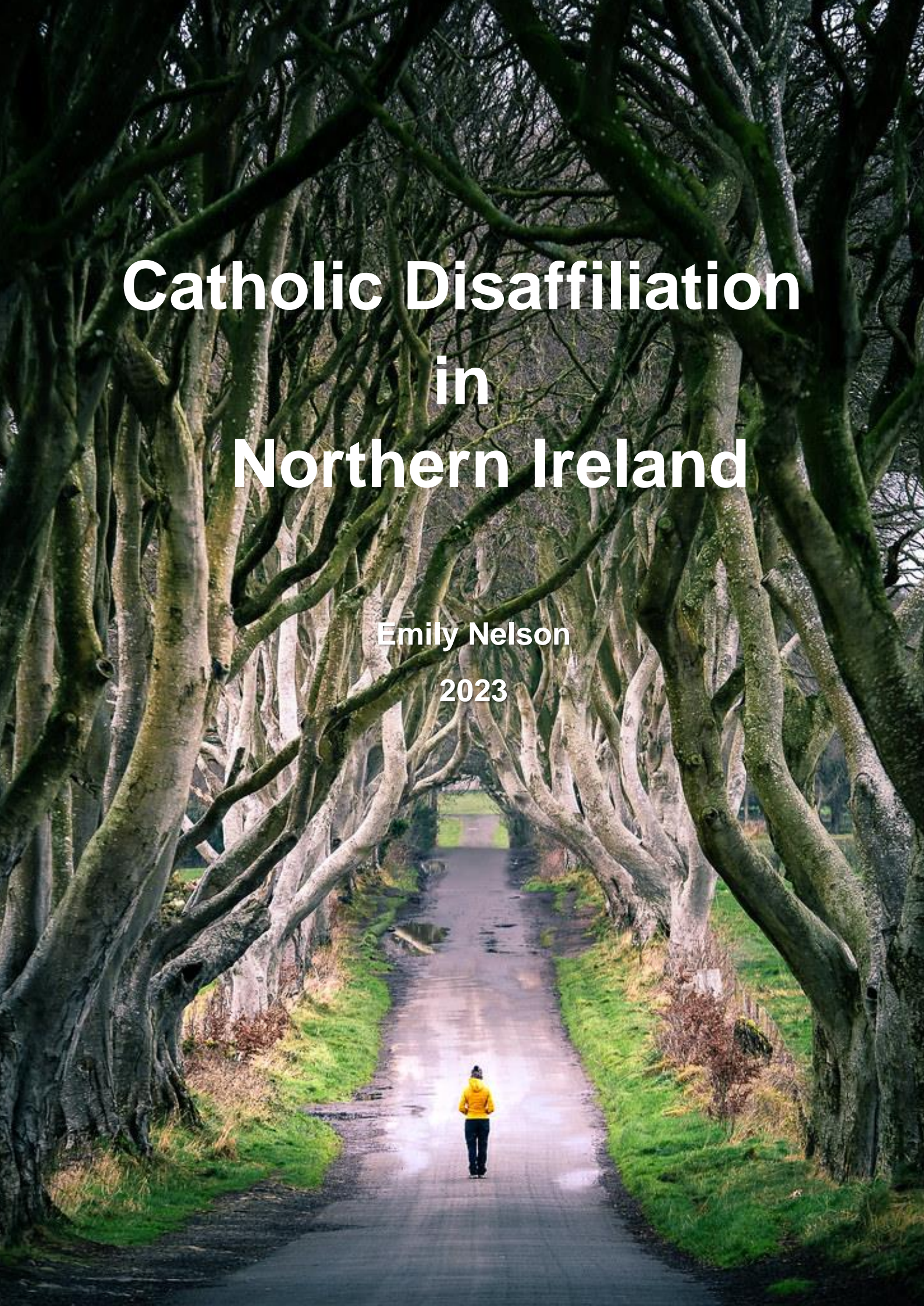


Catholic Disaffiliation in Northern Ireland

Emily Nelson

2023



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Acknowledgement...

To everyone who completed this questionnaire and who took the time and effort to fill this in and shared many very personal, at times moving stories, thank you for sharing a bit of yourself. I hope you feel what I have written is representative of your views and personal narratives. Thanks also to all who shared this questionnaire (and apologies to those who I pestered about it!). I was impressed by efforts made to distribute this survey and support I received for conducting this research. This research wouldn't have been possible without you. Thanks to Stephen Bullivant, my supervisor for this idea and all your assistance and advice. Lastly, to all who have been negatively affected by the issues brought up in this research. I hope you that representation through such work will bring some level of comfort and hope to your life.

This study is owed to many who contributed to its successful completion.

