant”.**

**Amtal, Muslim, London**

The age split on the issue of non-stun slaughter also follows a familiar pattern, with younger people more accepting of non-stun slaughter than their older counterparts. Indeed, 18-24 year olds are the only age bracket in which more would rather non-stun killing be permitted than prohibited.

The following are a list of practices which are associated with religious groups. For each of them do you think they should be prohibited or permitted.



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Young people are more permissive of every controversial religious practice tested in this research. In focus groups discussing the practice of gay conversion therapy, what matters is whether someone consents to undergo the therapy, rather than necessarily the existence of gay conversation therapy itself. Instead of viewing the action through the prism of straightforward right and wrong, the question for younger people was about individual liberty and the right to make individual choices.

**“If they're doing it consensually, then I suppose it's not unlawful, but you probably could put it under verbal abuse or even constraint and things like that if they're being made to be there.”**

**Adam, non-religious, York**

**“It's not anyone's right to impose anything on anyone. So like an exorcism on someone who's gay, that's someone who's just run with an idea to feed their own sort of selfish, evil thoughts. And I think the easiest thing would be just let people do what they want as long as they're not causing harm to anyone. Allow the people**

**the freedom to do what they want without imposing anything on them. And then we've got the freedom to live the way we want as long as we're not causing hurt.”**

**Khalid, Muslim, London**

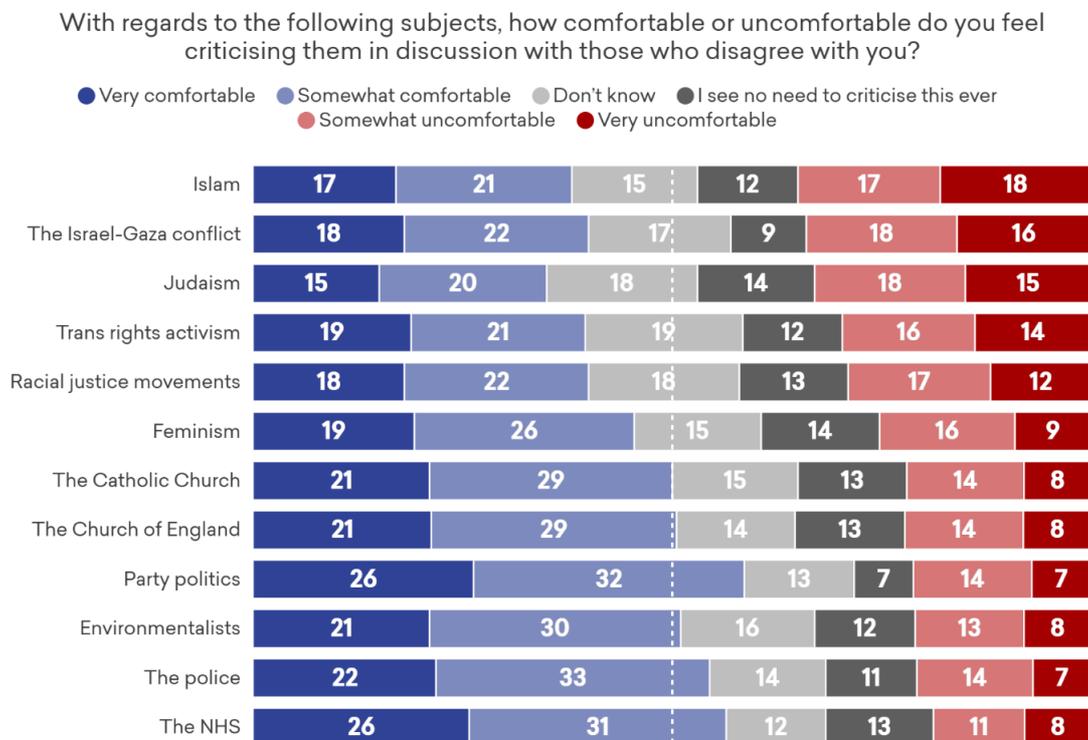
Nevertheless, many Britons are less permissive of expressions of faith that feel overly restrictive or which clash with their desire to ensure British society remains integrated and cohesive rather than fragmenting along cultural, religious or political lines.

