



Northern Ireland
Statistics & Research Agency

Perceptions of Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland: Summary findings from the Young Life & Times Survey 2017 to 2022

November 2023



Department of
Justice

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Fear and intimidation



18% agreed in 2022 that Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation

Law and justice



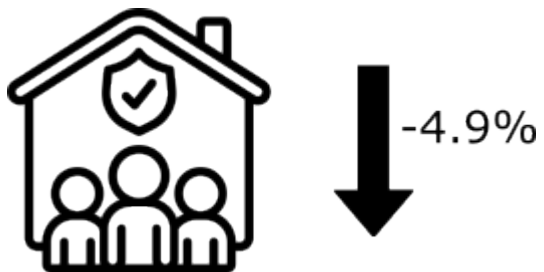
50% agreed in 2022 that people feel protected by the law and justice system

Young people



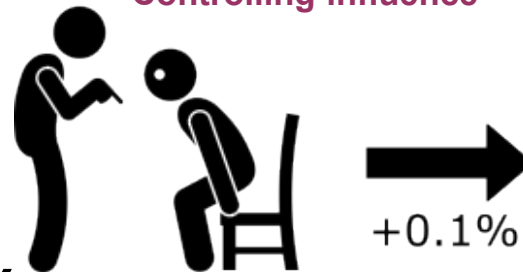
11% in 2022 felt young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups

Safe in area



87% in 2022 felt safe living in their area

Controlling influence



13% in 2022 felt paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in their area

Significant increase since 2017 baseline

Significant decrease since 2017 baseline

No significant change since 2017 baseline

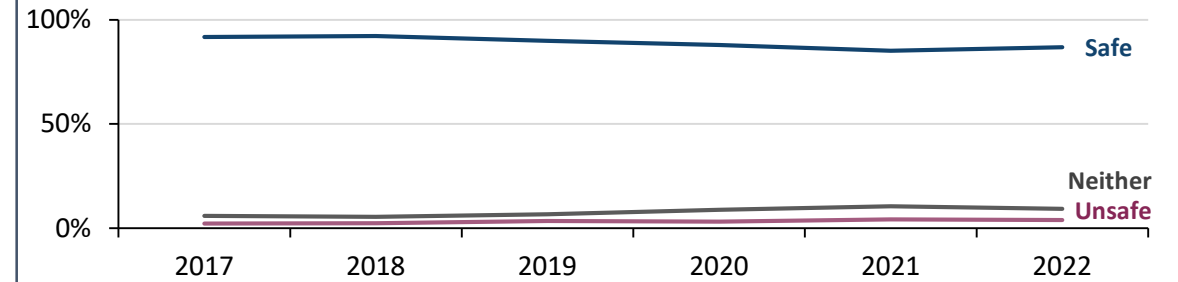


Summary Statistics

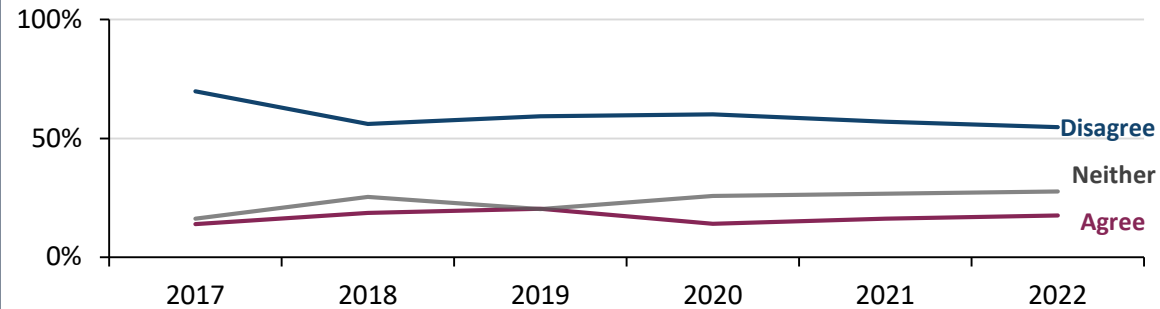
About the data

The Young Life & Times (YLT) Survey examines the social attitudes of people living in Northern Ireland. The survey provides a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of the young population in Northern Ireland. Following on from results of the 2017 survey, further questions have been commissioned annually to provide ongoing insight into young peoples' perceptions of paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland.

