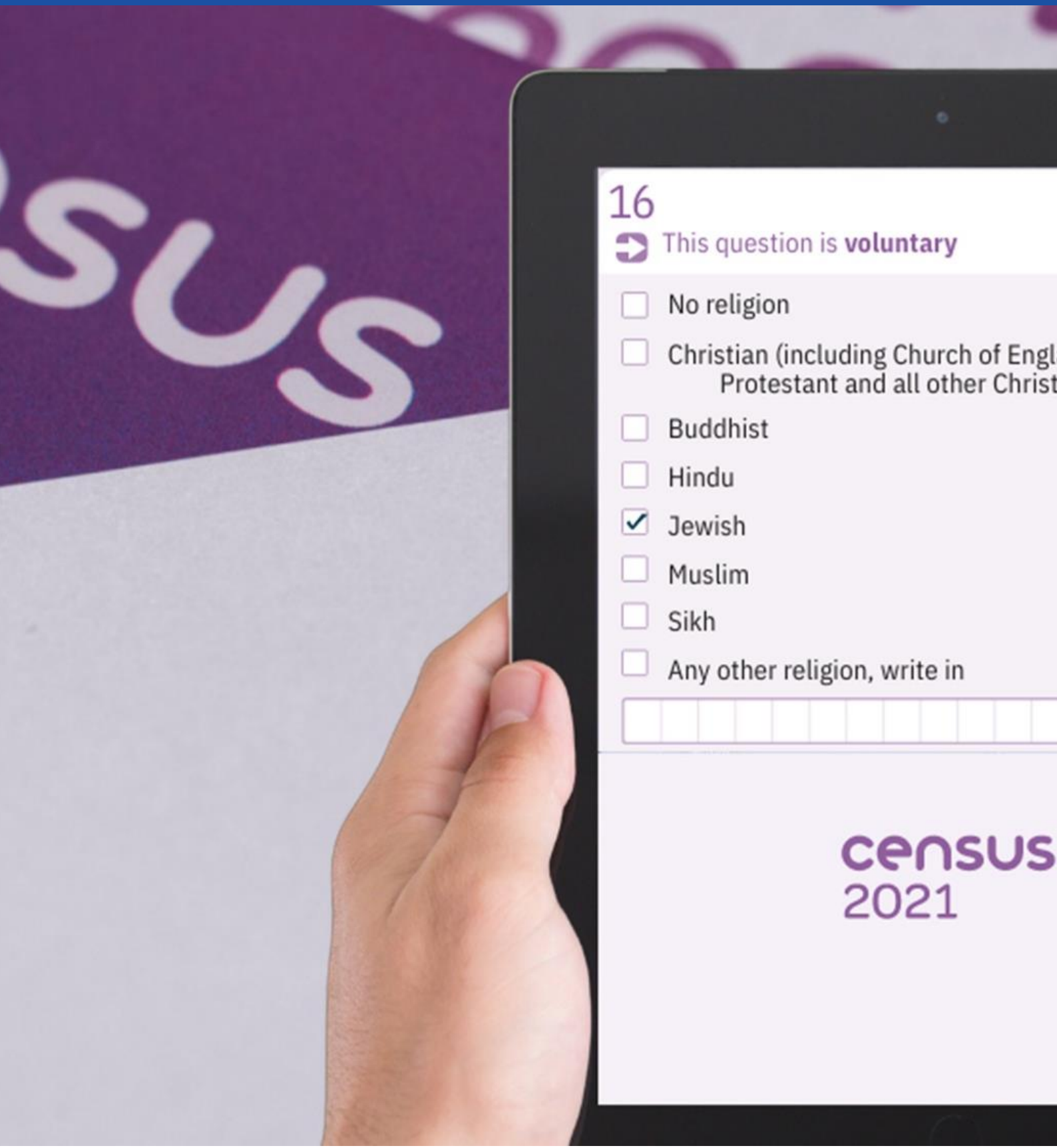


## Jews in Britain in 2021

First results from the Census of England and Wales

David Graham and Jonathan Boyd

November 2022



16

 This question is **voluntary**

- No religion
- Christian (including Church of England, Protestant and all other Christians)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

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**census**  
2021

# Jews in Britain in 2021: First results from the Census of England and Wales

David Graham and Jonathan Boyd

November 2022

Religion data have been gathered in the UK Census since 2001. They provide the most detailed demographic picture of the Jewish population that exists, painting a portrait of the size, geography, age profile, health, socioeconomic circumstances and identity of Jews today. The JPR research team uses them in myriad ways to help Jewish community leaders and policymakers to understand key demographic trends and to plan for their organisations' futures.

