



SCIENCE & RELIGION

EXPLORING THE SPECTRUM



Supplementary summary report of preliminary findings for a survey of public perspectives on Evolution and the relationship between Evolutionary Science and Religion

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Background and method

- This report presents findings from a study conducted for Newman University. The purpose of this research was to build a better understanding of public levels of acceptance or rejection of evolutionary science, as well as how members of the general public view the relationship between evolution and religion, and by extension science and religion.
- The study was conducted in two countries: the United Kingdom and Canada.
 - A survey of 2,129 UK adults was undertaken online between 12th May and 6th June, 2017. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 16+) by age, gender, region, social grade and ethnicity.
 - A survey of 2,009 Canadian adults was undertaken online between 17th May and 12th June, 2017. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Canadian adults (aged 18+) by age, gender, region, education level and ethnicity. Surveys were conducted with respondents in English or French respectively for respondents in Anglophone and Francophone Canada

Key Messages:

- Only a small minority endorse 'creationist' positions. Only 9% of all UK respondents selected "Humans and other living things were created by God and have always existed in their current form" and only 15% selected this option in Canada.
- Only a minority of religious or spiritual respondents endorse a 'creationist' position. Only 16% or roughly 1 in 6 religious or spiritual respondents in the UK and only 25% or 1 in 4 religious or spiritual respondents in Canada subscribe to the view that "Humans and other living things were created by God and have always existed in their current form".
- **Only 1 in 5 UK respondents (19%) and under 1 in 3 of Canadian respondents (29%)** who identified as religious or spiritual found it somewhat difficult, difficult or very difficult to accept evolutionary science in reference to their personal beliefs. This **compares to 53% in the UK and 41% in Canada who found it somewhat easy, easy or very easy.**

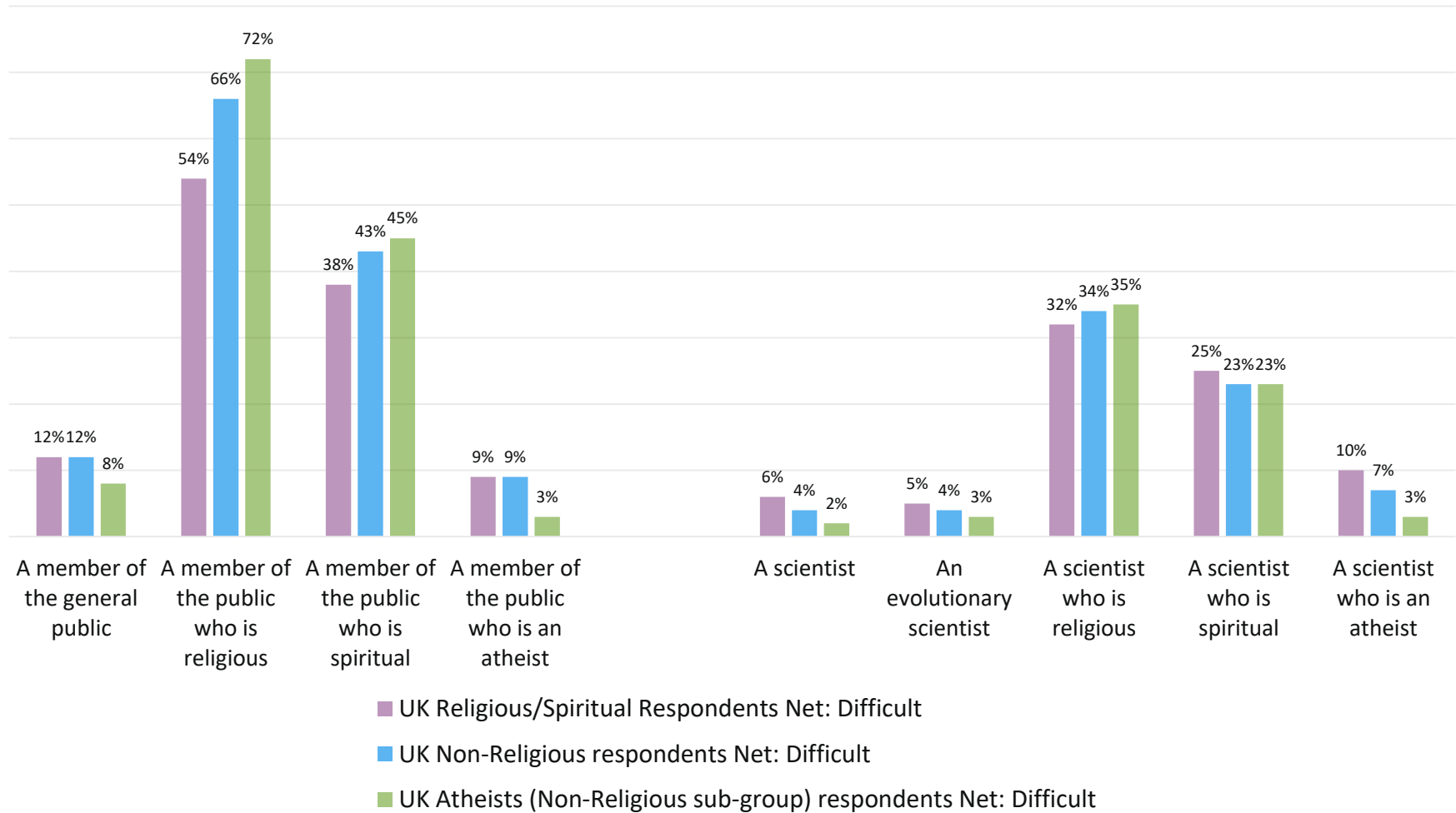
Levels of rejection or difficulty in accepting evolutionary science are relatively low in both UK and Canada

