

# Community Attitudes Survey Bulletin

## January – December 2000

June 2001

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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 eighth year of the Community Attitudes Survey (January 2000 - December 2000).

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.

The bulletin presents results derived from

those respondents who identified their religious denomination as either Catholic or Protestant. In the 2000 survey, this has yielded a base of 1204 respondents.

In addition to this bulletin, detailed tables covering results from each year of the survey since 1993/94 plus a technical report are available. Information on how to access these reports is provided at the end of this bulletin.

## Perceptions of the level of crime

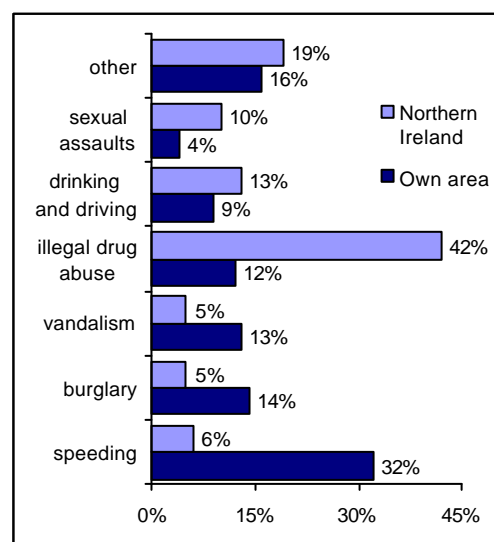
Most people think crime is uncommon in their area with the majority of people believing burglary (75%), car crime (72%), vandalism (71%) and illegal drug abuse (62%) are uncommon locally. The crime people think to be the least likely to occur in their area is mugging (4%). However, the belief that vandalism is common is at its highest level (28%) since the survey commenced. Although the perception of crime in their area was similar between the two communities, Protestants (25%) were less likely to think that vandalism was common in their area than Catholics (33%).

Around three-fifths of respondents (61%) thought that the level of crime in their area was the same as two years ago. However over a quarter (27%) thought that, in comparison to two years ago, the level of crime had increased.

The following issues were mentioned most frequently by respondents as issues that the police should devote most attention to in their area: speeding (32%), burglary

(14%), vandalism (13%) and illegal drug abuse (12%). The issues people thought the police should give the most attention to in Northern Ireland as a whole were illegal drug abuse (42%) and drinking and driving (13%).

**Figure 1: Issues which should receive the most attention from the police in own area and in Northern Ireland.**



## Personal fear of crime

Most respondents thought they would be unlikely to be victims of crime. However, nearly a quarter thought they were likely to be victims of some form of car crime with 24% thinking they were likely to have their car stolen, 24% thinking they were likely

to have their car damaged by vandals and 23% thinking that they were likely to have things stolen from their car. One in five thought it likely they would be the victim of a burglary while 13% thought they were likely to have their home damaged by vandals.

## Personal precautions taken against crime

The most common home security measures were double locks or deadlocks (52%), window locks (50%) and indoor or outdoor lights with a timer or sensor (38%), (Table 1). In contrast only 15% of respondents had burglar alarms fitted.

Respondents were more likely to report having car security devices, the most common ones including central locking (68%), a security coded radio or cassette player (65%), an immobiliser (48%) and an alarm (41%).

More than four-fifths of respondents (83%) have the contents of their home insured against theft. Three-fifths of respondents thought that it would be easy for a burglar to get into their home.

Protestant respondents were generally more likely than Catholic respondents to report having home or car security devices installed and to have their house contents insured against theft. Catholic respondents were more likely to report that it would be easy for a burglar to get into their home.

**Table 1: Home and car security measures present as a precaution against crime**

| Home security measures                  | Total | Protestant | Catholic |
|---|-------|------------|----------|
| Home insurance                          | 83%   | 85%        | 78%      |
| Double locks or deadlocks               | 52%   | 56%        | 45%      |
| Window locks                            | 50%   | 53%        | 47%      |
| Indoor/outdoor lights with a timer      | 38%   | 41%        | 32%      |
| Burglar alarm                           | 15%   | 19%        | 9%       |
| Security marking on household property  | 14%   | 16%        | 11%      |
| Car security measures                   |       |            |          |
| Central locking                         | 68%   | 68%        | 67%      |
| Security coded radio or cassette player | 65%   | 65%        | 63%      |
| An immobiliser                          | 48%   | 54%        | 37%      |
| An alarm                                | 41%   | 41%        | 41%      |
| Engine cut-out                          | 33%   | 37%        | 27%      |

## Contact with the police and reporting crime

Most people have little contact with the police. Less than one-third of people (30%) had initiated contact with the police during the previous twelve months, while 12% had been approached by the police (for reasons other than routine security checks).

