

## The Westminster Faith Debates 2013: Religion in Personal Life

Press releases, with analysis of the YouGov survey commissioned to support the debates.  
By Professor Linda Woodhead

### **DEBATE 1: ABORTION AND STEM CELL RESEARCH**

#### **New survey reveals that most religious people are not anti abortion**<sup>1</sup>

#### **Overall, the views of people with religious affiliations on abortion are not markedly different from the general view**

A new YouGov survey commissioned for the Westminster Faith Debates<sup>2</sup> finds that 43% of people who identify with a religion are in favour of keeping or raising the current 24 week limit (compared with 46% of the general population), 30% would like to see it lowered (compared with 28%), and 9% support a ban (compared with 7%). The remainder of people say they 'don't know'.

Even though the Roman Catholic Church teaches that abortion is always wrong and should be illegal, only 14% of Catholics in this country are in favour of a ban.

#### **A significant number of people believe that human life begins at conception, but this does not necessarily mean they are opposed to abortion.**

44% of people believe that human life begins at conception, 30% at some time during pregnancy, 17% when the baby is born, and 8% don't know.

Surprisingly, even amongst those who believe that human life begins at conception, most believe that abortion should be legal. Over three quarters believe that abortion is acceptable in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and a half believe that abortion should be allowed at least up to 20 weeks.

#### **Amongst the religious people surveyed, Catholics, Muslims and Baptists are the most hostile to abortion, but only about half would like to see the law changed**

14% of Catholics surveyed support a ban and 33% would like to see the 24 week limit lowered.

30% of Muslims surveyed support a ban and 16% would like to see the 24 week limit lowered.

#### **Those who rely on external religious sources for guidance, and whose religion offers an anti-abortion message, are the most likely to be hostile to abortion**

The survey finds that factors like gender, age and voting preference do not make much difference to attitudes to abortion. The people most likely to be hostile to abortion are those:

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<sup>1</sup> 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+).

<sup>2</sup> 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.

- who believe in God with most certainty
- rely most strongly on scripture or religious teachings for guidance
- whose religion has a strong anti-abortion message

Only 8% of the population fits this profile, and of this 8% one third support a ban on abortion.

The survey finds that most people in Great Britain —including religious people – rely most on their own judgment or feelings or the advice of family and friends for guidance.

**Amongst the population as a whole, anti-abortion sentiment is declining and support for current abortion law is growing**

Comparisons with earlier YouGov polls reveal that the percentage of the population who would like to see a ban on abortion has fallen from 12% in 2005 to 7% today. Of those who expressed a view, support for keeping (or even relaxing) the current 24 week limit has risen by about one-third to a clear majority (57%) today.

Background

*The current legal limit for abortion is 24 weeks. According to the latest Department of Health abortion statistics (for 2011), 91% of abortions were carried out at under 13 weeks gestation, and 78% at under 10 weeks.*<sup>3</sup>

*The new series of Westminster Faith Debates, on ‘religion and personal life’, begins this week. The first debate is on ‘Stem Cell Research, Abortion and the “Soul of the Embryo”’.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The most recent data were published in May 2012 by the Department of Health in Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, 2011, available at:  
<https://www.wp.dh.gov.uk/transparency/files/2012/05/Commentary1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Details at [http://religionandsociety.org.uk/faith\\_debates-2013/](http://religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/)

## DEBATE 2: THE SEXUALISATION OF SOCIETY

### **Catholic guilt about sex is a myth**<sup>5</sup>

A new YouGov survey of religious and secular attitudes to sex commissioned for the Westminster Faith Debates<sup>6</sup> finds no evidence that Catholics feel more guilty about sexual 'sins' than other religious people – although religious people in general feel more guilt than non-religious, with Baptists, Muslims and Pentecostals surveyed feeling the most. When asked whether they would feel guilty about four sexual activities condemned by the Catholic Church – pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex and the use of pornography and contraception – only 14% of Catholics said they would feel guilty about most or all of these, compared with 16% of all those who said they belong to a religion, and 3% of non-religious people.<sup>7</sup>

### **Only 9% of Catholics would feel guilty about using contraception**

Previous surveys have found that contraception is widely used by Catholics, despite their Church's condemnation of it. This survey finds that few Catholics in our survey today would even feel guilty about using it: only 9% of nominal Catholics and 12% of practising Catholics polled say they would feel guilty.<sup>8</sup>

### **Catholics no more guilty about extra-marital sex than non-Catholics**

When it comes to extra-marital sex, less than 60% of Catholics would feel guilty about it – the same proportion as Anglicans, and indeed the general population.

