

Community Attitudes Survey Bulletin

January – December 2002

March 2003

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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 tenth year of the Community Attitudes Survey (January 2002 - December 2002).

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 2002 survey, there was a response rate of 65%, yielding a base of 1430 respondents. Of these, 54% were

Protestant and 40% 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. Detailed tables covering results of the survey for this year will be available in April on the NISRA website.

Perceptions of the level of crime

Most people think crime is uncommon in their area with the majority of people believing burglary (73%), vandalism (71%), car crime (68%) and illegal drug abuse (62%) are uncommon locally. Only 5% of respondents thought people in their area were likely to be attacked and have things stolen from them in the street. The perception that crime in their area was uncommon was similar between the two communities.

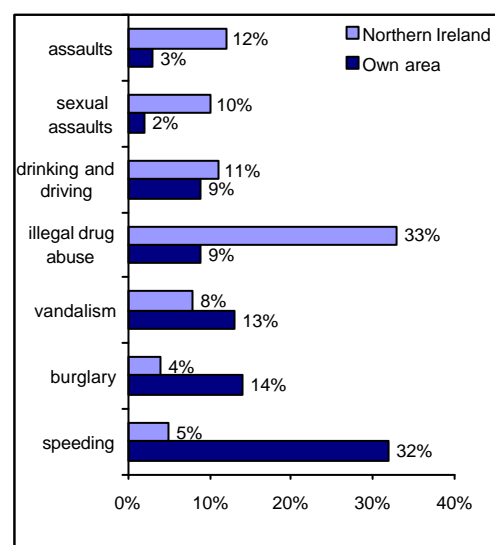
Nearly three-fifths of respondents (58%) thought that the level of crime in their area was the same as two years ago. Just over three in ten respondents (31%) in 2002 thought that, in comparison to two years ago, the level of crime had increased. This has not changed significantly since 2001.

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%) and vandalism (13%) (Figure 1). Of the respondents who mentioned speeding, 30% said the police were doing a good job dealing with speeding in their area.

The issues people thought the police should pay the most attention to in

Northern Ireland as a whole were illegal drug abuse (33%), assaults (12%) and drinking and driving (11%) (Figure 1). Of the respondents who mentioned drug abuse, 43% of them thought the police were doing a good job dealing with drug abuse in Northern Ireland.

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



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Personal fear of crime

Most respondents thought it was unlikely that they would be the victim of a crime. Few women (6%) 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. Just over one in ten respondents (12%) thought it was likely they would have their home damaged by vandals, while around one in five (22%)

thought that it was likely that their home would be broken into and something stolen.

Respondents were more likely to think they would be a victim of car crime with nearly three in ten respondents thinking that they were likely to have their car stolen (29%), something stolen from their car (27%) or their car damaged by vandals (27%).

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 (56%) and indoor or outdoor lights with a timer or sensor (41%). More than four-fifths of respondents (83%) have the contents of their home insured against theft. Almost three-fifths (57%) 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 security measures and to have their house contents insured against theft.

The majority of respondents (94%) mentioned having some form of car security device. The most

common car security devices were central locking (77%), a security coded radio or cassette player (74%) and an immobiliser (53%).

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

	Total	Protestant	Catholic
Home insurance	83%	86%	79%
Window locks	59%	60%	56%
Double locks or deadlocks	56%	60%	52%
Indoor/outdoor lights with a timer	41%	48%	33%
Burglar alarm	21%	24%	16%
Security marking on household property	13%	17%	8%

Contact with the police and reporting crime

Three in ten respondents (30%) had initiated contact with the police during the previous twelve months. 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 13% said that they would visit the police station.

Most respondents said that if they witnessed a burglary in a stranger's home, they would report the crime (95%), provide a statement to the police (88%) and give evidence in court (70%).

Perceptions of the police

A large number of respondents expressed positive attitudes about the police. Around seven in ten respondents felt that police were polite (73%) and helpful (69%) when dealing with ordinary policing problems and deal fairly with everyone (71%). Just over two-thirds of respondents (67%) 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 do a good job (Table 2).

Table 2: Perceptions of the police

	Protestant	Catholic
Polite	79%	67%
Deal fairly	78%	61%
Do a good job	76%	57%
Helpful	73%	63%

Responsibility for police complaints

Just over half of respondents (51%) 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 62% of Protestant respondents indicating they would use this method compared with 41% of Catholic respondents.

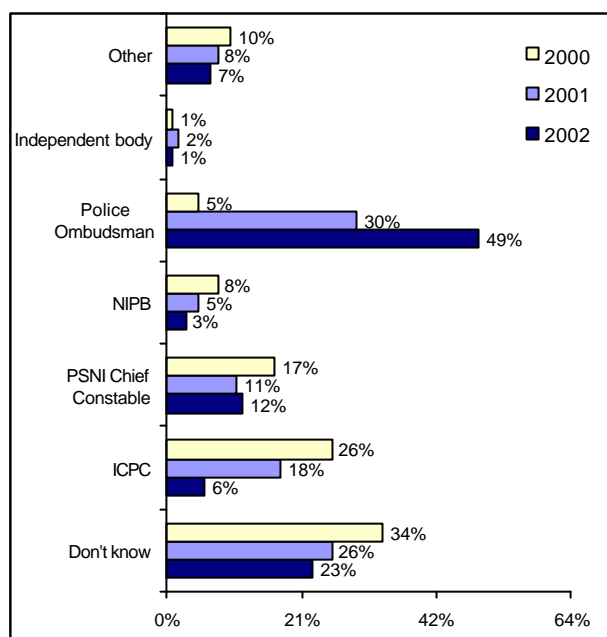
The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland took over responsibility for dealing with complaints against the police in November 2000. Nearly half of respondents (49%) said that the Police Ombudsman was mainly responsible for looking into complaints against the police in 2002 compared with 30% in 2001 and 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 to 23% in 2002 (Figure 2).