The primary researcher:	
Emily Nelson	Works in research and strategic development for Christian organisations and charities at FaithVersed. Following registration as a pharmacist, Emily decided to employ her scientific and evidence-based training to the theological sphere. She completed a Master's in Theology at St. Mary's University, Twickenham in which she attained a distinction. This report presents research which was completed under Professor Stephen Bullivant as part of the Theology qualification. Emily has since worked with various Christian organisations to aid their strategic development. In October 2023 she began a PhD in Sociology at Queen's University Belfast under Professor Gladys Ganiel, researching 'Catholic Disaffiliation on the Island of Ireland'.

Just so we're on the same page... Terminology:

- Northern Ireland (N.I) six counties in the northeast of the island of Ireland remaining under UK Governance
- Republic of Ireland (R.O.I) remaining 26 counties on this island which exist under a separate governing body
- The island of Ireland encompasses Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland together
- Britain refers to England, Scotland and Wales
- The UK embodies Britain and Northern Ireland
- Disaffiliation members of a particular community no longer identifying as such or associating themselves
- The Church here refers to the Catholic Church

Study Context: Northern Ireland



Figure 1: Map of Northern Ireland. Source: [Wikipedia](#)

In Northern Ireland, in contrast to the rest of the UK, religious identity is highly related to national identity.¹ Its recent history is shaped by ethno-religious conflicts between Catholics who widely identify as nationalists meaning they desire Irish rule and the predominantly Protestant unionists who desire British sovereignty. During 'the Troubles' thousands died; many more injured and underwent traumatic experiences of violence and sectarianism.² There remains debate regarding the role of religion in the conflicts³ but strong ties between national and religious identities illustrates the heightened complexity of the disaffiliation process for N.I inhabitants.

The prevalence of religious belief historically and within modernity illustrates the need to understand its influence, and what contributes to religious disaffiliation. Religiosity has been shown to effect educational level,⁴ engagement in labour force,⁵ fertility,⁶ attitudes of trust and risk,⁷ approach to cooperation,⁸ work ethics and honesty,⁹ amongst other traits.¹⁰ Disaffiliation impacts health and subjective well-being¹¹ and reflexivity.¹²

There has been significant religious decline in across Christian denominations within the UK and Ireland. In 2017 in England and Wales, there were "approximately four million" nonchurchgoing Catholics.¹³ Ireland was previously considered exception amongst the prevailing secularisation of the western European world¹⁴ but according to the 2022 census 69% identify as Catholic (down from 79% in 2016) and 14% identify as having no religion (up from 10% in 2016).¹⁵

Footnotes:

1. NINIS Religion in Northern Ireland (2011), <https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/census2011analysis/religion/religionCommentary.pdf> [Accessed: 8 August 2022]
2. David McKittrick and David McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), pp. 54
3. Claire Mitchell 'Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland' *Sociology of Religion* 26.1 (2005), 3–21 (p. 3) <https://academic.oup.com/socrel/article-abstract/66/1/3/1610109> [Accessed: 14 September]
4. David Landes *Culture Makes almost all the Difference. In Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 2-13
5. Folli Raquel Fernandez and Alessandra Fogli 'Culture: An Empirical Investigation of Beliefs, Work and Fertility' *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 1.1 (2009), 146–77
6. Shoshana Neuman and Adrian Ziderman 'How Does Fertility Relate to Religiosity: Survey Evidence from Israel' *Sociology and Social Research* 70.2 (1986), 178–80
7. Thomas Dohmen, Armin Falk, David Huffman, and Uwe Sunde 'The Intergenerational Transmission of Risk and Trust Attitudes' *The Review of Economic Studies* 79.2 (2012), 645–77
8. Marco Cipriani, Paola Giuliano and Olivier Jeanne 'Like Mother Like Son? Experimental Evidence on the Transmission of Values from Parents to Children.' *IZA Discussion Paper* (2007)
9. Rachel M. McCleary, and Robert J. Barro 'Religion and Economy' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20.2 (2006), 49–72
10. Pablo Brañas Garza and Shoshana Neuman 'Analyzing Religiosity within an Economic Framework: The Case of Spanish Catholics' *Review of Economics of the Household* 2 (2004), 5–22
11. Andrew Fenelon and Sabrina Danielsen 'Leaving my religion: Understanding the relationship between religious disaffiliation, health, and well-being' *Social Science Research* 57 (2016), 49–62 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X16000284> [Accessed: 15 June 2022]
12. Dominiek Coates 'The Effect of New Religious Movement Affiliation and Disaffiliation on Reflexivity and Sense of Self' *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 52.4 (2013), 793–809 (p. 793)
13. Stephen Bullivant, Catherine Knowles, Hannah Vaughn-Spruce and Bernadette Durcan *Why Catholics Leave, What they Miss and How they Might Return* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), pp. xiii
14. Máire Nic Ghiolla Phádraig Religion in Ireland: No longer an exception? (2009) <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2018-08/update64.pdf> [Accessed: 17 June 2022]
15. Central Statistics Office: Census of Population 2022 - Summary Results Migration and Diversity (2023) <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/> [Accessed: 30 May 23]