The guiltiest are Baptists and Pentecostals – almost 90% of those surveyed say they would feel guilty about extra-marital sex.

The least guilty are those of no religion – only half would feel guilty about extra-marital sex.

### **It's when it comes to pre-marital sex and pornography that religious people feel more guilty than non-religious**

Four times as many religious people (20%) say they would feel guilty about pre-marital sex as non-religious people (5%).

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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'.

<sup>v</sup> Sample sizes: Anglican 1519, Catholic 391, Baptist 60, Pentecostal 25, Muslim 107, Jewish 80.

More than twice as many religious people (33%) say they would feel guilty about using pornography for sexual stimulation as non-religious people (15%). Interestingly, there is little difference between nominal and practising Catholics (about 30% would feel guilty) about the use of porn, whereas many more practising Anglicans (55%) would feel guilty than nominal Anglicans (30%).

### **Most people think sex is important, but that society is too sexualised**

68% of people agree that sex is important for a fulfilled life, and there is little difference of opinion between religious and non-religious people. The biggest difference is between men and women, especially between those who feel strongly – men are almost twice as likely to agree strongly (40%) that sex is important for a fulfilled life as women (20%), and this gender difference is the same amongst religious and non-religious people.

Even though 68% of people think sex is important, a similar proportion (66%) also say that the profile of sex is too high in society, with religious people agreeing even more strongly, and little difference between men and women.

### **The most and the least guilty in society**

If we isolate the factors which correlate with feeling guilty, we can construct a profile of the people who would typically feel most and least guilt over the sexual activities the survey asked about.

The least guilty are men who regard their own judgement or intuition as authoritative, do not identify with nor participate in a religion, and are definite that there is no God.

The guiltiest are women who describe themselves as religious, regard religious sources as authoritative, are active members of a religious group, and definitely believe there is a God. They would feel four times as much guilt as the most guilt-free men.

**Appendix<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Would feel guilty if</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>All non-religious</b>	<b>All religious</b>	<b>Anglicans</b>	<b>Catholics</b>	<b>Baptists</b>	<b>Pentecostals</b>	<b>Muslims</b>	<b>Jewish</b>
<b>Used pornography for sexual stimulation</b>	26%	15%	33%	30%	30%	69%	89%	54%	31%
<b>Used contraception</b>	5%	3%	6%	3%	9%	7%	9%	23%	3%
<b>Had pre-marital sex</b>	13%	5%	20%	12%	19%	50%	76%	62%	12%
<b>Had extra-marital sex</b>	56%	48%	64%	60%	57%	88%	89%	69%	72%

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## DEBATE 3: RELIGION AND WOMEN

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

#### 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup>

#### 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.<sup>12</sup>

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

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<sup>10</sup> *Thinking about the Church of England, to what extent do 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

<sup>11</sup> *Thinking about the Church of England, to what extent do 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

<sup>12</sup> *Thinking the RC Church, to what extent do 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

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’).<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, amongst those who actively practice their religion, higher proportions agree that religions would be better off with more women leaders.<sup>14</sup>

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.”*

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<sup>13</sup> *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

<sup>14</sup> *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



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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/>

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

## DEBATE 4: THE FAMILY

### New survey discovers who has the narrowest view of 'the family'

A YouGov survey of attitudes to the family commissioned for the Westminster Faith Debate taking place this week finds that:

#### **A majority of people still think of the family primarily as a biological unit**

This can be called a narrow view of the family.

When asked what they would consider to be a 'family', almost everyone agrees that a married couple with children is a family.

Most people also agree that the following count as families:

- An unmarried couple with children (89%)
- A lone parent with at least one child (87%)
- A married couple without children (72%)
- Siblings who live together (71%)
- A same-sex couple in a civil partnership with children (70%)

#### **But sizeable proportions now take a broader view of the family**

This takes seriously emotional ties or living together.