Overall, while Britons acknowledge that religion can bring positive contributions through charity, community work and moral guidance, they do not adopt an “anything goes” approach when it comes to religious practices. Clear limits are drawn where more controversial practices are seen to conflict with the law and core British values such as fairness, equality, animal welfare or social cohesion. This cautious tolerance is especially visible in views on issues such as face veils, and non-stun slaughter, where support for freedom of religion passes its limits, and is superseded by concerns about the impact on wider society. The public is often clear in its opposition to many religious practices that are widespread in Britain today. This is evidently a debate that many would like to have. It may be that, rather than avoiding the debate, political, community and faith leaders should facilitate it, thus mitigating the risk of the debate being ceded to those with the most extreme views. This tends to include groups spreading more violent hate against religious minorities. That balance of respect with firm red lines is even sharper when the conversation turns to extremism – which is expanded upon in the next chapter.

## Chapter five | Free speech and extremism

Debates about religion often come into contact with debates about freedom of expression in contemporary Britain. As public discourse around free speech grows more broadly in the context of debates about the balance between tackling hate speech online and online censorship, religion has become a particularly sensitive area, shaped by deep personal beliefs, cultural identity, and fears about offence, extremism and social division. This chapter explores how Britons navigate these tensions: how free they feel to speak openly about religion, where they believe legal and social boundaries should lie, and how these views differ across age, belief and political outlook.

Criticising religion is near the top of the list of issues Britons feel most uncomfortable talking about. Thirty five per cent say they would feel uncomfortable criticising Islam in a discussion with someone who disagrees with them, and 33 per cent say the same for Judaism, although the numbers for Christianity are lower. In all of these cases, people are more likely to say they feel uncomfortable discussing and criticising religion than they are criticising party politics. Even compared to trans rights activism, which has become a contentious and uncomfortable topic to discuss for many, people are more likely to say they feel uncomfortable talking about Islam.



## Ability to criticise religion

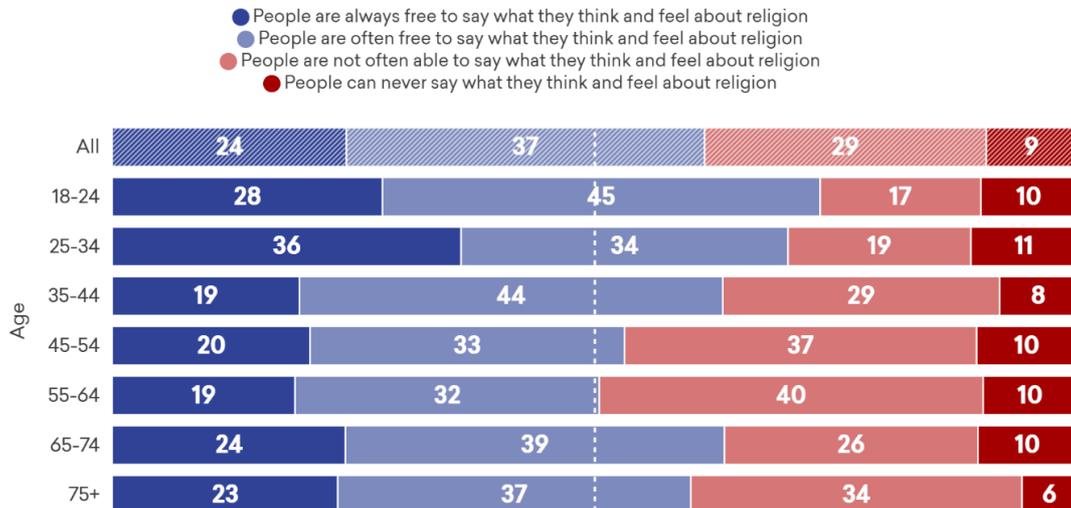
Few Britons feel they are always free to say what they think and feel about religion, although a majority say they have some freedom. People who follow faith are more likely than non-religious people to say there is freedom to criticise religion in the UK. Younger people and people of faith are more likely to say they always feel able to say what they think and feel than older Britons. It is those aged 45 to 64, who feel restricted in what they can say and feel about religion.

More religious Britons are more likely than the average to say they feel that people are always free to say what they want about religion. Whereas those who are not religious at all are the most likely to say that they can never or rarely say how they feel about religion.

**“I think everything should be able to be debated and discussed, not just you can't just say something is complete and utter rubbish. You have to be able to discuss that and debate it and back it up and be respectful in the process. So this is called debate and discussion, not I'm just going to throw a load of rubbish at somebody because that's not respectful and I think it's a very fine line”.**

**Gina, non-religious, Norwich**

When it comes to criticising religion, which do you feel most accurately describes the situation in the UK?