## / Introduction

The National Census was carried out in England and Wales on 21 March 2021 and, as with the two previous censuses in 2001 and 2011, it contained a question on religion. However, unlike these censuses, 2021 was a 'digital first' exercise, and almost 90% of households completed an electronic form online.<sup>1</sup> It was also carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, coinciding with the final stages of the first vaccine rollout in the UK. The Census asked everyone 'What is your religion?' and, as on previous occasions, this was a voluntary question including the category 'Jewish' among the eight check-box options. This is what most people would have seen when completing the questionnaire online:

Figure 1. 2021 Census question on religion as presented online

**What is your religion?**

This question is **voluntary**

No religion

Christian  
Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion  
You can enter your religion on the next question

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS); Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR).

<sup>1</sup> This is for all households, not just Jewish ones. Source: ONS 2021 [Delivering the Census 2021 digital service](#)

The total number of people recorded as 'Jewish' in 2021 was 271,327. This compares with 265,073<sup>2</sup> in 2011 and 259,927 in 2001, the first occasion the religion question was asked.

On the face of it, this is a 2.4% increase in the decade to 2021. But the extent to which we can assess Jewish population change through these figures depends on how comparable they are. While the circumstances in which each census is taken are unique, the rate at which the religion question is answered by people – i.e. 'non-response' – is known. Assuming that Jews choose to respond, or not respond, to the voluntary religion question at a similar rate to everyone else, we can adjust the data to take this into account. A comparison of the differences between the 'enumerated' or raw census data and the data adjusted to take account of non-response, is shown in Table 1. This suggests that after accounting for non-response, the Jewish population of England and Wales grew by 1.2% or 3,340 people between 2011 and 2021. By comparison, the general population grew by 6.3% (see Table 2).

**Table 1. The Jewish population of England and Wales by census year**

	Census year			Change		
	2001	2011	2021	2001-2011	2011-2021	2001-2021
Enumerated count	259,927	265,073	271,327	+2.0%	+2.4%	+4.4%
Proportion of total population not responding to religion question	7.7%	7.1%	6.0%	-	-	-
Adjusted estimate*	281,631	285,305	288,646	+1.3%	+1.2%	+2.5%

\* Calculated by dividing the enumerated total by the estimated proportion that did respond, i.e. 1 minus the non-response percentage.

Source: ONS.

The total size of the general population of England and Wales in 2021 was 59,597,540. Therefore, based on enumerated data, Jews made up 0.46% of the national population which compares with 0.47% in 2011 and 0.50% in 2001.

## / Rest of the UK

### Scotland

The national census is actually carried out by multiple agencies and is usually coordinated to use the same or very similar questionnaire at the same time. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Census in Scotland was delayed for a year and took place in March 2022. Consequently, these data were not be available at the time of writing. But for context, data from the 2011 Census recorded 5,887 Jewish people in Scotland. The 2001 Census in Scotland asked a different religion question and recorded 6,448 people with 'current' religion Jewish, and 7,446 people with a Jewish 'upbringing.'

### Northern Ireland

Data on the number of Jewish people recorded in Northern Ireland's 2021 Census are not yet available. However, 335 Jewish people were recorded in the 2011 Census and 365 were recorded in 2001.

<sup>2</sup> A corrected value following the identification of an error by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in February 2015.

## / Ethnic group

The census also asks a question about ethnic group, and 67,984 people in England and Wales reported their ethnic group as 'Jewish' in 2021. This compares with 33,770 people who did so in 2011, and 12,235 who did so in 2001. In other words, this number more than doubled over the last decade.

Future data releases will tell us how many of these 67,984 'Jews by ethnicity' also reported their religion as Jewish and how many did not. In 2011, one in four of those who reported Jewish ethnicity did *not* report Jewish in the religion question. Thus, the total enumerated Jewish population is larger than that recorded by religion data alone but we will need to wait to find out just how many of those 67,984 should be added to the 271,327 Jews by religion before we can calculate that figure.

## / Other religious groups

How large is the Jewish population compared with other religious groups in England and Wales? As we have seen, Jews make up just under 0.5% of the national population, about the same proportion as in the last two censuses. Therefore, in 2021, just 5 out of 1,000 people in England and Wales were Jewish compared with 462 Christians, 65 Muslims and 17 Hindus.