Context: Disaffiliation

NI census 2021 data provides insight and other research enables us to peruse the religious landscape. The conflicts were thought to contribute to religious trends through formation of ethnic identities and development of religious commitment.¹⁶ Almost everyone was raised as either a Catholic or Protestant and there remains very limited inter-sectarian religious mobility. It is much more likely for individuals to become religiously non-affiliated than a Catholic to become Protestant and visa-versa.¹⁷

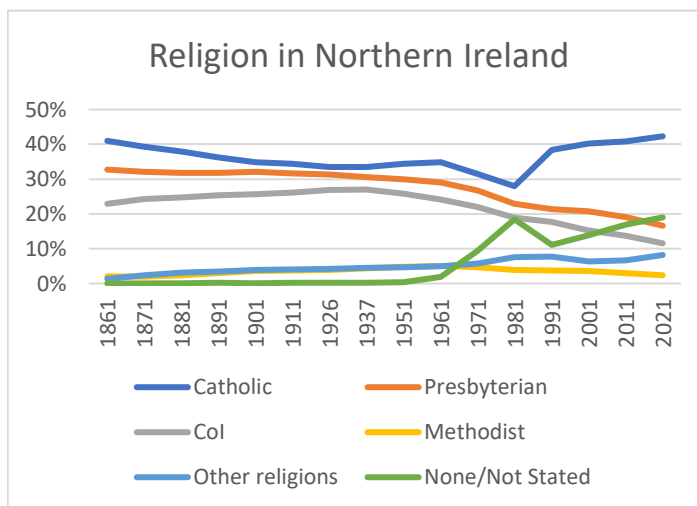


Figure 2: Religious Affiliation in Northern Ireland According to the 2021 Census

42.31% of the population identified as Catholics in the most recent census; varying little since 1861 when data begins. Those affiliated with no religion has significantly increased since 1961 reaching its peak in 2021 at 19%. Census results also show us religious upbringing. From this we can determine that 3.39% of those brought up as Catholic in N.I no longer identify as such (see figure 2) in comparison to an increase of 9.68% of those being brought up with no religion to currently identifying as such.¹⁸ Reasons behind disaffiliation are likely to be multifaceted.

In Ireland, religious practice has declined sharply (weekly mass attendance went from 85% in 1980 to 35% in 2012.¹⁹) There is little agreement with Church moral stances²⁰ and much institutional distrust.²¹ In Turpin's 2017 Qualtrics Panels survey data 11 known factors for rejecting Catholicism were ranked. These were in order: moral conservatism, clerical abuse, authoritarianism, everyday hypocrisy, irrational beliefs, inauthentic practice, personal irrelevance, boredom with services, scientific knowledge, secularist/atheist intellectual influence and knowledge of other religions.²² Derek Scalley's *The Best Catholics in the World* uncovered mixed perspectives on Catholicism in Ireland and the enduring legacy of Church scandals.²³

Many of the questions used on this survey were taken from a previous study that explored reasons behind Catholic disaffiliation in England²⁴ which itself took from previous research in America such as 'Why They Left'.²⁵

Footnotes:

16. Claire Mitchell 'Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland' *Sociology of Religion* 26.1 (2005), 3–21 (p. 3) <https://academic.oup.com/socrel/article-abstract/66/1/3/1610109> [Accessed: 14 September]
17. Richard Breen and Bernadette C. Hayes 'Religious Mobility in the UK' *Royal Statistical Society* 159.3 (1996), 493-504, pp. 493
18. NISRA Release: *Census 2021 main statistics for Northern Ireland (phase 1)* (2022) <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/2021-census/results/main-statistics> [Accessed: 22 September 22]
19. Gladys Ganiel 'Secularisation, Ecumenism, and Identity on the Island of Ireland.' In *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 73–90.
20. Eoin O'Mahoney *Religious Practice and Values in Ireland – A Summary of the European Values Study 4th wave data* (Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference, 2010)
21. Susie Donnelly and Tom Inglis 'The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child Sex Abuse' *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25 (2010), 1–19
22. Hugh Turpin *Unholy Catholic Ireland: Religious Hypocrisy, Secular Morality and Irish Irreligion* (California: Stanford University Press, 2022), pp. 32, 37, 65-72
23. Derek Scalley *The Best Catholics in the World: The Irish, the Church and the End of a Special Relationship* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2021)
24. Stephen Bullivant, Catherine Knowles, Hannah Vaughn-Spruce and Bernadette Durcan *Why Catholics Leave, What they Miss and How they Might Return* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), pp. xiii
25. William Bryon and Charles Zech 'Why They Left' *America: The National Catholic Review* (2012), 17-22

Survey Design and Data Collection

As far as the author is aware, this study is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland.