One-third of Britons, however, feel that they can rarely, or even never, say how they feel about religion, a significant number given growing broader concerns in the UK about freedom of speech and one which might need remedy to rebuild trust between religious and non-religious groups.

**“I would like to say I feel that as part of freedom of speech one should be able to debate and discuss and I fear that that's something that we are losing because if**

**we can't discuss and debate there's no way of learning. But of course if you discuss and debate, you have to enter that with an open mind and be respectful."**

**Gina, non-religious, Norwich**

**"I think it's very important to be able to criticise, but it has to be constructive criticism with an end goal, not with a goal to become violent or to burn each other's books. It's about learning. And I think through that you accept other people's faith and their right to believe or to not believe".**

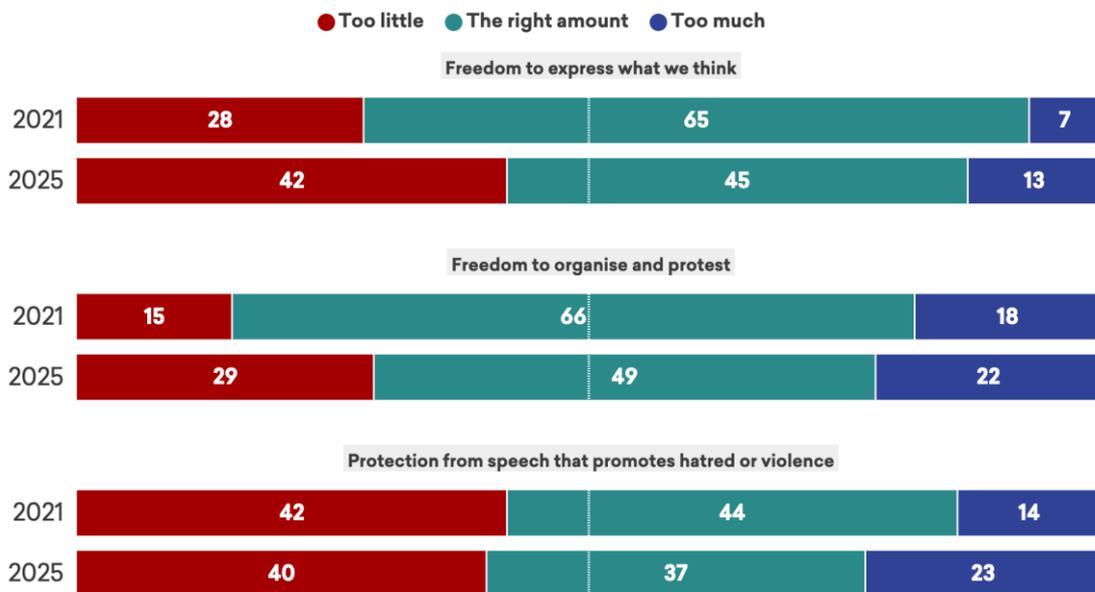
**Amtal, Muslim, London**

**"I think it's important that society protects religious freedom, diversity and beliefs and what have you. Don't be critical, be curious, ask questions, inquire, find out".**

**Debbie, Christian, London**

There is no doubt that many Britons increasingly feel that their right to freedom of speech is being eroded. Attitudes to free speech in Britain have changed significantly in recent years, with growing numbers of people saying that we have too little freedom to express what we think.

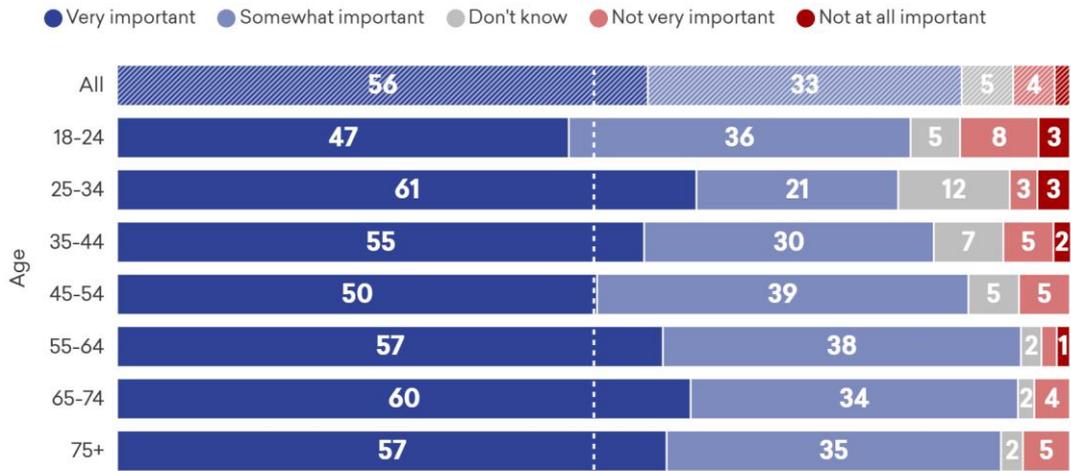
In Britain today, would you say that people have too much or too little of each of the following, or do they have the right amount?