**Table 2. Size of religious groups in England and Wales, 2001, 2011, and 2021**

Religion group	2001		2011		2021		Percent change		
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	2001-2011	2011-2021	2001-2021
Christian	37,338,486	71.7%	33,268,057	59.3%	27,522,672	46.2%	-10.9%	-17.3%	-26.3%
Buddhist	144,453	0.3%	248,580	0.4%	272,508	0.5%	+72.1%	+9.6%	+88.6%
Hindu	552,421	1.1%	817,679	1.5%	1,032,775	1.7%	+48.0%	+26.3%	+87.0%
Jewish	259,927	0.5%	265,073	0.5%	271,327	0.5%	+2.0%	+2.4%	+4.4%
Muslim	1,546,626	3.0%	2,720,426	4.9%	3,868,133	6.5%	+75.9%	+42.2%	+150.1%
Sikh	329,358	0.6%	423,345	0.8%	524,140	0.9%	+28.5%	+23.8%	+59.1%
Other religion	150,720	0.3%	240,850	0.4%	348,334	0.6%	+59.8%	+44.6%	+131.1%
No religion*	7,709,267	14.8%	14,115,360	25.2%	22,162,062	37.2%	+83.1%	+57.0%	+187.5%
Religion not stated	4,010,658	7.7%	3,976,542	7.1%	3,595,589	6.0%	-0.9%	-9.6%	-10.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,041,916</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>56,075,912</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>59,597,540</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>+7.8%</b>	<b>+6.3%</b>	<b>+14.5%</b>

\* The only change to the religion question between these years was the renaming of the category 'None' in 2001 to 'No religion' in 2011.

Source: Office for National Statistics

## A new era

In 2021, the Christian population fell below 50% of the total for the first time to 46%. While it remains the largest religious group, this marks a significant milestone in the evolution of religion in British society and a notable, if regrettable, development for the Church itself. It may also portend a less welcoming environment for religion in general in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the second largest group, 'No religion', continues to climb, comprising 37% of the population in 2021 and an increase of 57% since 2011. This shift away from Christianity alongside the growth of No religion is one of the major social stories of our times.

<sup>3</sup> See '[Decline of Christianity matters to British Jews](#)' by Jonathan Boyd, *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 January 2022.

## / Jewish geography

Regionally, London recorded the largest Jewish population in England and Wales at 145,466. London accounts for 54% of the total Jewish population which is considerably higher than the equivalent proportion of the general population living in the capital, which is 15%. London also has the highest proportion of Jews for its population at 1.7%. However, the Jewish population does not sit neatly within the boundary of the capital and there is a large Jewish presence in two of the regions coterminous with London: East of England (including Hertfordshire) (42,012) and South East (including Essex) (18,682). Together with London these areas total 206,160 Jewish people.

**Table 3. Regional population size, 2021**

Region	Jewish population in region	Total population in region	% of total Jewish population in region	% of total population of E+W in region	% of region that is Jewish
London	145,466	8,799,728	53.6%	14.8%	1.7%
East of England	42,012	6,335,072	15.5%	10.6%	0.7%
North West	33,285	7,417,397	12.3%	12.4%	0.4%
South East	18,682	9,278,068	6.9%	15.6%	0.2%
Yorkshire and The Humber	9,355	5,480,774	3.4%	9.2%	0.2%
South West	7,387	5,701,186	2.7%	9.6%	0.1%
West Midlands	4,394	5,950,756	1.6%	10.0%	0.1%
North East	4,389	2,647,012	1.6%	4.4%	0.2%
East Midlands	4,313	4,880,054	1.6%	8.2%	0.1%
Wales	2,044	3,107,494	0.8%	5.2%	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>271,327</b>	<b>59,597,541</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>

Source: Office for National Statistics. E+W = England and Wales.

The census data show clearly how the location of the Jewish population has been changing over time. Over the last decade at the regional level, the strongest growth has been in East of England (which includes Hertfordshire) growing by 21%. But the second strongest growth was surprisingly, in the South West, which grew by 16% and recorded 7,387 Jewish people in 2021. While it is too soon to assess why this area has grown by this much, particularly bearing in mind that it declined in the previous decade, one possibility may be related to people moving out to more rural areas during the pandemic. It is also possible that the pandemic influenced the slight decline recorded in the size of London's Jewish population over the decade (down 3.2% from 2011).