Around four-fifths of all respondents (81%) said that they would use the telephone (999 call, confidential telephone or ordinary telephone call) if they wanted to report an ordinary crime, a nuisance or a disturbance. Only 14% said that they would visit the police station.

Most respondents said that if they witnessed a burglary or were the victim of a burglary, they would

report it to the police.

When respondents were asked what they would do if they saw an unknown perpetrator burgle a stranger's house, 95% said they would report it to the police, 87% would be prepared to provide a statement to the police and 70% would be prepared to give evidence in any subsequent court trial.

If the respondent's own home was burgled and items stolen, nearly all the respondents (99%) said they would report the crime, 98% said they would be prepared to provide a statement to the police and 93% stated they would be prepared to give evidence in court.

## Perceptions of the police

Most people have positive attitudes about the police. Around three-quarters of respondents felt that police were polite (73%) and helpful (71%) when dealing with ordinary problems. Similarly 75% said that the police deal fairly with everyone and 72% thought that the police in their area do a good job.

Protestant respondents expressed more positive attitudes to the police in these areas than Catholic

respondents, the most notable difference relating to whether or not the police do a good job (table 2).

**Table 2: Perceptions of the police**

|               | Protestant | Catholic |
|---------------|------------|----------|
| Polite        | 76%        | 68%      |
| Helpful       | 75%        | 63%      |
| Deal fairly   | 81%        | 63%      |
| Do a good job | 79%        | 58%      |

## Responsibility for police complaints

Nearly three-fifths of respondents (59%) would contact the local police station if they wanted to complain about the way a police officer behaved towards them or someone they knew. There was a difference between the two communities in this response with 66% of Protestant respondents indicating they would contact the local police station compared with 48% of Catholic respondents.

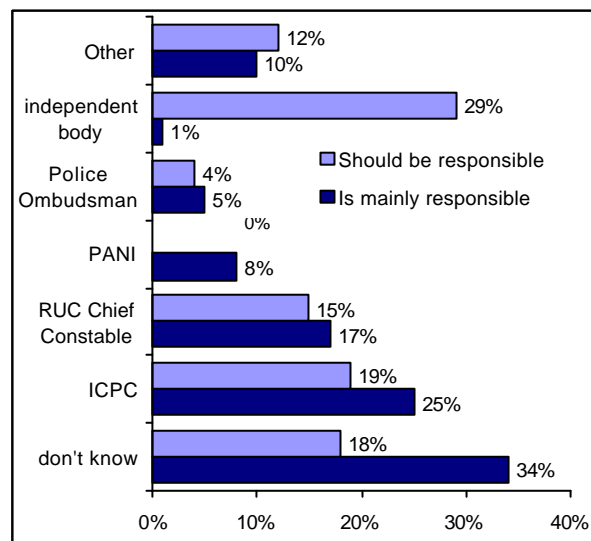
Over one-third (34%) of respondents did not know who was mainly responsible for looking into complaints against the police and 25% said that the Independent Commission for Police Complaints was mainly responsible (Figure 2).

In terms of who should be responsible for police complaints, 29% indicated that it should be a completely independent body outside the police (39% of Catholic and 23% of Protestant respondents), 19% thought it should be the Independent Commission for Police Complaints and 18% didn't know who should be responsible.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) had heard of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland (79% of Protestant and 63% of Catholic respondents).

Of these, 48% thought that PANI was part of the police (58% of Catholic and 43% of Protestant respondents) while 42% thought PANI was independent of the police (46% of Protestant and 32% of Catholic respondents).

**Figure 2: Respondent's views of responsibility for police complaints**



## Community Involvement in policing

Only 28% of respondents had heard of the Police Citizen's Charter.

