

Community Attitudes Survey Bulletin

January – December 2003

March 2004

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A continuous survey of public attitudes and views on crime, law and order and policing issues

This bulletin presents the findings from the eleventh year of the Community Attitudes Survey (January 2003 - December 2003).

The survey measures a broad range of attitudes towards crime, policing and the courts. It is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 16 and over living in Northern Ireland.

In the 2003 survey, there was a response rate of 68%, yielding a base of 1464 respondents. Of these, 54% were Protestant and 39% were Catholic. A further 7% of respondents did not identify their religion as either Protestant or Catholic. This bulletin represents the views

of all respondents.

In addition to this bulletin, a technical report is available. Information on how to access the technical report is provided at the end of this bulletin.

In 2003, there was a review of the questionnaire that resulted in some questions being removed or amended and new questions being added into the questionnaire. Therefore, care should be taken when comparing the results with previous years. A copy of the questionnaire for each year is available on the Central Survey Unit website along with detailed tables covering the results.

Perceptions of the level of crime

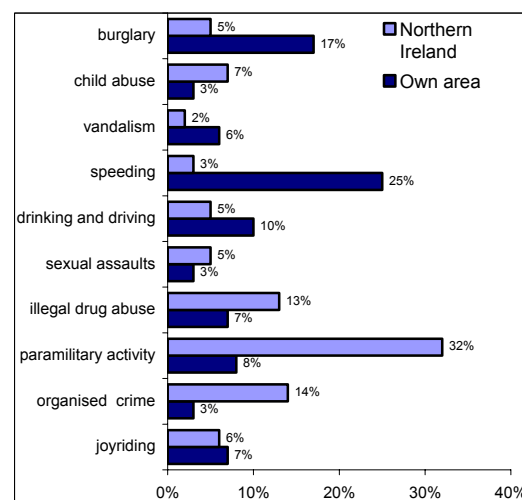
Nearly three in five respondents (57%) thought that the level of crime in their area was the same as two years ago. Three in ten respondents (30%) said that crime had increased in their area in the last two years.

Most people thought crime was uncommon in their area with the majority of people believing vandalism (73%), car crime (72%), burglary (71%) and illegal drug abuse (63%) were uncommon locally. Few respondents (4%) thought people in their area were likely to be attacked and have things stolen from them in the street.

The following issues were mentioned most frequently by respondents as issues police should devote most attention to in their own area: speeding (25%), burglary (17%) and drinking and driving (10%). When asked about the types of crime that should receive the most attention from police across Northern Ireland as a whole, respondents were most likely to mention paramilitary activity (32%), organised crime (14%) and illegal drug abuse (13%) (Figure 1). There was some difference

between the two communities in relation to paramilitary activity, with 37% of Protestants saying it should receive the most attention from the police in Northern Ireland compared to 25% of Catholics.

Figure 1: Issues which should receive most attention from the police in respondents' own area and in Northern Ireland as a whole

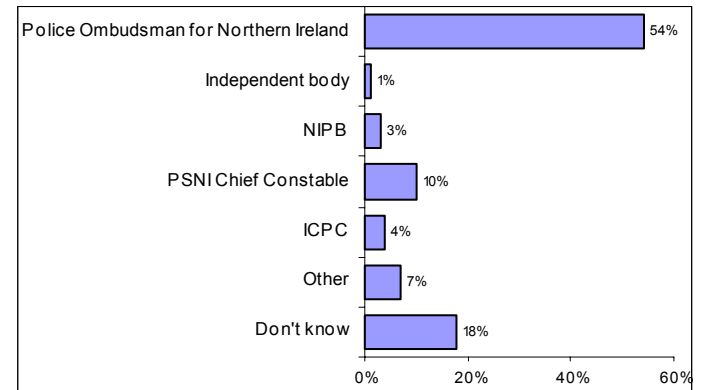


Responsibility for police complaints

Just over half of respondents (52%) would contact their local police station if they wanted to complain about the way a police officer behaved towards them or someone they knew, with 58% of Protestant respondents indicating they would use this method compared with 43% of Catholic respondents.

More than half of respondents (54%) thought that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was mainly responsible for looking into complaints against the police, with one in ten (10%) saying that this was the responsibility of the chief constable. Nearly one in five respondents (18%) said they did not know who was responsible for looking into police complaints (Figure 2). There was little difference between the two communities.

Figure 2: Respondents' views of responsibility for police complaints



Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

The majority of respondents (84%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Nearly eight in ten respondents said the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was independent of the police (76%).

Just over seven in ten respondents (71%) said that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland investigates complaints against the police in an impartial way (78% of Catholic and 65% of Protestant respondents). Most respondents (78%) thought they would be treated fairly if they were to make a complaint against a police officer to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, (82% of Catholic and 76% of Protestant respondents).

Seven in ten respondents said that they thought the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland treats the person making the complaint and the police officer being complained about equally (76% of Catholic and 67% of Protestant respondents). Of those who thought the two groups would not be treated equally, 62% said the police officer being complained about would be treated more favourably.