- 52% of people consider an unmarried couple without children to be a family
- 47% of people consider a same-sex couple in a civil partnership to be a family
- 39% of people consider any two or more people who care for each-other to be a family

#### **Religious people differ little from the general population in their views - even when it comes to same-sex couples**

67% of Anglicans, 66% of Catholics and 72% of Jewish people consider a same-sex couple in a civil partnership with children to be a family (compared with 70% of the population)

46% of Catholics, 51% of Baptists and 48% of Jewish people consider a same-sex couple in a civil partnership without children to be a family (compared with 47% of the general population)

#### **Most people think it's OK not to start a biological family...**

When asked whether more women never having children is good or bad, 18% say good and 54% say neither good nor bad.

#### **...but we think children need families, preferably with a father and a mother**

When asked whether more single women having children without a male partner is good or bad, 30% say neither, and 58% say bad.

When asked whether more gay and lesbian couples raising children is good or bad, 24% say good, 31% bad and 39% neither.

### **The narrowest view of a family is held by older, Conservative-voting men**

The two most important factors which predict whether you take a narrow view of what counts as a family are:

- Voting Conservative
- Being a man

The next most important are:

- Being in the minority of religious believers who take their main authority from God or religious teachings (Baptists and Muslims score highest on this)
- Being over 65

An important factor in predicting whether you take a broad view of what counts as a family is stating 'none' when asked what your religion is.

So those with the narrowest view of a family are older male Conservative voters. Those with the least restricted are younger women Lab/Lib/PC/Scot Nat voters. Those who take their guidance from religious sources also tend to have a narrower view.

### **Individual Christians appear to be more tolerant and welcoming than the Churches to which they belong**

Most people agree that churches are welcoming to married couples with children. Seventy-four per cent think they are also welcoming to single people.

But only 45% think they are welcoming to divorced people, and a mere 21% that they are welcoming to gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

This contrasts with the fact that nearly half of Christians think that a same-sex couple in a civil partnership is a family, a proportion which grows to two thirds if same-sex couples have children.

*"This is clearly a problem for the Churches, not only because they fail to reflect the views of most Christians, but because they purport to welcome people even if they didn't necessarily approve of their lifestyle." Linda Woodhead*

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

## DEBATE 5: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

### **New poll finds many Christians ignoring Church leaders on same-sex marriage**

A YouGov poll commissioned for the Westminster Faith Debate on same-sex marriage this Thursday finds that half of all religious people in Britain are now in favour of allowing same-sex marriage, and that those who identify as Anglican and Catholic now support it by a small margin.

#### **Christian support for same-sex marriage**

Despite the churches' official opposition to gay marriage, British Christians who identify as Anglican, Catholic or Presbyterian are now in favour of allowing same-sex marriage by a small margin (Table 1 - appendix).

Amongst active churchgoers, support for allowing same-sex marriage is slightly lower, but still high. Forty percent of Anglicans are in favour and 47% against. Forty-two percent of Catholics are in favour, 48% against (Table 3- appendix).

Overall, all those people who identify with a religion, Christian or otherwise (excluding 'don't knows'), are now evenly split on allowing same-sex couples to marry – 43% for and 43% against (Table 1 - appendix). On the different but related question of whether same-sex marriage is right, religious people are somewhat more opposed (Table 2 - appendix).

#### **The more you believe in God, the less you support same-sex marriage**

The section of religious people most opposed to same-sex marriage is made up of those who both (a) believe in God with certainty and (b) make decisions primarily on the basis of explicit religious sources – God, scriptures, teachings and religious leaders.

This 'moral minority' of strict believers amounts to almost 9% of the population, and is spread across religious traditions, with a greater concentration among Baptists and Muslims.