Key Messages:

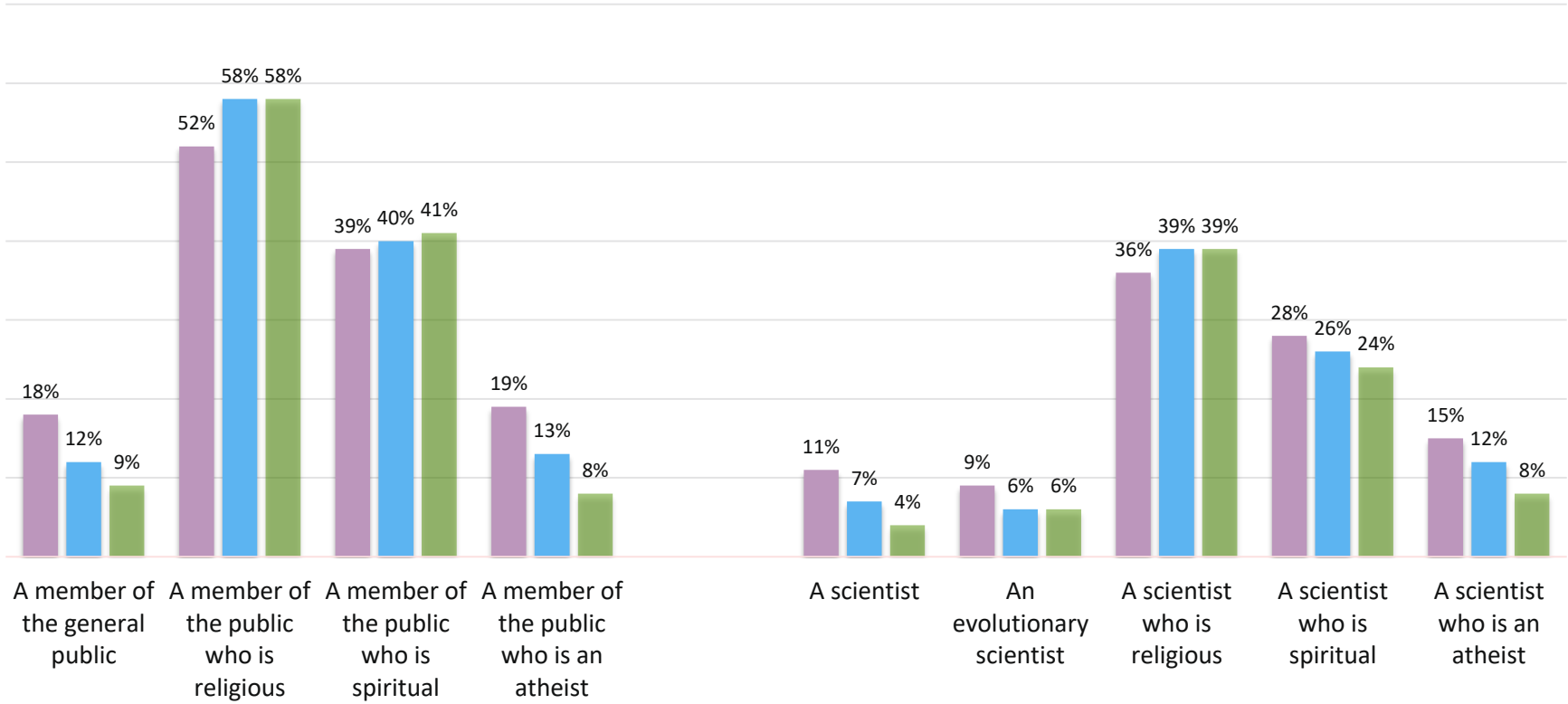
However.....

