

There is overwhelming disapproval in Britain for the churches' stance on women

YouGov Polling commissioned for Westminster Faith Debate 3 – “Is it right for religion to treat men and women differently”

1. The level of support for the CofE's treatment of women is astonishingly low

Only 8% of the population express approval of the Church of England's current policies towards women – and that includes Anglicans. Age, gender, social class, and educational level do not make any appreciable difference to this proportion. The figure falls to 3% among those who don't affiliate with any religion.

2. More Muslims than Anglicans approve of the CofE's policies on women

Only 11% of Anglican adherents (nominal Anglicans) support their Church's policies. More Muslims (26%) than Anglicans approve.ⁱ

Amongst actively practising Anglicans, only 16% express approval. Even if we look at the most devout and obedient of Anglicans (7% of the total), only a quarter express approval of the Church of England's current policies towards women.

Spokesmen for the Church often say that what happens at national level doesn't reflect the parish, so we also asked people about how women are treated at parish level. The survey shows that only 20% of Anglicans approve of how women are treated at parish level.ⁱⁱ

3. There is even more disapproval of the Catholic Church's policies

Only 6% of the population express approval of the Catholic Church's current policies towards women – and that includes Catholics.

More Catholics than Anglicans approve of their Church's policies – 22% compared with 11%, but it is still a small proportion.

Amongst practising Catholics that figure rises to 31%, and to about half of Catholics who are most respectful of Church teaching.ⁱⁱⁱ

4. The overwhelming majority of people, both religious and non-religious, think religions would be better off with more women leaders

When asked if they think that the major religions would be better if more women held senior positions (e.g. female bishops, chief rabbis etc.), only 5% of Anglicans thought they would NOT be, compared with 43% who thought they would be better – these figures are exactly the same as for the population as a whole (the remainder of respondents said ‘neither’ or ‘don’t know’). A large majority of adherents of all the major religions were pro women’s leadership, including Catholics (10% said ‘worse’, 43% ‘better’) and Muslims (18% said ‘worse’, 35% ‘better’).^{iv}

Interestingly, amongst those who are actively practice their religion, higher proportions agree that religions would be better off with more women leaders.^v

But what about the small number who think religions would be worse off? Who are they? The determining factors are gender (being a man) and whether you draw most guidance from religious leaders and teachings, rather than their own reason, judgement or intuition. In the population as a whole, 3% of women and 6% of men think things would be worse if more women held senior positions. Of those who draw most guidance from religious leaders and teachings (‘obedient’ religious people), the figures are considerably higher: 12% of women and 23% of men. But even among the last group, 36% think that the major religions would be positively better if there were more women in senior positions while the rest don’t express a view either way.

In every identifiable group in our survey, those that thought major religions would be better clearly outnumber those who thought they would be worse---in most cases by a very considerable margin.

Linda Woodhead commented: *“These new findings show that the churches are seriously out of step not only with society but with their own members. In failing to allow women’s leadership in the churches, church leaders are privileging the views of a tiny, disproportionately male, group of people over the views of the vast majority of people in their own churches and in the country as a whole.”*

NOTES

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4,437 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th - 30th January 2013. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

The Westminster Faith debates are organised by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead and supported by Lancaster University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. They are designed to bring high-quality academic research on religion into public debate. http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/

Linda Woodhead is Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University and Director of the £12m national research programme the 'Religion and Society Programme' funded by two UK research councils, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. <http://religionandsociety.org.uk/>

Those we refer to in this briefing as the 'religious' or 'nominally' religious are those who identified with one of the following major religions or denominations: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Jewish, Hindu, Islam/Muslim, Sikh, Other. Those we call 'non-religious' are those who answered 'none' to the same question about identification.

Practising Catholics and Anglicans are those say that they 'currently engage in religious or spiritual practices with other people, for example attending services in a place of worship or elsewhere, or taking part in a more informal group', and that the group or community with which they are involved is 'Roman Catholic' or 'Anglican'.

Sample sizes (unweighted): Anglican 1261, Catholic 354, Baptist 58, Muslim 201, Jewish 162, none 1649. Total 4437

ⁱ *Thinking about the Church of England, to what extent to you approve of its current policies towards women?*

%	Anglican	RC	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Muslim	None
Approve	11	12	7	10	16	4	18	26	3

ⁱⁱ *Thinking about the Church of England, to what extent to you approve of its treatment of women at local parish level?*

%	Anglican	RC	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Muslim	None
Approve	20	16	10	15	19	2	18	24	6

ⁱⁱⁱ *Thinking the RC Church, to what extent to you approve of its current policies towards women?*

%	Anglican	RC	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Muslim	None
Approve	4	22	7	10	10	2	17	20	1

^{iv} *And do you think that major religions would be better or worse if more women held senior positions (e.g. female bishops, chief rabbis etc.)? (adherents)*

%	Anglican	RC	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Muslim	None
Better	43	43	40	50	41	45	57	35	46
Worse	5	10	3	6	7	11	2	18	2
Neither	40	34	44	29	41	33	27	26	39
Don't know	12	13	13	14	11	11	14	22	13

^ And do you think that major religions would be better or worse if more women held senior positions (e.g. female bishops, chief rabbis etc.) (actively practising)

%	Anglican	RC	Presbyterian	Methodist	Pentecostal	Jewish	Hindu	Muslim	None
Better	55	48	44	61	36	36	63	36	46
Worse	8	7	13	8	11	21	8	25	9