If respondents wanted to see a change in the way the police do their job in their area, 25% would contact their local police station and 25% would contact their elected representatives.

In all, 28% of respondents said they would be interested in joining a local group meeting regularly with the police to discuss policing. While less than half of respondents (45%) had heard of the

Community Police Liaison Committees, 92% thought they were a good idea and 89% thought all communities should have one.

## Composition of the police force

While 56% of respondents thought that the police try equally hard to recruit both Protestants and Catholics, 70% of respondents (85% of Catholic and 60% of Protestant respondents) thought that there were too few Catholic members of the police force.

## The courts and criminal justice system

Very few people have had contact with the courts with just one in ten respondents having been in contact with the courts during the previous twelve months. While only 40% felt that they understood the way in which the courts work, 88% thought it was important to have such an understanding.

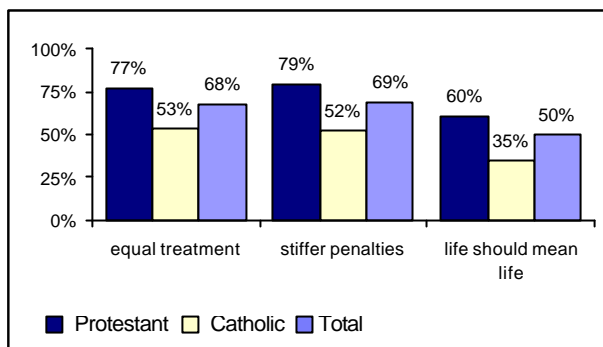
Looking at the criminal justice system overall, 69% of respondents had confidence in the fairness of the system. In relation to the component parts, 78% were confident about the contribution of judges and magistrates to the fairness of the system, 76% had confidence in the contribution of juries, 73% were confident about police contribution and 69% had confidence in the contribution of lawyers. Protestant respondents expressed greater confidence in the contribution of the police, judges and magistrates, while Catholic respondents expressed greater confidence in the contribution of lawyers to the fairness of the system.

Although respondents were, for the most part, confident in the criminal justice system, 91% thought that guilty people are sometimes found innocent and 83% thought that innocent people are sometimes found guilty.

Nearly four-fifths of respondents (79%) thought that the courts gave equal treatment to Protestants and Catholics accused of committing non-terrorist offences (84% of Protestant and 71% of Catholic respondents) (Figure 4). In terms of terrorist offences just over two-thirds (68%) thought that there was equal treatment (77% of Protestant and 53% of Catholic respondents) (Figure 3).

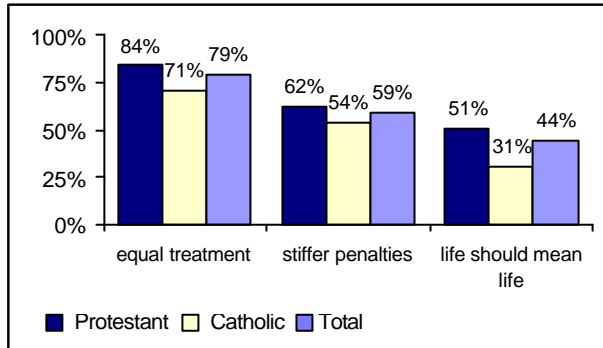
While 59% felt that the penalties handed out by the courts for non-sectarian crimes should be stiffer (62% of Protestant and 54% of Catholic respondents) (Figure 4), a larger proportion (69%) thought that the penalties for sectarian crimes should be stiffer than at present (79% of Protestant and 52% of Catholic respondents) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Views on courts and sentencing for terrorist/sectarian offences**



Half of the respondents (50%) thought that a life sentence for a terrorist offence should mean life (Figure 3), with slightly less (44%) indicating that for a non-terrorist offence a life sentence should mean life (Figure 4). Protestant respondents were more likely to say that a life sentence should mean life for both terrorist and non-terrorist offences.

**Figure 4: Views on courts and sentencing for non-terrorist/non-sectarian offences**



While fewer than two in five respondents (37%) thought that the availability of legal aid was about right, 27% felt that they couldn't comment.

The majority of respondents (78%) thought that contact between prisoners and their families during imprisonment would help in their rehabilitation.

**For additional copies of this bulletin or for the detailed tables and technical report, please contact:**

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