Most respondents (83%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman. Eight in ten respondents (80%) said they thought they would be treated fairly if they were to make a complaint against a police officer to the Police Ombudsman. Just over three-quarters of respondents (76%) said that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure the police do a good job (84% of Catholic and 71% of Protestant respondents).

Eight in ten respondents (80%) had heard of the

Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). Of these, 38% thought that the NIPB was part of the police while 49% thought the NIPB was independent of the police.

Figure 2: Respondents' views of responsibility for police complaints in 2000, 2001 and 2002



Community involvement in policing

The majority of respondents (80%) had not 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 elected representatives and 21% would contact their local police station. However, 16% of respondents did not

know who they would contact.

While less than half of respondents (46%) had heard of the Community Police Liaison Committees, 90% thought they were a good idea and 87% thought all communities should have one.

Composition of the police force

Just over half of respondents (54%) in 2002 thought that there were too few Catholic members of the police force (73% of Catholic and 42% of Protestant respondents), compared to nearly seven in ten respondents (68%) in 2001 who thought the same (85% of Catholic and 57% of Protestant respondents). Almost half of respondents in 2002 thought that the police try equally hard to recruit both Protestants and Catholics (49% in 2002 and 52% in 2001).

In 2002, 34% of respondents cited lack of support of the system of government as a reason why Catholics might be deterred from joining the police compared to 42% of respondents in 2001. Other reasons such as symbols (24% in 2001 and 10% in

2002) and the name (21% in 2001 and 6% in 2002) also decreased between 2001 and 2002. This was reflected in both communities (Table 3).

Table 3: Reasons Catholics might be deterred from joining the police in 2001 and 2002.

		Total	Protestant	Catholic
They do not support the system of government	2001	42%	43%	40%
	2002	34%	36%	30%
Symbols, such as the badge or other insignia	2001	24%	25%	24%
	2002	10%	11%	8%
The name	2001	21%	21%	21%
	2002	6%	6%	6%

The courts and criminal justice system

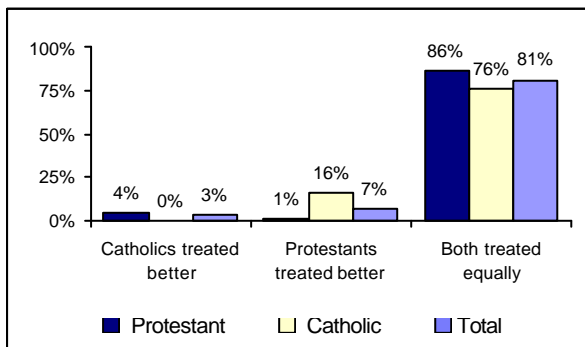
Few respondents (8%) had contact with the courts during the previous twelve months. While the majority of respondents (87%) felt it was important to have an understanding of the way in which the courts work, just over two in five respondents (42%) felt that they had this understanding.

Looking at the component parts of the criminal justice system, 78% had confidence in the contribution of juries to the fairness of the system, 76% were confident about the contribution of judges and magistrates, 76% were confident about the police's contribution and 70% had confidence in the contribution of lawyers. Protestant respondents expressed greater confidence in the contribution of the police, judges and magistrates than Catholic respondents while Catholic respondents expressed more confidence in lawyers.

While 72% of respondents were, for the most part, confident in the criminal justice system, 90% thought that guilty people are sometimes found innocent and 82% thought that innocent people are sometimes found guilty.

Over four-fifths of respondents (81%) thought that the courts gave equal treatment to Protestants and Catholics accused of committing non-terrorist offences (86% of Protestant and 76% of Catholic

Figure 3: Views on how the courts treat Catholics and Protestants committing non-terrorist offences



respondents) (Figure 3). In terms of terrorist offences, seven in ten respondents (70%) thought that Protestants and Catholics were treated equally by the courts (78% of Protestant and 62% of Catholic respondents) (Figure 4).

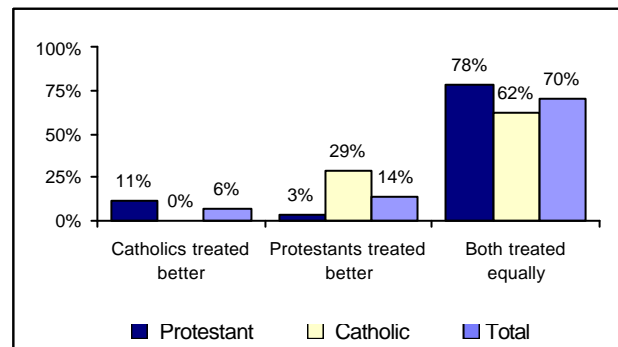
Over three in five respondents (61%) felt that the penalties handed out by the courts for non-sectarian crimes should be stiffer. A larger proportion (71%) thought that the penalties for sectarian crimes should be stiffer than at present (82% of Protestant and 57% of Catholic respondents).

Less than half of the respondents (47%) thought that a life sentence for a terrorist offence should mean life, with slightly less (42%) 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.

Less than two in five respondents (39%) thought that the availability of legal aid was about right, while 26% of respondents felt that they couldn't comment.

The majority of respondents (75%) thought that contact between prisoners and their families during imprisonment would help in their rehabilitation (73% of Protestant and 81% of Catholic respondents).

Figure 4: Views on how the courts treat Catholics and Protestants committing terrorist and other sectarian crimes



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