The correlations are striking:

**Table A "Do you believe in a God or some 'higher power'?" - and attitudes to SSM**

<b>Do you think same-sex couples should or should not be allowed to get married?</b>	<b>Believe there is definitely a God (26% of population)</b>	<b>Believe there is probably a God (23% of population)</b>	<b>Believe there is probably NOT a God (16% of population)</b>	<b>Believe there is definitely NOT a God (19% of population)</b>	<b>Don't know if there is a God (17% of population)</b>
Should	38	51	63	66	50
Should NOT	48	38	27	22	25
Don't know	14	11	10	12	25

Table B “Which, if any, of the following do you rely on MOST for guidance as you live your life and make decisions?” – and attitudes to SSM

Do you think same-sex couples should or should not be allowed to get married?	Own reason (41% of popn)	Own intuition (22% of popn)	Family (13% of popn)	God (6% of popn)	Friends (3% of popn)	Religious teachings (2% of popn)	Science (2% of popn)	Deceased loved ones (1% of popn)	Religious leaders (<0.5% of popn)	Religious group (<0.5% of popn)
Should	56	57	58	32	64	34	65	53	27	22
Should not	32	31	30	54	25	56	26	37	67	58
Don't know	11	12	12	14	11	10	9	10	7	20

**Muslims and Baptists are the most opposed to allowing same-sex marriage; Jews, Hindus and those of ‘No Religion’ the least opposed**

Those who identify as Muslim and Baptist are most opposed to allowing same-sex marriage, whilst Jews, Hindus and those who say they have ‘no religion’ are most in favour of allowing it (Table 1 - appendix).

This can be explained by the higher proportions of those who believe in God with certainty and take authority from religious sources amongst Baptists and Muslims.

**Actively practising a religion makes a difference**

Amongst those who currently engage in a religious activity, 41% are in favour of allowing same-sex marriage and 46% are against. Amongst the non-practising, 54% are in favour and 31% are against.

Amongst Anglicans, 47% of active churchgoers are against allowing same-sex marriage and 40% are in favour. Amongst non-churchgoers opinion is more equally balanced: 44% are in favour of allowing ssm and 43% against. The biggest difference is between churchgoing and non-churchgoing Anglicans and the small number (7%) of strict Anglicans who both believe definitely in God and take their authority from religious sources, 65% of whom oppose same-sex marriage.

**Overall, age, religion and gender are the most important predictors of opposition to Same-sex marriage**

The most important predictors of opposition to SSM are:

- 1.Age (17% of 18-24yr olds are against allowing SSM, compared with 53% of those aged 60 and over)
- 2.Believing that there is definitely a God (Table A)

3. Gender (40% of men are against allowing SSM, compared with 27% of women)
4. Being guided most by God or other religious sources (Table B).

**Christians who support same-sex marriage do so because they believe in equality and faithful love; Christians who oppose it do so because they believe in traditional marriage, family, and gender-roles**

The most common reasons given by Christians who say gay marriage is RIGHT are that:

- “People should be treated equally whatever their sexual orientation” (77%)

The next most common is:

- “Faithful love is the heart of marriage and it is not exclusive to heterosexual couples” (70%)

The most common reasons given by Christians who say gay marriage is WRONG are that:

- “Marriage should be between a man and a woman” (79%)

The next most common is:

- “It undermines the traditional family structure of a mother and father” (63%)

**Churches are widely perceived as unwelcoming to gay and lesbian people.**

Despite the fact that half of all Christians who express an opinion are in favour of same-sex marriage, when asked if churches are welcoming to gay, lesbian and bisexual people only 21% of the public think they are, a proportion which falls to 17% amongst 18-24 olds. Most churches claim to welcome everyone irrespective of sexual orientation. They are clearly not getting this message across. Some Christians, even from more conservative evangelical churches, are concerned about this. The Revd Steve Chalke, a prominent Baptist Minister, who will be taking place in the Debate on Thursday comments that: “the noise of the arguments around gay marriage are clouding the real question for the Church: The nature of inclusion.”\*

\* Article and video available at [www.oasisuk.org](http://www.oasisuk.org)

## Appendix

Table 1 Do you think same-sex marriage should be allowed? Adherents

Do you think same-sex couples should or should not be allowed to get married?	ALL	No religion	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Religion TOTAL
Should	<b>52</b>	69	44	44	49	32	40	52	55	29	35	43
Should NOT	<b>34</b>	20	43	41	44	45	50	38	26	59	35	43
Don't know	<b>14</b>	11	14	15	7	23	11	10	19	12	30	14