Almost four-fifths of respondents (79%) thought the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland would help ensure that the police do a good job (83% of Catholic and 78% of Protestant respondents).

Northern Ireland Policing Board

Over eight in ten respondents (84%) had heard of the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). Nearly two-fifths (39%) thought that the NIPB was part of the police while almost half (49%) thought the NIPB was independent of the police. Just less than three-quarters of respondents (74%) thought that the NIPB would help ensure that the police do a good job, with one in ten respondents (12%) disagreeing.

District Policing Partnerships

Less than half of respondents (48%) had heard of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs). Just over two-fifths of respondents (43%) were confident that the composition of their local DPP was representative of their local area, while a higher proportion were confident that DPPs would address policing problems (59%) and were prepared to contact their local DPP to raise local policing issues (60%).

Community policing

The majority of respondents (79%) thought that it was important for local people to have a say in the way in which they are policed. Seven in ten (70%) said that they thought that the police would take notice of a local group meeting regularly with them to discuss matters to do with policing in the community (74% of Protestant and 65% of Catholic respondents). Over a third (34%) expressed interest in joining such a group.

Nearly seven in ten respondents (68%) thought that

the police understood the kinds of problems faced by people in the area (72% of Protestant and 63% of Catholic respondents). Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) thought it was important that the police be prepared to explain their actions (70% of Catholic and 55% of Protestant respondents), while 22% thought that the police should be trusted to have acted in the best interests of the community (29% of Protestant and 14% of Catholic respondents).

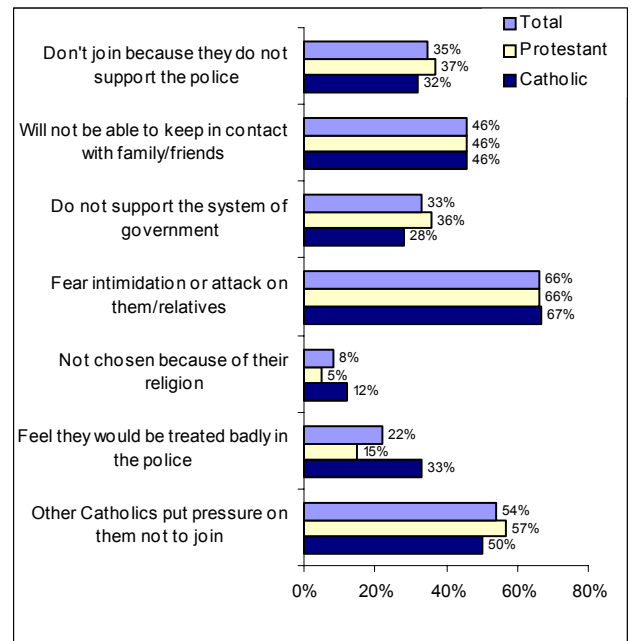
Composition of the police

Just less than half of respondents (48%) thought that there were too few Catholic members of the police (68% of Catholic and 34% of Protestant respondents). Almost half of respondents (48%) thought that the police try equally hard to recruit both Protestants and Catholics (54% of Catholic and 44% of Protestant respondents).

The main reasons respondents gave that might deter Catholics from joining the police in Northern Ireland were fear of intimidation or attack on them or relatives (66%) and other Catholics putting pressure on them not to join (54%) (Figure 3). Nearly a quarter of respondents thought that Catholics did not join the police because they felt they would be badly treated (22%). A third of Catholic respondents (33%) thought this compared to 15% of Protestant respondents (Figure 3).

Just under half of respondents (49%) thought that there were too few women in the police in Northern Ireland (56% of Catholic and 44% of Protestant respondents).

Figure 3: Reasons Catholics might be deterred from joining the police.



Contact with the police and reporting crime

Nearly four in ten respondents (37%) had initiated contact with the police during the previous 2 years. Of those who had been in contact with the police in the last two years, 71% had contacted the police to report a crime or other incident (75% of Catholic and 69% of Protestant respondents). Of these respondents, 61% were satisfied with the way the police handled the matter (65% of Protestant and 56% of Catholic respondents). Most (71%) said that this contact did not make their view of the police either more or less favourable.

Over four in five respondents (81%) said they would use the telephone (999 call, confidential telephone, Crimestoppers or ordinary telephone call) if they wanted to report a crime affecting themselves or someone else in their household. Only 16% said that they would visit the police station.

Over one in ten respondents (12%) had been approached by the police during the last two years (for reasons other than routine security checks).

Perceptions of the police

Two-thirds of respondents (65%) thought that, taking everything into account, the police in their area did a good job (69% of Protestant and 59% of Catholic respondents). Around seven in ten (72%) thought the police dealt fairly with everyone (78% of Protestant and 66% of Catholic respondents).

Protestant respondents had more positive attitudes about the police than Catholic respondents, the most notable difference relating to whether or not the police dealt fairly with paramilitary crime (Table 1).