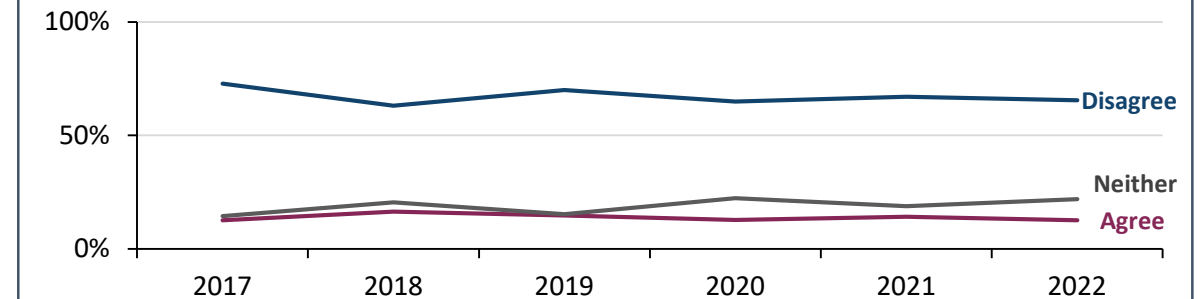
How safe do you feel living in this area?



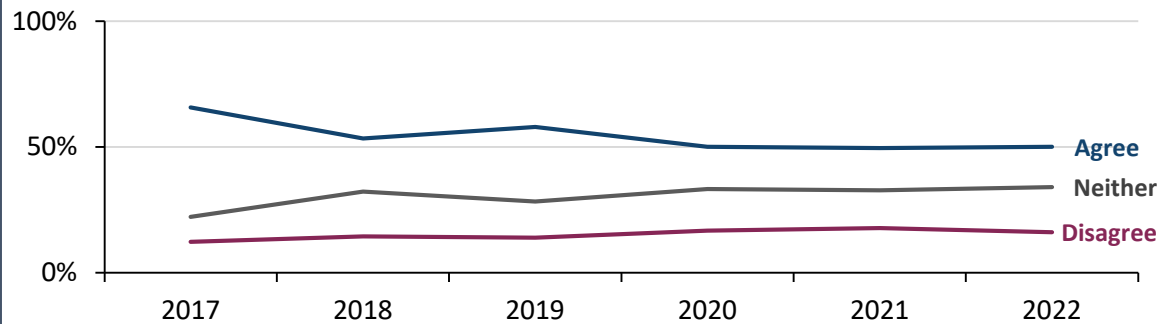
Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation



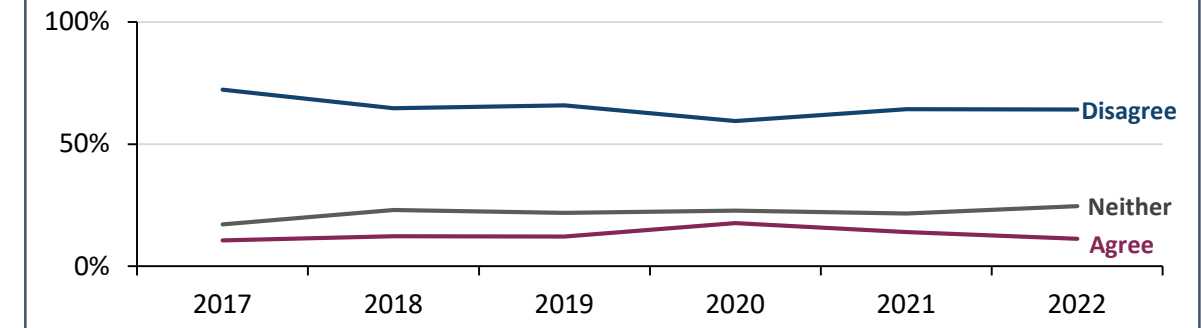
Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in this area?