Table 2 Do you think same-sex marriage is right or wrong? Adherents

Do you think same-sex marriage is right or wrong?	ALL	No religion	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Religion TOTAL
Right	<b>46</b>	63	38	36	37	27	22	46	44	23	28	37
Wrong	<b>34</b>	20	43	44	44	43	55	38	31	64	54	44
Don't know	<b>20</b>	17	19	20	18	29	24	16	25	13	19	20

Table 3 Do you think same-sex marriage should be allowed? Currently attend church, participate in a religious group or community

Do you think same-sex couples should or should not be allowed to get married?	Roman Catholic	Anglican	Church of Scotland	Methodist/baptist	Pentecostal	Jewish	Muslim / Islamic	Hindu	Buddhist	Sikh	None
Should	42	40	54	31	29	46	28	63	95	25	57
Should NOT	48	47	37	52	65	45	58	19	5	45	32
Don't know	10	14	9	17	6	9	14	18	0	30	11



## NOTES

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Sample sizes (top line weighted, bottom line unweighted) Total 4437

None	Ang- lican	Roman Catholic	Presby- trerian	Meth- odist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Other	Prefer not to say
1630	1519	391	108	121	60	82	48	106	24	100	207
1649	1261	354	90	96	58	162	92	201	49	185	192

Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th - 30th January 2013 and predated the Second Reading debate in the House of Commons of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill. The Bill has now completed the Committee stage in the Commons (12 March) and awaits a date for Report and Third Reading before passing to the House of Lords.

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## DEBATE 6: EUTHANASIA

### **New poll shows overwhelming public support for euthanasia, and probes reasons**

#### **Overwhelming agreement that you have the right to chose when you die is driving support for euthanasia**

A YouGov poll commissioned for the final 2013 Westminster Faith Debate on assisted suicide this Thursday sheds light on the reasons people have for supporting or opposing a change in the law on assisted suicide – a change which would make it possible to help someone with an incurable disease die without risk of prosecution for doing so.

Support for such a change is overwhelming. Overall, the survey finds that 70% of GB adults support it with only 16% opposing it and 14% “don’t know.”

The poll probes the reasons for this high level of support. Respondents could tick as many reasons as they wished.

#### **An individual’s “right to choose” counts most with those who support a change in the law**

A remarkable 82% of those who support a change in the law agree that “An individual has the right to choose when and how to die”.

Very high proportions also say that “It is preferable to drawn-out suffering” (77%) and “Those assisting suicide should not fear prosecution” (76%).

These reasons score more highly than the more pragmatic ones that were also suggested on the survey (see Appendix 1).

The high proportions citing these reasons show that opponents of the legislation are both clear and fairly unanimous about their reasons for doing so.

#### **Patients’ vulnerability, not “Sanctity of Life”, counts most with opponents**

The survey also asked those who oppose a change in the law why they do so (see Appendix 2). Respondents could tick as many reasons as they wished.

For the minority who are opposed, the most popular reasons all have to do with the potential for harm and abuse of the person who dies and those who assist.

Almost 60% of those who are opposed to a change in the law agree that “Vulnerable people could be, or feel, pressured to die”, 55% say that “It places too much of a burden on the person or people who help someone to die”, and 48% think that “You can never build in enough safeguards.”

Although it is often invoked by religious campaigners against euthanasia, “Sanctity of life” comes joint third in the list of reasons for opposition. It is cited by 48% of opponents.

#### **Most religious people ignore their leaders and support a relaxation of the law**

An absolute majority of religious adherents – i.e. those who identify with a religious tradition – support assisted suicide: 64% of religious people support a change in the law on

euthanasia, 21% think the law should be kept as it is, 14% don't know (sums to 99 due to rounding).

The only constituencies for which this is not true are Baptists, Muslims and Hindus. (See Appendix 3)

Adherents of all other traditions favour a change in the law. In doing so many are rejecting the official message given by their religious leaders.

- Anglicans are in favour of change by a margin of 57% (total in favour 72%) - which is greater even than the general population at 54% (total in favour 70%). Only those who say they have those "no religion" show greater support – by a huge margin of 72% (total in favour 81%).
- Roman Catholics are in favour of change by a margin of 26%,
- Jewish people are in favour of change by a margin of 48%
- Although many Hindus don't know, those with a view are in favour of change by a margin of 8%.