Source: More in Common, 2025

However, younger age groups see their right to free speech as slightly less important than older Britons, with 47 per cent of 18-24 year olds saying that the right to free speech is very important compared to 56 per cent of the country as a whole.

### How important do you consider the right to free speech?



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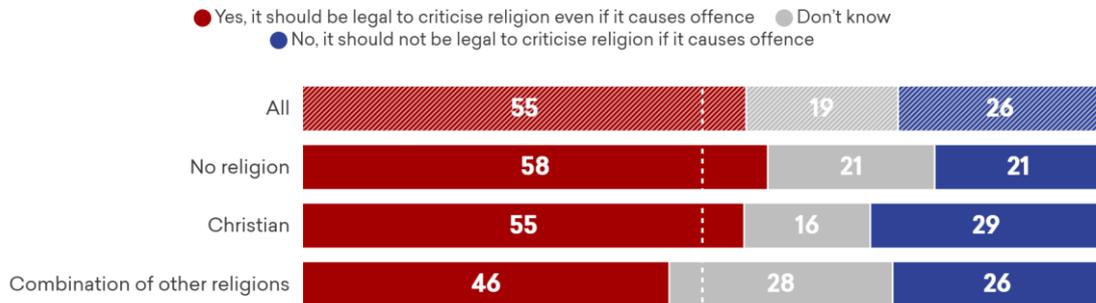
**“So we've got this kind of shift in two different ways. Either it's empowering extremism or it's shutting down intelligent rational conversation. And that's a huge issue”.**

**Hannah, non-religious, Hampshire**

In focus group conversations, several participants mentioned that they often feel the need to remove themselves from the conversation when it comes to religion because of the deeply polarised nature of the debates. They felt stuck between two unsatisfying extremes: shutting down legitimate criticism of religion altogether, or allowing the kind of free-for-all that opens the door to hate speech and extremism.

A majority of Britons (55 per cent) think it should be legal to criticise religion, a quarter (26 per cent) say that this should be illegal, and a fifth (19 per cent) of Britons are unsure. People of no religion are more likely to say that it should be legal to criticise religion, even if it causes offence, although at a level only slightly higher than among Christians, at 58 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively.

Do you think it should be legal to criticise religion, even if it offends others?



More in Common • July 2025  
(Combination of other religions includes Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Jewish)

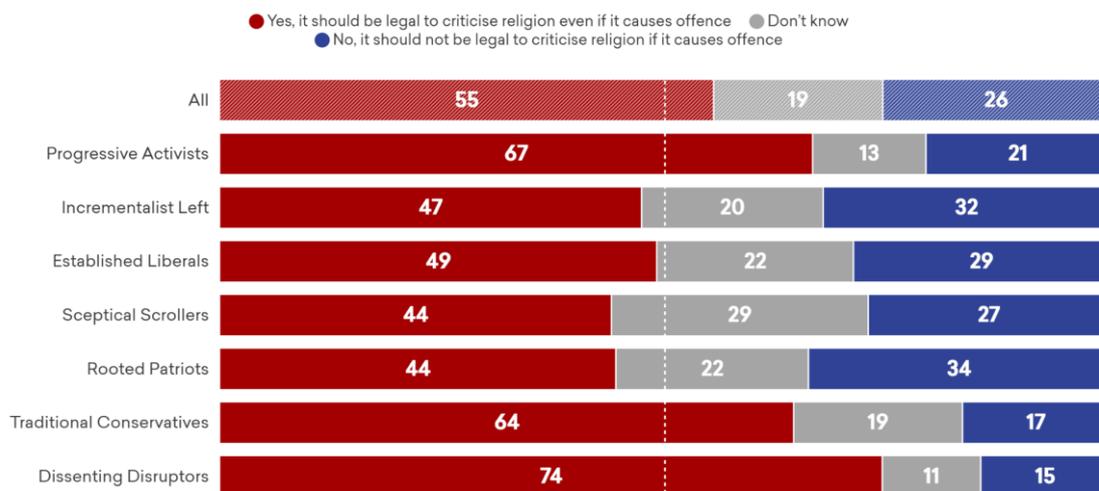
In focus groups, some non-religious participants expressed deep fears that the policing of speech was leading to a backsliding of democracy.