Survey Design

Research of all forms confers advantages and limitations. A questionnaire was selected as it removed interviewer bias, allowed for standardisation of questions facilitating comparisons, enabled participant anonymity increasing the likelihood of accurate responses and they enable researchers to elicit a great number of responses within a short period. However, they can be subject to a low response rate, misunderstandings, they assume respondents possess adequate self-understanding, they are limited by respondent literacy capabilities and it is impossible to determine the veracity of answers (though anonymity was provided increasing the likelihood of truthful responses). Open and closed questions were used to gain from the advantages of both.²⁶ Follow-up interviews remain a future possibility to supplement data.

All researchers can show a degree of bias thus attempts were made to reduce this by piloting questions on the target population and using quantitative data. It should be noted that the researcher is both Northern Irish and a practising Catholic. Openness about potential researcher bias is hoped to help reduce its influences in the reading of this work.

Participant Recruitment

This survey was initially piloted with contacts of the primary researcher who met the eligibility criteria. Thanks to their feedback, several changes were made to wording to add clarity.

For the final survey, as there is no organised group of 'disaffiliated Catholics' (as far as the researcher is aware!) so participants were recruited through a multitude of avenues aiming for a snowball effect. The primary researcher reached personal contacts, shared the link on social media, contacted political figures, Northern Ireland Humanists, Ikon Collective and sports associations. Communication with Catholic organisations extended to contacting all dioceses with parishes in N.I (most diocese transverse the border between N.I. and Ireland), several religious orders and individual parishes, the *Irish Catholic* newspaper, Drumalis retreat centre and the Iona Institute. Although results will never be fully representative, a range of means were used to increase representativeness.

The survey targeted adults (under 18's are generally more malleable in belief²⁷) either from or living in N.I who have been baptised as a Catholic and distanced themselves from the Church (for whatever reason). 13 responses were excluded as they did not meet the criteria, so the final sample contained 104 participants.

The bulk of the survey and question wording was taken from previous studies on the same topic to facilitate comparison.²⁸ Questions were added to further help us understand the scale of Catholic disaffiliation that exists generally and how this was represented in this study, on Catholic education, the effect of living in N.I. and apologetics understanding.

Footnotes:

26. Bill Graham *Developing a Questionnaire* (New York: Continuum, 2000)
27. David McClendon and Conrad Hackett 'When people shed religious identity in Ireland and Austria: Evidence from censuses' *Demographic Research* 31 (2014), 1297-1310
28. Gladys Ganiel 'Understanding the Sociology of Religion in Contemporary Ireland' in *The Study of Religions in Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022)

Let's get to the Good Stuff: Who Took Part?

To understand the representativeness of this data the participant demographics must be analysed.

In the final sample 31.7% identified as male and 68.3% identified as female. This does not reflect the Northern Irish population of 51% female and 49% male²⁹ nor the population of disaffiliated Catholics who are more likely to be male.³⁰

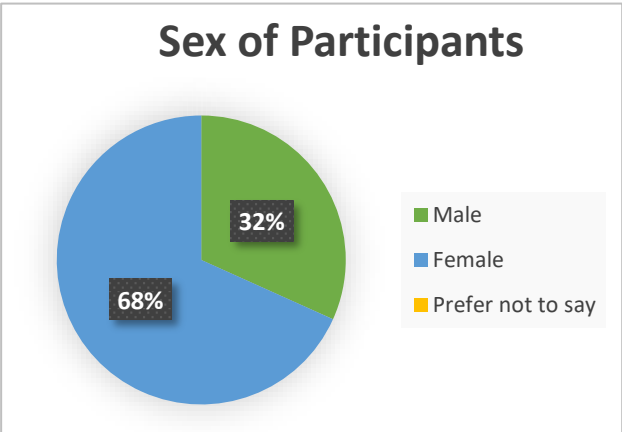


Figure 3: Participant Sex

This can be explained by the fact that on average, females are more likely to respond to survey requests and complete them,³¹ however it does limit the applicability of results to the target population. Ages are not proportionally reflected though there is a number from each age category.