Those who actively participate in a church or other religious group – rather than merely identifying with a religion – also support change (49% support, 36% against, 15% don't know; see Appendix 3 for a breakdown by tradition)

Those who say they have "no religion" are most likely to support a change in the law – 81% for, 9% against. The vast majority (87%) do so because they believe in a person's right to choose when to die.

### **Being strictly religious is the main factor which predicts opposition to assisted suicide**

The survey also gauged attitudes towards a number of other controversial topics of personal morality, including abortion, gender roles, the traditional family, and same-sex marriage. In relation to these issues, a number of different factors predicted "conservative" attitudes, including age (being older), gender (being male), voting intention (being Tory), and religiosity (being certain in belief in God, and taking authority from religious sources).

Assisted suicide is different. Here, the only factor which really makes a difference is being strictly religious. People who are strictly religious are those who take authority from religious sources - like scripture or simply "God"- rather than from relying on their own judgement, who believe in God with certainty, and who actively participate in a religious group. They account for around 9% of the population, and can be found in all religions, but their proportions are highest amongst Baptists and Muslims.

Amongst these strict believers, only a third of those expressing a view are in favour of a change in the law. That proportion is higher among Anglicans (42%) and lower among Catholics (28%), Baptists (27%), and Muslims (19%).

Unlike other opponents, the leading reasons that strictly religious people give for their opposition are that “human life is sacred” (80%) and that “death should take its natural course” (69%). These two more traditionally "religious" reasons overwhelm the other reasons.

There are, however differences between traditions. For example, highest concern for vulnerable people was expressed by strict Catholics (89%), whereas strict Muslims were much less likely to cite concern for vulnerable people (37%), and concentrated instead on “death taking its natural course” (83%) and the “sanctity of human life” (76%).

**Appendix 1**

**You said that you think the current law on euthanasia should be changed to allow assisted suicide in some circumstances. Which of the following best describes your view? Please tick all that apply**

An individual has the right to choose when and how to die	<b>82</b>
It is preferable to drawn-out suffering	<b>77</b>
Those assisting suicide should not fear prosecution	<b>76</b>
It's happening anyway and regulation would improve safety and delivery	<b>51</b>
The national health and welfare systems cannot provide decent end of life care	<b>35</b>
Other/Don't know	<b>2</b>

**Appendix 2**

**You said that you think the current law on euthanasia should be kept as it is. Which of the following best describes your view? Please tick all that apply**

Vulnerable people could be, or feel, pressured to die	<b>59</b>
It places too much of a burden on the person or people who help someone to die	<b>55</b>
You can never build in enough safeguards	<b>48</b>
Human life is sacred	<b>48</b>
Death should take its natural course	<b>46</b>
No-one can ever be certain that they really want to die, but the decision is irreversible	<b>43</b>
Other/Don't know	<b>6</b>

**Appendix 3**

**\*\*Euthanasia is the termination of a person's life, in order to end suffering\*\***

**Do you think British law should be kept as it is, or should it be changed so that people with incurable diseases have the right to ask close friends or relatives to help them commit suicide, without those friends or relatives risking prosecution?**

**Adherents**

Self identified religious tradition	None	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim
Support change	81	72	56	61	62	43	69	36	26
Oppose change	9	15	30	24	23	45	21	28	55
Don't know	10	13	14	15	15	12	10	36	19

### People who actively participate in a church or other religious group

Religion of group	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Church of Scotland	Methodist/Baptist	Pentecostal	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh
<b>Support change</b>	59	44	45	49	6	64	47	23	73
<b>Oppose change</b>	25	42	40	40	78	25	36	63	11
<b>Don't know</b>	16	14	15	11	16	11	17	14	17

#### NOTES

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

Sample sizes (top line weighted, bottom line unweighted) Total 4437

None	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Other	Prefer not to say
1630	1519	391	108	121	60	82	48	106	24	100	207
1649	1261	354	90	96	58	162	92	201	49	185	192

Those we refer to in this briefing as 'religious' are those who identified with one of the following major religions or denominations e.g. Anglican, Roman Catholic, Hindu. Those we call 'non-religious' are those who answered 'none' to the same question about identification.

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/](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/)

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