Table 1: Perceptions of the police

	Total	Protestant	Catholic
Ordinary policing problems			
Polite	74%	79%	71%
Deal fairly	79%	81%	77%
Helpful	69%	72%	65%
Paramilitary or sectarian crime			
Deal fairly	64%	74%	54%
Do a good job	44%	50%	39%

A large number of respondents expressed positive attitudes about the police in relation to ordinary policing problems. The majority of respondents felt that the police were polite (74%) and helpful (69%) and dealt fairly with ordinary policing problems (79%). Two thirds (64%) of respondents thought the police dealt fairly with paramilitary or sectarian crime, although less than half thought the police did a good job with this type of crime (44%).

The courts and criminal justice system

Few respondents (13%) had contact with the courts during the previous two years. Just over two in five respondents (42%) felt that they understood the way in which the courts work.

Seven in ten respondents (70%) thought that the criminal justice system respects the rights of people accused of committing a crime and treats them fairly (75% of Protestant and 68% of Catholic respondents). Half of respondents (50%) thought the system was effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice. Around a third of respondents thought that the system met the needs of victims of crimes (33%) and dealt with cases promptly and efficiently (39%). Three in five respondents (60%) did not think that the system was effective in reducing crime.

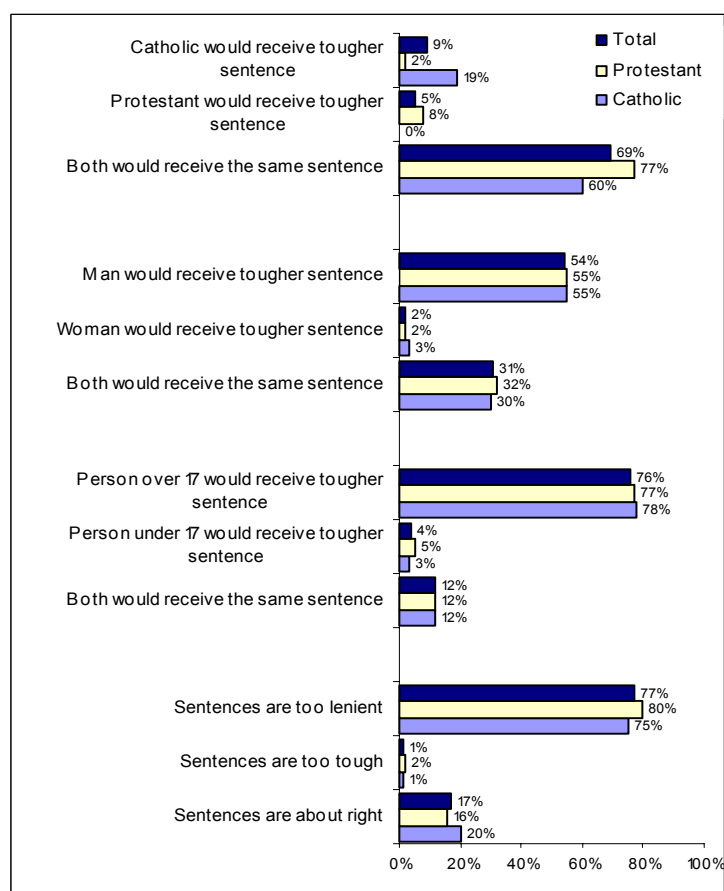
Respondents were asked how good a job they thought the various parts of the criminal justice system were doing. Nearly two-thirds (65%) thought the police were doing a good job (70% of Protestant and 58% of Catholic respondents). Around two in five thought judges and magistrates (42%), adult courts (40%), prisons (40%) and the probation services (40%) were doing a good job.

Three in five respondents were confident in the fairness of the criminal justice system (60%). Looking at the component parts of the criminal justice system, 74% had confidence in the contribution of juries, 70% were confident about the police's contribution, 60% were confident about the contribution of judges and magistrates, 56% were confident about the contribution made by the prisons and 55% were confident about the contribution made by the probation service. Protestant respondents expressed greater confidence in the contribution of the police than Catholic respondents (79% and 61% respectively).

Less than three in ten respondents (29%) thought the system was effective in dealing with young people accused of crime, with just over a quarter saying they thought the youth courts were doing a good job (26%). Around seven in ten respondents (71%) thought that the way the police and the courts deal with juvenile offenders was too lenient. A similar proportion (70%) said that if a young person had stolen something of theirs, they would be prepared to attend a meeting with the offender present, to help decide what should happen to them.

If two people from different religious community backgrounds were found guilty of the same crime, the majority of respondents (69%) thought they would receive the same sentence (77% of Protestant and 60% of Catholic respondents). If a man and a woman were found guilty of the same crime, less than a third (31%) thought they would receive the same sentence, with 54% of respondents saying that the man would receive a tougher sentence. In relation to a similar situation involving two people, one over 17 and one under 17, the majority of respondents (76%) said the person over 17 would receive the tougher sentence. Over three-quarters of respondents thought sentences handed down by the courts were too lenient (77%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Views on sentencing



Two-thirds of respondents thought that witnesses were treated well by the police (66%) and by the courts (64%). A lower proportion of respondents thought that victims were treated well by the police (58%) and the courts (47%).

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