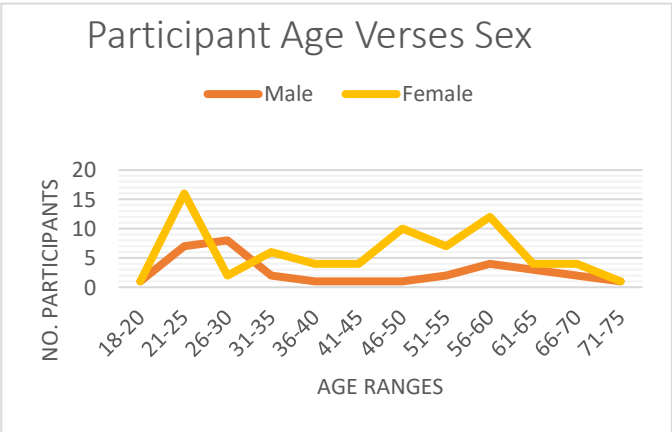


Figure 4: Participant Age Verses Sex

Another limitation imposed by this survey's demographics is the fact that 100% of participants were white. This is not a far cry from the Northern Irish population in which 96.6% identified as white.³² A breakdown of religion and race has not yet been released for the 2021 census but according to previous census data 99% of those identifying as Catholics were white.³³

85.6% of participants currently live in Northern Ireland the remainder used to. Most answers obtained were from the diocese of Down and Connor (35%) with Derry next (33%). The remaining answers were reasonably evenly split. 97.1% said they were raised in a Catholic family; significantly higher from the 88% of the study conducted in England.³⁴

Footnotes:

29. NISRA Population and Household Data Infographic (2022) <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-population-and-household-estimates-for-northern-ireland> [Accessed: 21 June 2022]
30. Stephen Bullivant *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data* Catholic Research Forum Reports 1 (London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016) <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf> [Accessed: 30 June 2022]
31. Richard Curtin, Stanley Presser and Elenor Singer 'The effects of response rate changes on the index of consumer sentiment' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000), 413–428 (p. 413)
32. Claire Mitchell 'Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland' *Sociology of Religion* 26.1 (2005), 3–21 (p. 3) <https://academic.oup.com/socrel/article-abstract/66/1/3/1610109> [Accessed: 14 September]
33. NISRA Census 2011: *Detailed Characteristics for Northern Ireland on Health, Religion and National Identity* (2013), pp. 40 <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/2011-census-results-detailed-characteristics-statistics-bulletin-16-may-2013.pdf> [Accessed: 27 September 22]
34. Stephen Bullivant, Catherine Knowles, Hannah Vaughn-Spruce and Bernadette Durcan *Why Catholics Leave, What they Miss and How they Might Return* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), pp. xiii

Catholic Feels

Questions on participants' religious affiliation indicate the extent of their disaffiliation. Asked if they regard themselves as a Catholic (on forms or surveys) 51% said yes and 29.8% said they would not. The majority of those who said no (83.3%) said they would describe themselves as having 'no religion' consistent with data showing that those who leave Catholicism tend to become religious 'nones'.³⁵

"I consider myself an atheist. I'm confident in my belief that the Christian god as described by the bible and modern Christians cannot exist." Male, 28

"I consider myself spiritual but not religious."
Female, 29

"It's odd really. Feel like I have much in common with Catholic Church and still feel somewhat connected to it, but also struggle with the hypocrisy" Male, 59

Most participants were non-practicing, only a minority felt they believed in Catholic teaching with most respondents somewhat believing and a slight majority felt positive about the faith, with strongly negative significantly more popular than strongly positive- see figures 5-7. When figure 7 is compared with Turpin's results, more participants here selected positive or neutral, which may be due to difference in wording, alternative perceptions in Northern Ireland verses the Republic of Ireland, or the over-representation of females in this sample who are on average more religiously inclined³⁶ and therefore may be more likely to view the Church in a positive manner.