**“When a religion is suppressing people in our society, I think it's really important that we have free speech also from politicians who can chime in and help make laws against certain things.... So when it's like a danger to somebody, I think it's really important that these things are addressed”.**

**Joh, non-religious, Suffolk**

Freedom of speech is now a more divisive issue across British politics than in recent memory. The segments which come together most strongly in support of freedom of speech are the unlikely alliance of Progressive Activists, the Traditional Conservatives and the Dissenting Disruptors. This coalition of segments both on the left and right of politics is formed of the groups in which a majority think it should be legal to criticise religion even if it causes offence. Conversely, it is the Rooted Patriots and the Sceptical Scrollers who are least likely to support criticising religion if it causes offence; Rooted Patriots in particular are the segment most likely to prioritise protecting people from harm over protecting free speech.

Do you think it should be legal to criticise religion, even if it offends others?



More in Common • July 2025

By segment, the groups most likely to think that it should be legal to criticise religion are again the unlikely pairing of the Progressive Activists and the Dissenting Disruptors. Other segments are more conflicted, yet still in support of the idea that criticising religion should be legal.

**“I think they absolutely have the right to do that, but they also have the right of consequences as well. So if they do cross the line, then they should face the consequences for it. So yes, freedom of speech should be a thing, but also people should face the consequences if they do cross a line or go too far. But I think being able to criticise anything is healthy in a society”.**

**Tom, non-religious, North Yorkshire**

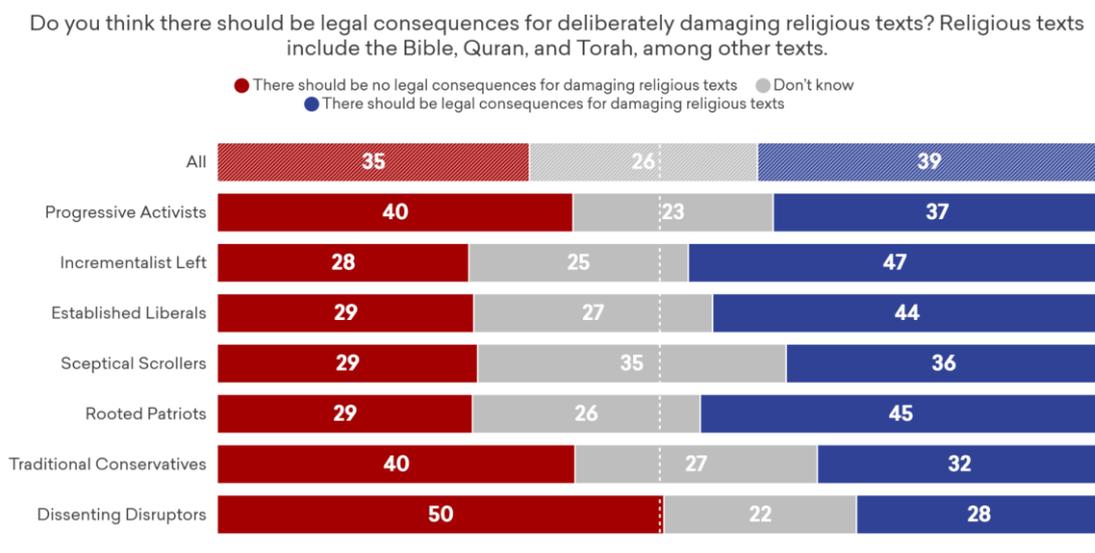
**“So that's a lack of responsibility on the person that makes that comment. ... but some of these comments are just irrationally thrown out there and that's just not on. It's irresponsible and we all have a responsibility to be fair, considerate, and objective about anything in life”.**

**Stuart, non-religious, Stroud**

While most Britons believe they should be able to criticise religions, they are divided on whether damaging religious texts, such as burning copies of Quran or Bible, should be legal or illegal. Progressive Activists, Traditional Conservatives and Dissenting Disruptors once again make up a coalition of segments where a majority believe damaging religious texts should be legal.

