

Community Attitudes Survey Bulletin

January – December 2001

May 2002

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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 ninth year of the Community Attitudes Survey (January 2001 - December 2001).

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 2001 survey, this has yielded a base of 1246 respondents out of a total of 1313.

In addition to this bulletin, detailed tables covering results of the survey from 1994/95 to 2001 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

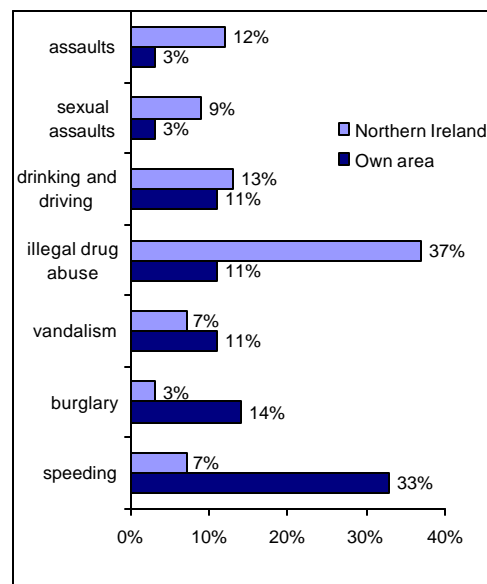
Three-fifths of respondents (60%) thought that the level of crime in their area was the same as two years ago. However over a quarter (28%) thought that, in comparison to two years ago, the level of crime had increased.

Most people think crime is uncommon in their area with the majority of people believing vandalism (71%), burglary (71%), car crime (68%) and illegal drug abuse (64%) are uncommon locally. Only 5% of respondents thought they were likely to be mugged in their area. The perception that crime in their area was uncommon was similar between the two communities.

The following issues were mentioned most frequently by respondents as issues that the police should devote most attention to in their area: speeding (33%), burglary (14%), vandalism (11%), drinking and driving (11%) and illegal drug abuse (11%). The issues people thought the police should give the most attention to in Northern Ireland as a whole were illegal drug abuse (37%), drinking and driving (13%) and assaults (12%). Protestants

(34%) were less likely to think that the police should devote more attention to drug abuse in Northern Ireland than Catholics (41%).

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. Few women (5%) thought that it was likely that they would be raped or sexually assaulted and only 9% of respondents thought it was likely that they would be mugged and robbed. Nearly a quarter (22%) thought that it was likely that their home would be broken into and something stolen.

In the last three years, there has been an increase in respondents who thought they were likely to be

victims of some form of car crime (Table 1).

Table 1: Fear of car crime in the last three years

	1999	2000	2001
Car stolen	23%	24%	29%
Something stolen from car	20%	23%	27%
Car damaged by vandals	18%	24%	25%

Personal precautions taken against crime

Most respondents (79%) mentioned having at least one home security measure. The most common home security measures were window locks (59%), double locks or deadlocks (55%) and indoor or outdoor lights with a timer or sensor (38%). More than four-fifths of respondents (82%) have the contents of their home insured against theft. Less than three-fifths (57%) of respondents thought that it would be easy for a burglar to get into their home.

Most respondents (95%) mentioned having some form of car security device. The most common car security devices were central locking (76%), a security coded radio or cassette player (73%), an immobiliser (51%) and an alarm (43%).

Over the last three years of the survey, there has been an increase in the reported use of both home and car security measures (Table 2). In 1999, 47% of respondents had window locks in their home compared to 59% of respondents in 2001. The use

of central locking in cars has risen from 62% in 1999 to 68% in 2000 and to 76% in 2001.

Table 2: Home and car security measures present as a precaution against crime in the last three years

Home security measures	1999	2000	2001
Window locks	47%	50%	59%
Burglar alarm	16%	15%	20%
Car security measures			
Central locking	62%	68%	76%
Security coded radio or cassette player	66%	65%	73%
Door locks which cannot be opened if the window is broken	19%	19%	24%

Contact with the police and reporting crime

Most people have little contact with the police. Less than three in ten respondents (29%) had initiated contact with the police during the previous twelve months (33% of Protestants and 24% of Catholics). One in ten respondents (10%) had been approached by the police during the same period (for reasons other than routine security checks).