Not shown in the table is the Jewish population of Greater Manchester which totalled 28,075 Jewish people in 2021. This is 12% higher than in 2011 when the population was enumerated at 25,013.

**Table 4. Jewish population and change by region, 2001, 2011, and 2021**

Region	Number			Percent change		
	2001	2011	2021	2001-2011	2011-2021	2001-2021
London	149,789	150,329	145,466	+0.4%	-3.2%	-2.9%
East of England	30,367	34,830	42,012	+14.7%	+20.6%	+38.3%
North West	27,974	30,417	33,285	+8.7%	+9.4%	+19.0%
South East	19,037	17,761	18,682	-6.7%	+5.2%	-1.9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	11,554	9,929	9,355	-14.1%	-5.8%	-19.0%
South West	6,747	6,365	7,387	-5.7%	+16.1%	+9.5%

West Midlands	4,977	4,621	4,394	-7.2%	-4.9%	-11.7%
North East	3,151	4,503	4,389	+42.9%	-2.5%	+39.3%
East Midlands	4,075	4,254	4,313	+4.4%	+1.4%	+5.8%
Wales	2,256	2,064	2,044	-8.5%	-1.0%	-9.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>259,927</b>	<b>265,073</b>	<b>271,327</b>	<b>+2.0%</b>	<b>+2.4%</b>	<b>+4.4%</b>

Source: Office for National Statistics.

As in 2001 and 2011, the local authority with the largest Jewish population in 2021 was Barnet with 56,616 Jewish people and where Jews account for 14.5% of the population as a whole. Barnet alone accounts for 21% of the total Jewish population of England and Wales.

Of the 331 local authorities in England and Wales, half of all Jews (50%) live in just 8 of them (Barnet, Hertsmere, Hackney, Bury, Salford, Camden, Haringey, and Harrow). By contrast, just 3.4% of the national population lives in these 8 places attesting to a typically high geographic concentration of the Jewish population common in most Diaspora countries.

Of the largest 30 Jewish local authorities in 2021, the neighbourhoods that grew the most between 2011 and 2021 were Salford (increasing by 34.9%), St Albans (increasing by 34.4%), and Islington (increasing by 29.7%). The areas that contracted the most over this period were Redbridge (decreasing by 37.2%), Harrow (decreasing by 30.7%), and Birmingham (decreasing by 23.5%).

Overall, the picture of change is complex. In London, while several boroughs grew between 2011 and 2021, especially in Inner and south London, others in the north east and west of the capital declined. While Barnet grew by 5%, Hertsmere, the second largest Jewish concentration after Barnet, continued to exhibit strong growth (up 28%), attesting to the continued spread of the Jewish population out of London and into the leafier outer suburban hinterland. Similarly, the haredi (Strictly Orthodox) areas of Haringey and Hackney also grew strongly, though perhaps not as strongly as the previous decade,<sup>4</sup> as did Salford and, to a lesser extent, Bury, in Greater Manchester. Intriguingly, after seeing huge growth between 2001 and 2011 (by 92%), Gateshead recorded a very slight decline between 2011 and 2021, an unexpected finding that requires further investigation.

Although not included in the table, there was also growth of a Jewish community in Castle Point in the Thames Estuary from 183 Jewish people in 2011 to 661 in 2021. This is where Canvey Island is located and is the result of migration of Haredi Jewish families from Inner London.

**Table 5. 30 largest Local Authorities in England and Wales by Jewish population, 2001-2021**

Local Authority	Number			Percent change			Percent of LA that is Jewish 2021
	2001	2011	2021	2001-2011	2011-2021	2001-2021	
Barnet	46,686	54,084	56,616	+16%	+5%	+21%	14.5%
Hertsmere	10,712	14,293	18,346	+33%	+28%	+71%	17.0%
Hackney	10,732	15,477	17,426	+44%	+13%	+62%	6.7%
Bury	8,924	10,302	10,734	+15%	+4%	+20%	4.8%
Salford	5,179	7,687	10,373	+48%	+35%	+100%	2.8%

<sup>4</sup> Further work will explore how much of this change is real and how much is to do with haredi response rates, which increased significantly after the 2001 Census.