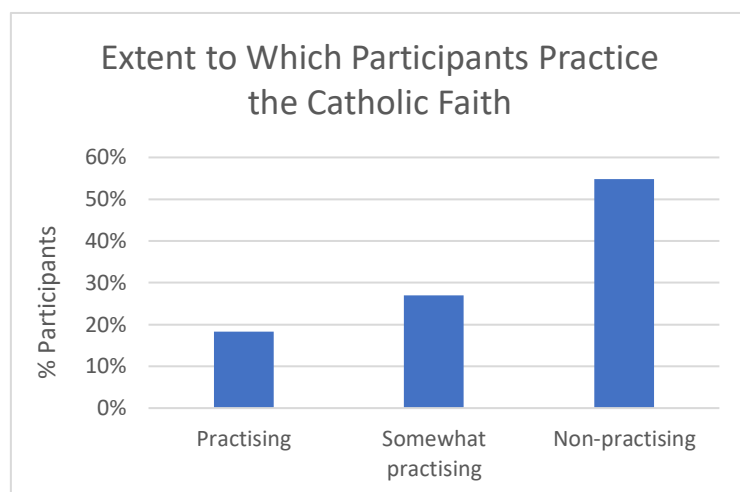


Figure 5: Extent to Which Participants Practice the Catholic Faith

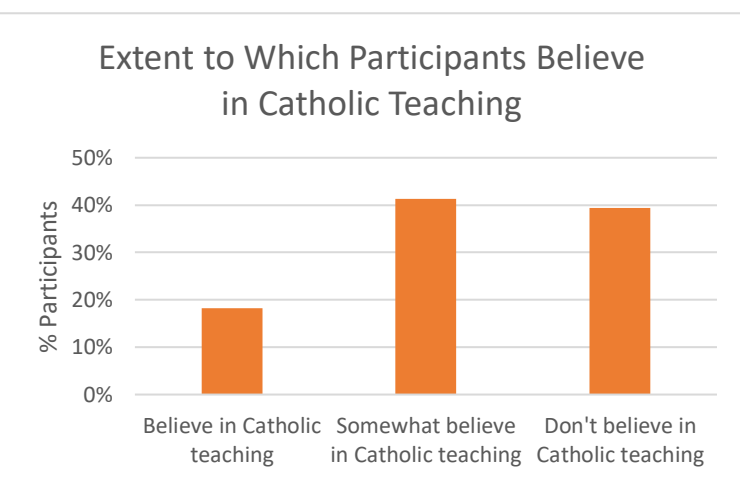


Figure 6: Extent to Which Participants Believe in Catholic Teaching

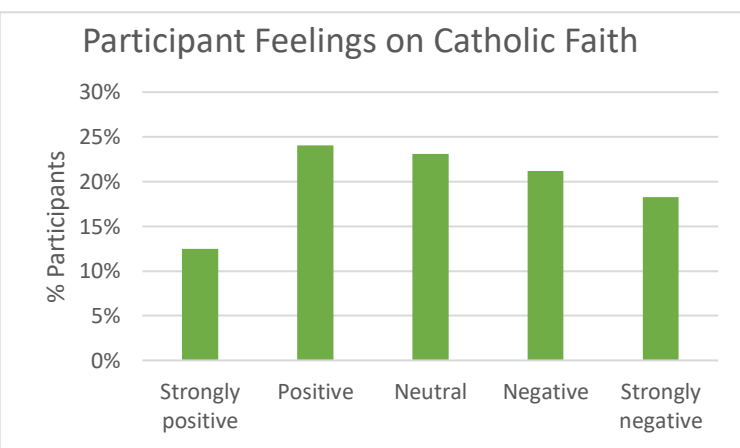


Figure 7: Participant Feelings on the Catholic Faith

Footnotes:

35. Stephen Bullivant *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 10, 36
36. Stephen Bullivant *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data* Catholic Research Forum Reports 1 (London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016) <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf> [Accessed: 30 June 2022]

Current Status & Schooling

Participants were then asked if there was a time when they attended Mass more regularly. 90 answers were provided, including:

“Attended every Sunday with my parents until I was about 14/15 when they let me choose to keep going or not. I stopped going as I felt it was a pointless chore.” Male, 25

“Took children to church. Sent them to Catholic schools. I personally have not believed since I was a teenager. The definition of a cultural Catholic. Children are grown up so I stopped.” Male, 61

When asked why they no longer practice the Catholic faith or distanced themselves 73 provided a range of answers, with some overlapping themes.

“There were several things about Catholicism and religion in general I always thought didn't make sense....” Male, 31

“I have distanced myself from the church because I believe that you don't need to go to church to be a Christian.” Female, 60

“I just feel like that whatever hope I had is now gone”
Female, 22

Catholic education remains prominent in Northern Ireland. In this survey, 96% went to a Catholic primary school and 95% a Catholic secondary school. Generally, Catholic primary schools were

felt to increase faith and secondary schools decrease or have a neutral impact (figures 8 and 9). The effects of a general decrease in faith as a teenager with the influence of their secondary school may have been conflated. The variation in participant ages means more research would be required to determine the effect of recent changes in Catholic education. Participants felt that they learnt more about what the Church teaches than the reason behind Church teachings and demonstrated unfamiliarity with apologetical material.