The other four segments are more likely to say that there should be legal consequences for damaging religious texts. For Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals, this is likely to be due to the high rates of religiosity in their segment. Wary of offensive and disruptive speech, Rooted Patriots generally do not like to see people offended for the sake of

freedom of expression. Sceptical Scrollers, who are the least likely to hold strong views on many of the issues explored in this report, are most likely to say they are not sure whether there should be legal consequences for damaging religious texts.



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It would seem that, on balance, even though Britons are in favour of being allowed to criticise religion, they view burning religious texts as going against other important values of fairness and tolerance.

**“Burning books, violence, isn't it? That is inciting violence”.**

**Khalid, Muslim, London**

**“Burning books, that doesn't seem to be a good idea to me. That's disrespectful. Think we all know what is right and wrong”.**

**Len, Christian, Southend-on-Sea**

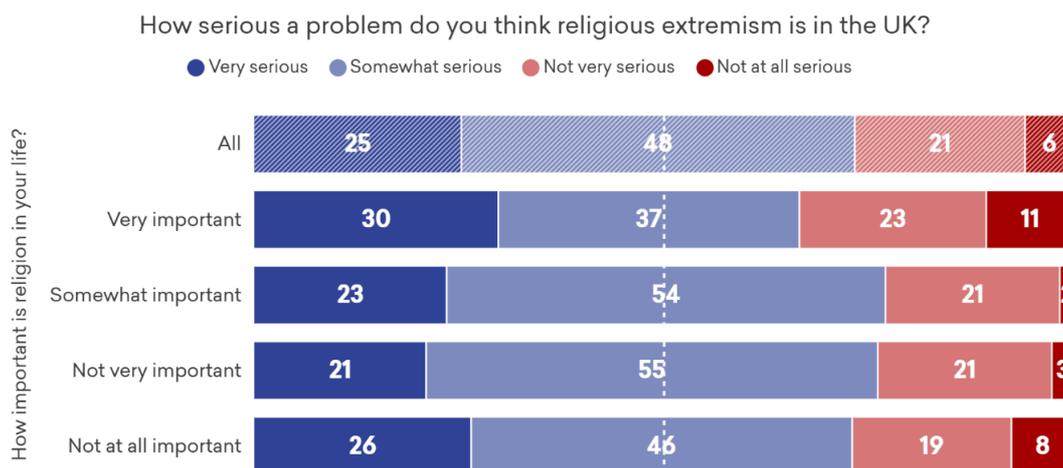
**“Even if you don't believe in a faith or you don't believe in a God, you should be teaching tolerance and respect. And most parents do. You do it at home and that's something that should be taught at school. So yeah, totally burning each other's books is absolutely wrong”.**

**Amtal, Muslim, London**

## Religious extremism

There is a widespread public view that religious extremism is a serious problem in the UK and it is perhaps the most salient issue with the British public relating to the role of religion in society. Almost three-quarters consider religious extremism either a 'very' serious or a

'somewhat' serious problem. This figure remains fairly consistent across religious and non-religious groups, falling just slightly to two-thirds among those who identify most strongly with religion in Britain. In short, no matter someone's personal religious beliefs, there is consensus as to the serious threat posed by religious radicalism.



However, focus group conversations reveal that the public's fear of extremism is not confined to religious zealots, but includes individuals radicalised by other issues, symptomatic of a more fragmented and polarised society overall. In fact, concern about extremism is rarely to do with the ideology that the extremists are representing, and more to do with the acts of extremism itself - most people who are concerned about Islamist extremism are also concerned about far-right extremism and vice versa, for example.

**“I think there's a problem with extremists in general. I don't think it's specific to religion. I think there are religious extremists, but I think there's extremists in everything now. Whether that's environmentalists or animal rights or right wing, left wing, incels, all sorts. There's an extremist in everything and I think yeah, there probably is religious extremists, but I don't think it's a problem in the UK any more than it would be anywhere else in the world”.**

**Chris, non-religious, Yorkshire**

In some circumstances, Britons do have concerns about the ability to freely criticise certain religions or religious practices. Britons want to find a balance in which other people's cultures, beliefs and ways of life are respected, yet the ability to call out what they see as extremist behaviour or unacceptable practices in their communities is protected. A point often raised in focus groups is that Britons do not want to see the nuanced and personal conversation about religious beliefs devolve into a 'shouting match'. Instead, they want the national debate to be conducted with respect, in order that we can strike the right balance between religion and state, and between those who are religious and those who have no religion.