Camden	11,153	11,242	10,079	+1%	-10%	-10%	5.5%
Haringey	5,724	7,643	9,397	+34%	+23%	+64%	2.1%
Harrow	13,112	10,538	7,304	-20%	-31%	-44%	3.8%
Redbridge	14,796	10,213	6,412	-31%	-37%	-57%	3.6%
Leeds	8,267	6,847	6,267	-17%	-8%	-24%	2.8%
Westminster	7,732	7,237	5,628	-6%	-22%	-27%	0.8%
Epping Forest	3,715	3,972	4,376	+7%	+10%	+18%	1.1%
Brent	6,464	4,357	3,723	-33%	-15%	-42%	1.1%
Enfield	5,336	4,412	3,713	-17%	-16%	-30%	3.2%
Gateshead	1,564	3,004	2,905	+92%	-3%	+86%	1.9%
Islington	1,846	2,093	2,714	+13%	+30%	+47%	1.5%
Kensington and Chelsea	3,550	3,320	2,681	-6%	-19%	-24%	0.9%
Manchester (LA)	3,076	2,613	2,632	-15%	+1%	-14%	0.5%
Brighton and Hove	3,358	2,670	2,455	-20%	-8%	-27%	1.0%
Trafford	2,314	2,413	2,408	+4%	0%	+4%	0.1%
St Albans	1,187	1,664	2,237	+40%	+34%	+88%	0.4%
Southend-on-Sea	2,721	2,150	2,057	-21%	-4%	-24%	1.1%
Liverpool	2,698	2,157	1,807	-20%	-16%	-33%	1.3%
Wandsworth	1,691	1,617	1,756	-4%	+9%	+4%	0.5%
Birmingham	2,343	2,205	1,687	-6%	-23%	-28%	1.5%
Bournemouth*	1,667	1,343	1,601*	-19%	+19%	-4%	0.5%
Three Rivers	1,726	1,611	1,463	-7%	-9%	-15%	1.6%
Hillingdon	1,977	1,753	1,392	-11%	-21%	-30%	0.4%
Lambeth	1,211	1,134	1,344	-6%	+19%	+11%	0.6%
Tower Hamlets	1,831	1,413	1,341	-23%	-5%	-27%	0.4%
Havering	1,123	1,159	1,305	+3%	+13%	+16%	0.4%
Waltham Forest	1,441	1,259	1,268	-13%	+1%	-12%	0.5%
Richmond upon Thames	1,576	1,409	1,262	-11%	-10%	-20%	0.7%
Southwark	1,011	1,006	1,243	0%	+24%	+23%	0.5%
Stockport	1,654	1,340	1,234	-19%	-8%	-25%	0.4%
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,312	1,161	1,228	-12%	+6%	-6%	0.3%
Oxford	1,091	1,072	1,120	-2%	+4%	+3%	0.7%
Ealing	1,488	1,131	1,041	-24%	-8%	-30%	0.3%
Watford	892	1,023	944	+15%	-8%	+6%	0.9%
Nottingham	626	1,069	941	+71%	-12%	+50%	0.4%

\* Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole UA comprises the former district of Christchurch and the former UAs of Bournemouth and Poole (changed 2019).

## / The benefits of the census

2021 marked the third occasion the Census has included a question on religion in England and Wales. As we have seen in the past, it continues to be an invaluable resource for the Jewish community. Even as the availability of administrative data recording religion continues to rise, it remains by far and away the gold standard in terms of data quality and detail.

Since the first set of religion data became available in 2001, census data have transformed the ways in which JPR has been able to analyse and understand the Jewish population and provide data insights to assist community organisations with their planning.

Census data have also underpinned the key data sources that have allowed Jewish community leaders and professionals to understand and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing population baselines we have been able to accurately weight data from JPR's COVID-19 surveys to make them more representative.<sup>5</sup> In addition, ONS was able to use longitudinal census data on religion to estimate the mortality impact on the community from the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, beyond COVID-19, all credible surveys of the Jewish population of the UK rely on census data to assess the accuracy of their samples. Survey work JPR conducts for organisations ranging from key UK Jewish charities to the European Union all draw on census data.

Over the coming months, more religion data from the 2021 Census will become available. This will help us add to the picture already painted here with data about age, health, welfare, partnerships and intermarriage, households, education, employment, migration, identity, tenure and even the pandemic. Census data will hold their value for many years to come.

### **/ Acknowledgments**

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<sup>5</sup> Graham, D. and Lessof, C. (2020). *Methodology: COVID-19 online panel survey*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics (2021). [Deaths involving COVID-19 by religious group, England: 24 January 2020 to 28 February 2021](#).



## / About the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life. Web: [www.jpr.org.uk](http://www.jpr.org.uk).

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