Over four in five respondents (83%) said 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 12% said that they would visit the police station.

Most respondents said that if they witnessed a burglary in their own or a stranger's home, they would report it to the police, provide a statement and give evidence in court (Table 3).

Table 3: Reporting a burglary in their own or a stranger's home

	Own home	Stranger's home
Report the crime	99%	95%
Provide a statement	98%	87%
Give evidence in court	92%	70%

Perceptions of the police

Most respondents expressed positive attitudes about the police. Over seven in ten respondents felt that police were polite (74%) and helpful (72%) when dealing with ordinary policing problems and deal fairly with everyone (72%). Nearly seven in ten respondents (69%) thought that the police in their area do a good job.

Protestant respondents have more positive attitudes about the police than Catholic respondents, the

most notable difference relating to whether or not the police deal fairly with everyone.

Table 4: Perceptions of the police

	Protestant	Catholic
Polite	80%	65%
Helpful	77%	63%
Deal fairly	83%	57%
Do a good job	79%	55%

Responsibility for police complaints

Just over half of respondents (53%) 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 65% of Protestant respondents indicating they would use this method compared with 36% of Catholic respondents.

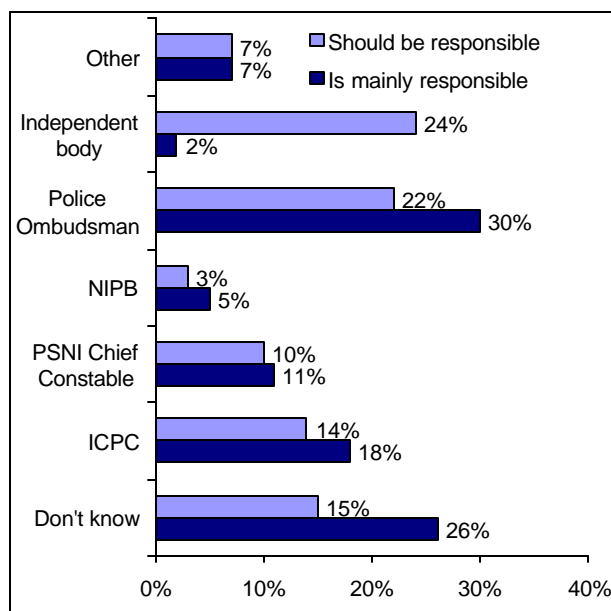
The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland took over responsibility for dealing with complaints against the police in November 2000. Three in ten respondents (30%) said that the Police Ombudsman was mainly responsible for looking into complaints against the police compared with 5% in 2000. There was also a decrease in the percentage of respondents who did not know who had this responsibility, from 34% in 2000 to 26% in 2001.

Similarly, there was an increase in the proportion of respondents who thought that the Police Ombudsman should be responsible for police complaints, from 4% in 2000 to 22% in 2001. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) indicated that it should be a completely independent body outside the police (32% of Catholic and 18% of Protestant respondents)

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) had

heard of the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). Of these, 41% thought that the NIPB was part of the police while 47% thought the NIPB was independent of the police.

Figure 2: Respondents views of responsibility for police complaints



Community involvement in policing

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) had never 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, 29% would contact their elected representatives and 24% would contact their local police station. However, 18% of respondents did not know who they would contact.

While less than half of respondents (44%) had heard of the Community Police Liaison Committees, 93% thought they were a good idea and 89% thought all communities should have one.

Composition of the police force

Nearly seven in ten respondents (69%) thought that there were too few Catholic members of the police force (85% of Catholic and 57% of Protestant respondents). Just over half of respondents (52%) thought that the police try equally hard to recruit both Protestants and Catholics.