“There's a difference between having an informed debate and shouting at each other, obscenities related to religion or sexual orientation. So we just haven't found the right balance yet because we're probably trying to be a little bit too liberal in our view of dealing with it”.

Stuart, non-religious, Stroud

“I mean you can't stop people from criticising. I think it depends on the lengths that people go to. I mean we have freedom of speech, so you can pretty much say what you want. Criticising the Prophet, I think that's just a debate. Maybe a debate that goes a little bit too far. I mean I wouldn't be offended if anyone told me that your religion is wrong. I will never believe in your religion. I don't believe in a God. Fair enough”.

Khalid, Muslim, London

“You just need to be mindful and respectful of what you're saying. So there needs to be a line and then be a balance so everybody has right to their opinions. Absolutely”.

Fatiha, Muslim, London

## Conclusion

This report has shown that Britons' attitudes to religion are neither defined by ardent rejection of the role of religion in Britain nor by uncritical acceptance. Most do not see religion as wholly a force for good or wholly a force for bad; instead, they recognise that religion has benefits and harms in society. Many describe how religion provides them comfort, community, and moral guidance, and Christian traditions remain woven into Britain's cultural fabric, something most are broadly happy with. At the same time, many are uneasy about privileges enjoyed by religious institutions, sceptical of religion overstepping into politics, and opposed to practices they see as incompatible with wider social values, such as gender equality and sexual liberty. Most Britons do not know what secularism means as a political idea - but many have concerns about some elements of the current relationship between Church and state in Britain.

What emerges is a picture of balance. Britons are generally respectful of others' beliefs, but they do not subscribe to an "anything goes" attitude. The public outlook is grounded in several principles:

- **An equal playing field** – no one should be treated differently because of their faith or lack of it, and religious groups should similarly not receive special privileges not available to others.
- **Pride in tradition** – particularly in Christian cultural traditions, valued as part of British identity even by many who are not religious.
- **Freedom of expression** – people want to speak openly about religion, including criticism, without being silenced for fear of saying the 'wrong thing'. Despite their demand for freedom of expression, people oppose prejudice against religious groups and what they see as incitement to violence
- **Opposition to cruelty and oppressive practices** – whether in animal welfare, the treatment of women, or discrimination against minorities, Britons draw clear red lines where religious practices are seen to cause harm, and many are happy for the government to step in and make practices illegal if they are seen to be cruel or oppressive.

These principles run through the views of all seven segments of the public. Some segments are more trusting, others more sceptical, but what unites them is the expectation of fairness, respect and individual freedom. Differences between generations and communities also shape the picture: younger people often show more openness to visible expressions of faith, while older people are more attached to Britain's Christian heritage but less tolerant of religious practices they see as at odds with social cohesion - with some practices associated with Islam of particular concern.

In this sense, what is emerging is a distinctively British settlement on religion. Britons do not think about secularism in the broader ideological sense (in focus groups, "mostly secular" was the phrase most often used to describe an ideal Britain), but have stronger views on specific religious practices and privileges. On an ideological level, most Britons accept a pluralist balance: a recognition that people should be free to believe, worship and express themselves, but within a framework that protects fairness, cohesion and the rule of law. The challenge for leaders and institutions is to uphold and actively steward this balance: protecting private faith and freedom of belief, facilitating open and sometimes uncomfortable debate about religion's public role, and ensuring that religious conviction is never used as a justification for undermining equality, dignity or mutual respect.

# Methodology

## Quantitative research

Polling in this report was conducted by More in Common, a member of the British Polling Council.

Polls are weighted and allocated to be representative of the adult population of Great Britain.