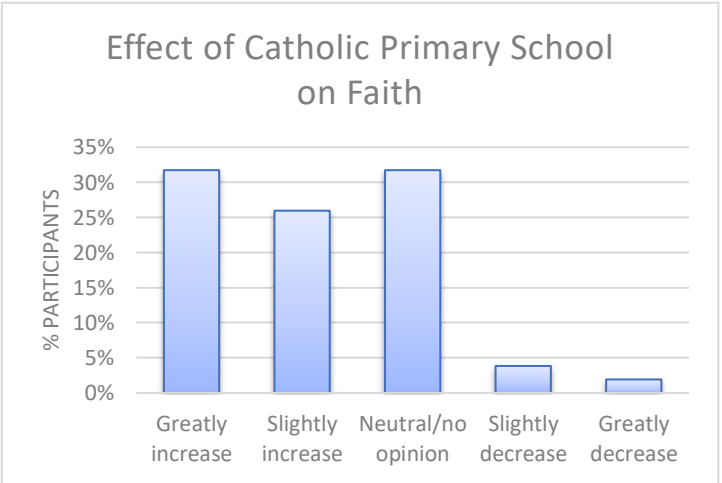


Figure 8: Effect of Catholic Primary School on Faith

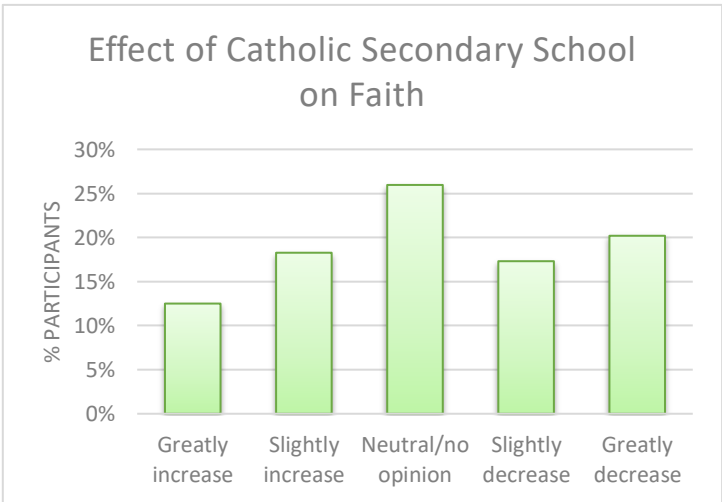


Figure 9: Effect of Catholic Secondary School on Faith

Apologetics, Living in N.I and Other Factors

Apologetics

Philosopher and Theologian William Lane Craig suggests apologetics can be employed to increase faith, change opinions and alter culture so Christianity is viewed as an intellectually viable option.³⁷ Irrational beliefs were ranked 5th on a scale of 11 factors in rejection of Catholicism. Scientific knowledge and secularist/atheist intellectual influence also ranked highly.³⁸ This report focuses on the effect of such knowledge on the sociological trend of disaffiliation.

There was much disagreement as to whether participants had heard good reasons to believe in Catholic teaching, if it was illogical, and whether there was too much suffering for a God to exist. A majority felt they were familiar with philosophical arguments for God's existence, historical evidence of the Bible and resurrection, authority of Catholic teaching and the purpose of Mass. More research would be required to determine the quality and content of argumentation participants were familiar with. Most disagreed that Catholics they admire had affected their desire to become Catholic again. A slight majority greatly disagreed these could have or would have affected their belief in Catholicism, with neutral next most popular.

Living in N.I.

Results indicated that for a large part, participants felt that the Troubles had no or little impact on faith though for some these did increase their faith. Sectarianism from the same community was more likely to decrease faith than that of a different community. Most expressed little impact on faith and described limited involvement of the Church at

this time. This indicates a minor role of the Troubles and living in Northern Ireland on Catholic disaffiliation.

"The actions or inaction of the RCC has been a major factor in dividing the people of NI" Female, 52

"Bloody Sunday destroyed my Catholic faith" Female, 72

"I was raised a Catholic, will always be part of me, but more the community than any belief." Male, 52

One response provided insight into N.I culture:

"As an English Catholic living in Northern Ireland it made me realise that I am not part of the Catholic "tribe" and that the reason that I am Catholic is purely from believe and love of God rather than because those are "my people". I totally felt/feel like an outsider."

Scandals across Ireland were felt to decrease faith. Nearly half felt local scandals had no effect.

Other Factors in Disaffiliation

Results demonstrate a range of issues contribute to disaffiliation. Factors with greater impact include negative experiences with the Church (personally or vicariously), dissent from Church teaching and general busy-ness making attendance difficult. More minor factors include music (more often mentioned positively), COVID and the availability of family-friendly and Latin Masses was as an issue for a number.