- When asked about other peoples ease or difficulty in accepting evolutionary science we see that the levels to which people think others will struggle is far higher than people actually reportedly experience.
- This is most pronounced when we asked about religious members of the public – with **nearly 2 in 3 of respondents in the UK (60%) and just over 1 in 2 of respondents in Canada (55%)** saying that they think **religious members of the public will find it very difficult, difficult or somewhat difficult to “accept information about evolutionary science**, in reference to THEIR own personal beliefs or way of seeing the world”.
- **Around 1 in 3 of respondents in both countries also thought that a scientist who is religious** is much more likely than an atheist scientist to **find it very difficult, difficult or somewhat difficult to “accept information about evolutionary science**, in reference to THEIR own personal beliefs or way of seeing the world”.
- We see similar levels of this kind of projection of a rejection of evolutionary science across all groups – so people think that others will struggle, regardless of whether they themselves are religious, spiritual or non-religious.

UK: How difficult or easy do you think the following people would find it to accept information about evolutionary science, in reference to THEIR own personal beliefs or way of seeing the world? NET responses for those who perceive others to find it very difficult, difficult, or somewhat difficult.



Canada: How difficult or easy do you think the following people would find it to accept information about evolutionary science, in reference to THEIR own personal beliefs or way of seeing the world? NET responses for those who perceive others to find it very difficult, difficult, or somewhat difficult.



- Canada Religious/Spiritual Respondents Net: Difficult
- Canada Non-Religious respondents Net: Difficult
- Canada Atheists (Non-Religious sub-group) respondents Net: Difficult

Conclusions:

- The idea that it is necessary to reject evolutionary science if you are religious is commonplace across religious and non-religious groups. However, this is not a necessary conflict as we found that more religious and spiritual people find it easy rather than difficult to accept evolutionary science in relation to their own beliefs in both the UK and Canada.
- However, this does not match up to the actual levels of rejection or difficulty in accepting evolutionary science. So **there is a mismatch** between **how we think religious people think** about evolutionary science and **what they actually think** about evolutionary science.
- Those who are themselves atheists or non-religious in the UK are more likely to think that religious people will struggle to accept evolutionary science.
- 1 in 3 people think religious scientists will struggle to accept evolutionary science in relation to their own beliefs – this highlights that publics may see certain aspects of the sciences as supporting atheism or non-belief.
- In a society that is increasingly non-religious, this mismatch in perception could be seen as a form of prejudice towards religious or spiritual groups. Surprisingly, this form of prejudice is present in both non-religious and religious groups.
- This mismatch in the way people think about evolution and the way social narratives or common place thinking tell them they should think about evolution may be one of the contributing factors in religious groups or individuals people saying they see a conflict between science and religion.

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