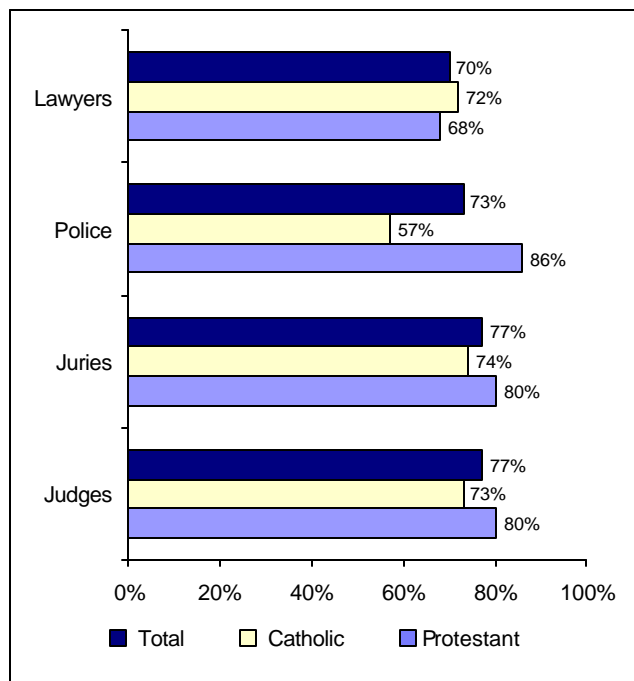
Respondents cited fear of intimidation or attack on them or their relatives (68%) and pressure from other Catholics not to join the police force (61%) as the two most common reasons they thought might deter Catholics from joining the police force in Northern Ireland.

The courts and criminal justice system

Less than one in ten respondents (8%) had contact with the courts during the previous twelve months. While the majority of respondents (88%) felt it was important to have an understanding of the way in which the courts work, less than half of respondents (43%) felt that they had this understanding.

Most respondents had confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system (71%). Looking at the component parts of the system, 77% were confident about the contribution of judges and magistrates to the fairness of the system, 77% had confidence in the contribution of juries, 73% were confident about police contribution and 70% had confidence in the contribution of lawyers. Protestant respondents

Figure 3: Confidence of respondents about the contribution of the following to the criminal justice system



expressed greater confidence in the contribution of the police, judges and magistrates and juries than Catholics (Figure 3).

While respondents were, for the most part, confident in the criminal justice system, 89% thought that guilty people are sometimes found innocent and 79% thought that innocent people are sometimes found guilty.

Over four-fifths of respondents (82%) thought that the courts gave equal treatment to Protestants and Catholics accused of committing non-terrorist offences (87% of Protestant and 75% of Catholic respondents). In terms of terrorist offences just over two-thirds (69%) thought that there was equal treatment (77% of Protestant and 59% of Catholic respondents).

Over six in ten respondents (61%) felt that the penalties handed out by the courts for non-sectarian crimes should be stiffer (66% of Protestant and 55% of Catholic respondents). A larger proportion (71%) thought that the penalties for sectarian crimes should be stiffer than at present (84% of Protestant and 54% of Catholic respondents).

Half of the respondents (50%) thought that a life sentence for a terrorist offence should mean life, with slightly less (41%) indicating that for a non-terrorist offence a life sentence should mean life. Protestant respondents were more likely to say that a life sentence should mean life for both terrorist and non-terrorist offences.

Two in five respondents (40%) thought that the availability of legal aid was about right, while 27% of respondents felt that they couldn't comment.

The majority of respondents (79%) thought that contact between prisoners and their families during imprisonment would help in their rehabilitation (74% of Protestant and 84% of Catholic respondents).

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

Central Survey Unit
McAuley House
2-14 Castle Street
Belfast BT1 1SY

Tel: (028) 9034 8222

Fax: (028) 9034 8205

Visit the NISRA website
at

www.nisra.gov.uk

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