Footnotes:

37. William Lane Craig *On Guard: Defending Your Faith With Reason and Precision* (Colorado: David C Cook, 2010)
38. Hugh Turpin *Unholy Catholic Ireland: Religious Hypocrisy, Secular Morality and Irish Irreligion* (California: Stanford University Press, 2022), pp. 32, 37, 65-72

Future Projections

Measures of altering the trajectory of disaffiliation were explored. First, the likelihood of attending different events. Selected wording *How Likely to attend...* rather than how *interested* was felt would set a higher bar giving a more accurate indication of attendance and therefore impact.

None generated many 'highly likely' responses, the two that generated the most interest were the concept of a live debate and an event offering the opportunity to ask questions, though both had similar numbers for 'highly unlikely' as 'likely'. The least popular was a 'course that explored the basics of the Christian faith', then 'an event which explores if there is any logic behind Catholicism.'

Lastly, participants were offered two open questions. The first exploring whether they might return attracted 79 responses. Of these, 34 said something like no or never, often without any additional text.

"No. I've heard all the most advanced arguments for the existence of God and they haven't convinced me." Male, 31

"No. When the next pope is a black Irish lesbian" Female, 61

Some expressed potential for change.

"Yes I think I will return when it feels right for me. I don't think anything will help me do this." Female, 23

"Yes. As my children get older, it becomes less difficult to attend Mass." Female, 43

Others offered suggestions as to what they felt the Church could improve upon. A lot of these extended to change in doctrine, reduction in scandals and an improved response to these when they occur.

"End the pretentiousness" Male, 25

And others said that they never left or only partially indicative of the scale of disaffiliation.

"I haven't fully left but current approach of the church does impact my fuller involvement." Male, 46

"I have not left the church - better to stay and change from inside." Female, 71

The final question *"What things do you find attractive about the Catholic Church?"* attracted 74 responses. 14 of these said 'nothing' or similar. Some expressed attraction to particular ethical positions, that the Church brought them closer to God or community.

"They do funerals well" Female, 59

"Need a faith and a base" Female, 66

"Some of the ethical positions are sound." Male, 42

Others found the beauty of Churches attractive.

"Pretty buildings" Female, 61

Different aspects of the Church attract different people, and many feel there is nothing worthwhile in Catholicism. Reoccurring themes included the value of community, certain Church teachings, music, Church buildings, provision of sacraments and enhanced relationship with God.

Summary and Key Takeaways

Summary:

This report is intended for anyone who finds the trend of religious disaffiliation and its impact on society to be of interest. It may also be useful for the Catholic Church to contribute to ongoing formation as to how the Church might move forward in its current cultural climate. There remains much scope for future research in this topic; interviews, more detail on the topics explored, comparison with synodal results and correction of the scant work on Catholic disaffiliation on the island of Ireland would be of benefit.

The data from this study demonstrates that through each individual's story we see patterns of reasoning behind distancing from the Church. It's not the troubles but more a mix of personal experience and feeling of an organisation not delivering on standards expected and increasingly set apart from perceived societal norms. Doctrinal difference is a factor, but is it when combined with the failure to meet expected standards or societal norms, particularly for personal experience, that it regularly becomes exacerbated to point of disaffiliation. Catholic Primary school education has an overall increase in faith in previous attendees whilst the opposite is true for past pupils of Catholic secondary schools. There remains varying degrees of Catholic apologetics awareness. Many suggestions were offered for improvements, but how these and all survey results sit with potential for the Church without it losing its essence remains to be seen. These results capture a snapshot of individual narratives regarding the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland.

Key findings:

- Northern Ireland is its own cultural context. **Disaffiliation is increasing**
- A range of issues contribute to disaffiliation. Factors with greater impact include **negative experiences with the Church** (personally or vicariously), **dissent from Church teaching** and **general busy-ness** making attendance difficult
- Catholic **primary schools were felt to increase faith** and **secondary schools decrease**. Participants felt that they **learnt more about what the Church teaches, than the reason behind** Church teachings
- Catholicism is commonly **considered illogical** and this has contributed to disaffiliation. A **majority had heard pro-Catholic arguments**, future research would indicate *what* they heard
- Participants generally felt **the Troubles had no or little impact** on faith.
- **Different aspects of the Church attract different people**. Reoccurring themes included the value of **community, certain Church teachings, music, Church buildings**, provision of **sacraments** and enhanced **relationship with God**
- No potential events grabbed a majority, **concept of a live debate** and **an event offering the opportunity to ask questions** were more popular
- Many disaffiliated Catholics are **not open** to changing their status.
- Potential **methods for re-engaging** include a meaningful **community, hospitality** for all, **changing perceptions** of the Church particularly as being **illogical** and **unfair, strength-based ministry** and clear **expectations**

Thank you for reading this short report. If you would like more detail, have any questions, or want to discuss this or similar work please email emily@faithversed.org

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