Most of the analysis in this report is drawn from polling conducted on the following dates:

- 27/06/2025 – 30/06/2025, N = 2,030

Additional data were used from the poll:

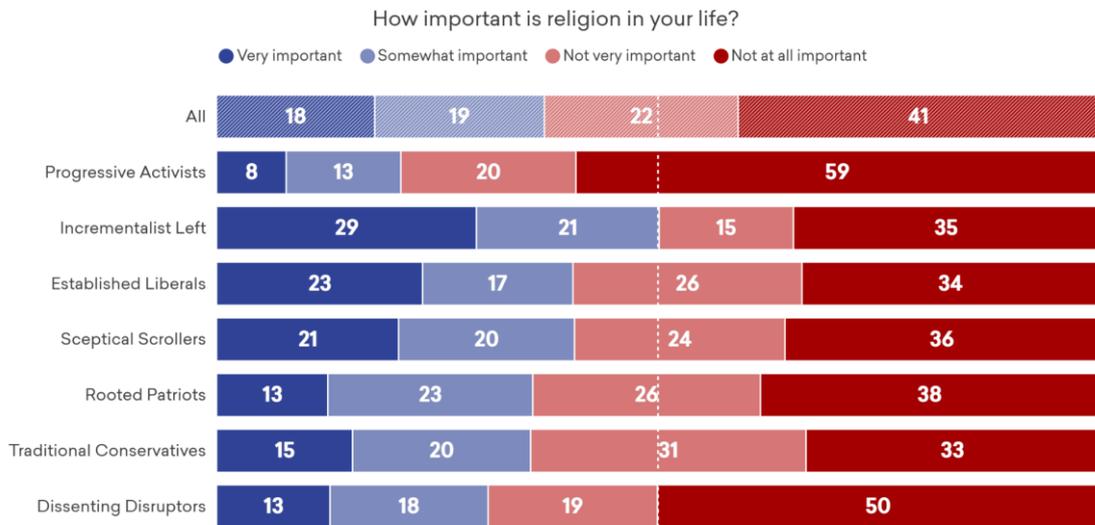
- 19/09/2025 – 22/09/2025, N = 2,055

Data tables for this research can be found at [www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/](http://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/)

# Appendix

## Britons' religiosity

Role of Religion in Britons' life:



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The religious beliefs by segment:

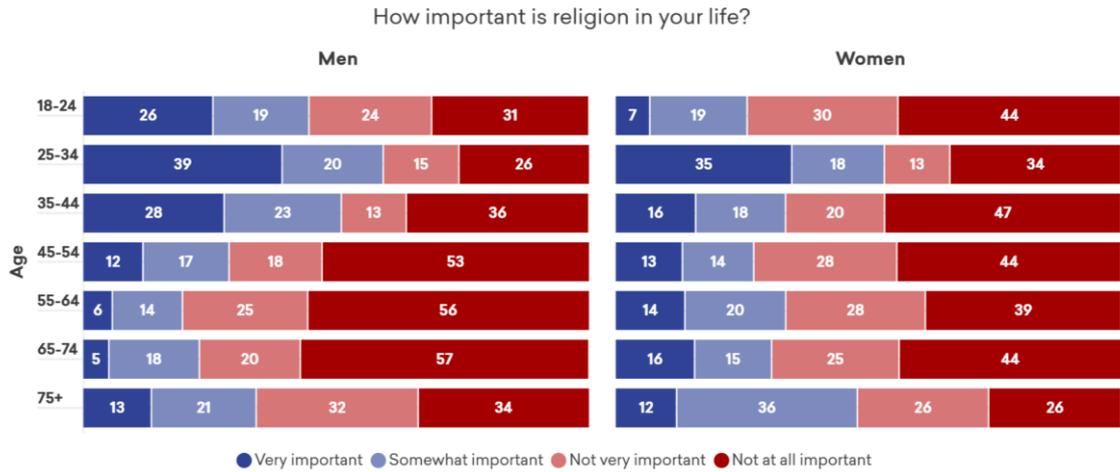
What is your religion?

Religion	All	Progressive Activists	Incrementalist Left	Established Liberals	Sceptical Scrollers	Rooted Patriots	Traditional Conservatives	Dissenting Disruptors
No religion	45%	67%	34%	33%	46%	41%	37%	51%
Christian	44%	21%	48%	51%	36%	53%	59%	42%
Buddhist	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Hindu	2%	1%	2%	4%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Jewish	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Muslim	4%	4%	9%	3%	8%	1%	1%	2%
Sikh	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%



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Religiosity by age/gender:



Source: More in Common, August 2025

## Privileges of the Church of England asked about:

- Automatic seats for Church of England bishops in the House of Lords
- Church of England prayers said before parliamentary sittings
- The head of state (the monarch) also being the supreme governor of the Church of England
- The Church of England having a leading role in national ceremonies
- The Church of England controlling state-funded schools



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