People feel protected by the law and justice system



Young people are influenced too much by paramilitary groups in this area?



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This bulletin is available on www.justice-ni.gov.uk ([opens in a new window](#)). Feedback can be provided directly to Analytical Services Group at the email address below.

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The Young Life & Times (YLT) Survey

The YLT survey was launched in October 1998 as a resource for everyone interested in the social attitudes of people living in Northern Ireland. Set up by [Queen's University Belfast \(opens in a new window\)](#) and [Ulster University \(opens in a new window\)](#) and run every year, the survey aims to put on record the attitudes, values and beliefs of the young people in Northern Ireland on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of young people in Northern Ireland. Further information on sample selection can be found in the [Technical Annex](#). The survey comprises of two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances; and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients. This allows, where appropriate, for responses to the survey to be broken down by a variety of key demographic characteristics. The survey receives ethical approval from the School Ethics Committee of the [School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work \(opens in a new window\)](#), Queen's University Belfast.

The Focus of this Publication

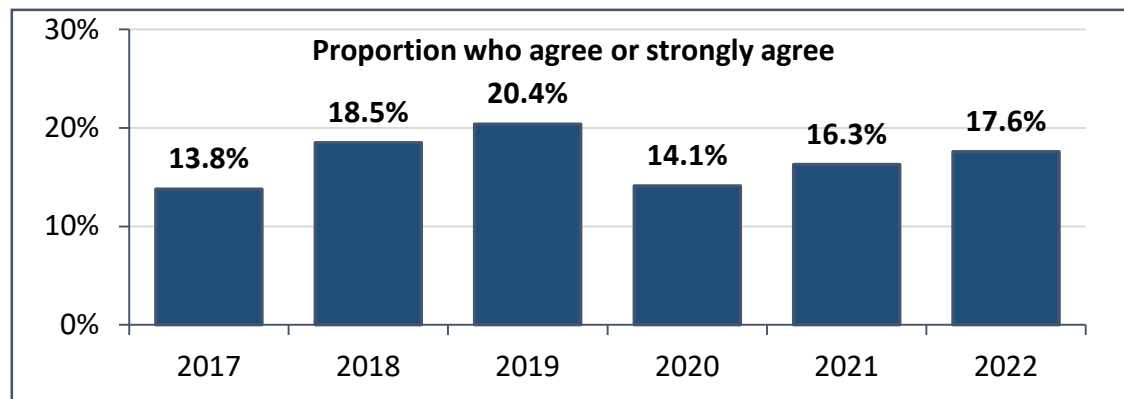
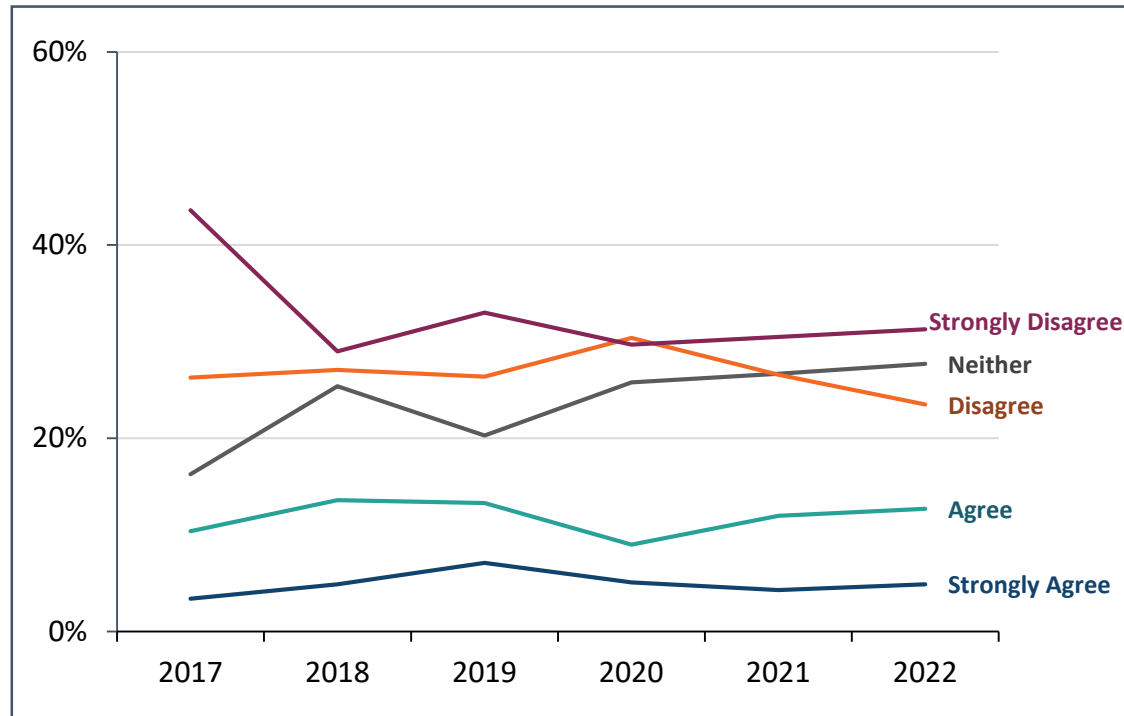
The Cross-Executive Programme for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime started its second phase of delivery in 2021, with a revised overall outcome: 'safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control'. This marks a conscious shift away from the 38 projects that existed under the original Executive Action Plan to increase cohesion and collaboration across the Programme. Sitting under this overall outcome are two complementary workstreams, each of which will deliver the following end outcomes:

- People and communities are safe from the harm caused by paramilitarism; and
- People and communities are more resilient to paramilitary influence and involvement in paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

Projects supported by the Programme must contribute towards the achievement or realisation of one or both of these Programme level outcomes.

In order to measure the impact of the Programme, the NILT was commissioned to provide baseline data on the public's perceptions of and attitudes towards paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland. These survey questions have been repeated each year since 2017 to monitor any changes in attitudes and perceptions as work on the delivery of the Programme progresses. This publication presents key findings from the survey and compares year-on-year responses. This will be updated as additional information becomes available. The current version highlights trends and findings over a six year period, from 2017 to 2022.

Paramilitary Groups Create Fear and Intimidation



Data Trends

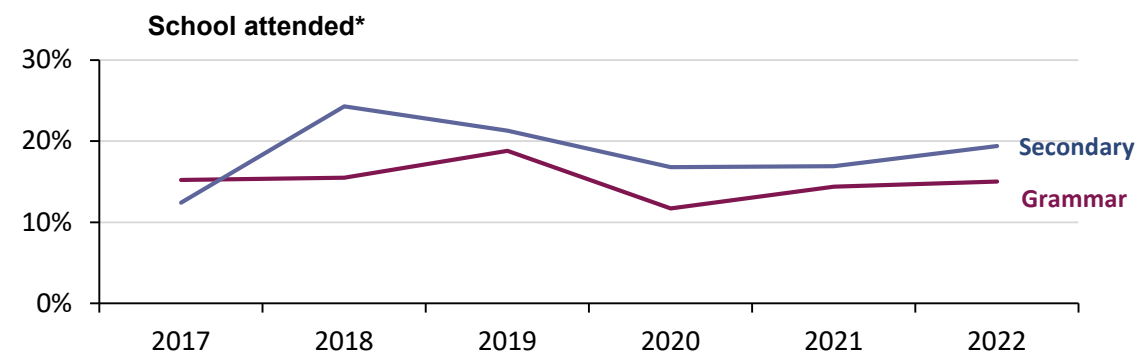
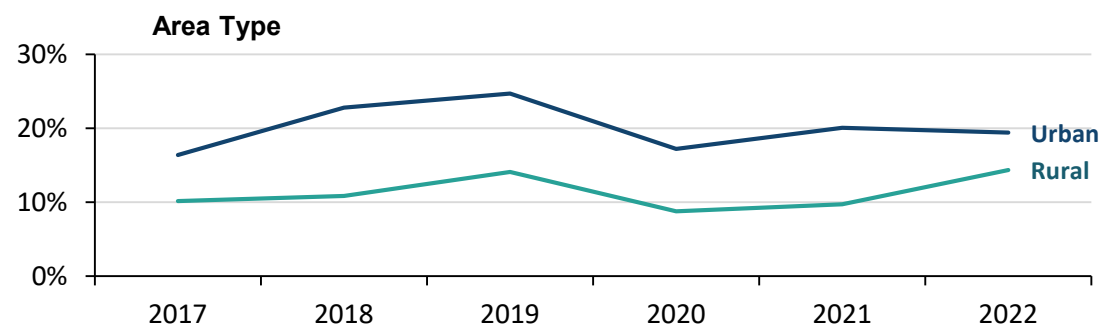
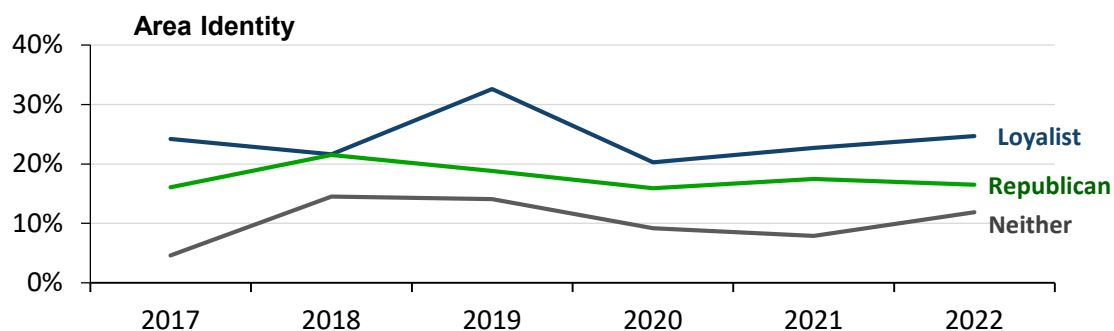
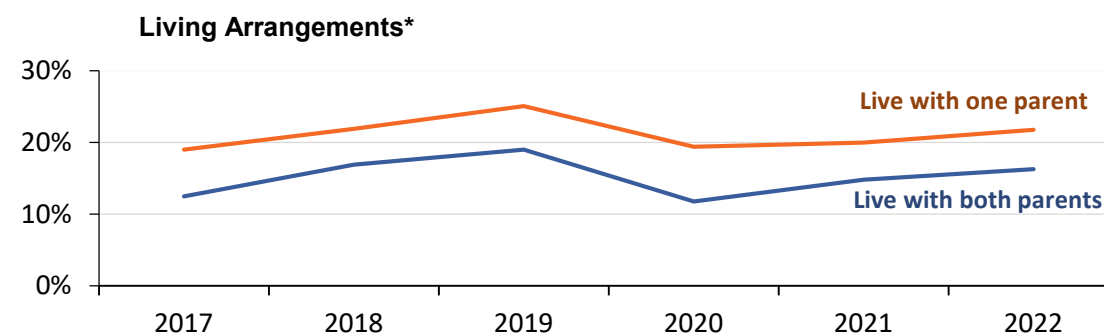
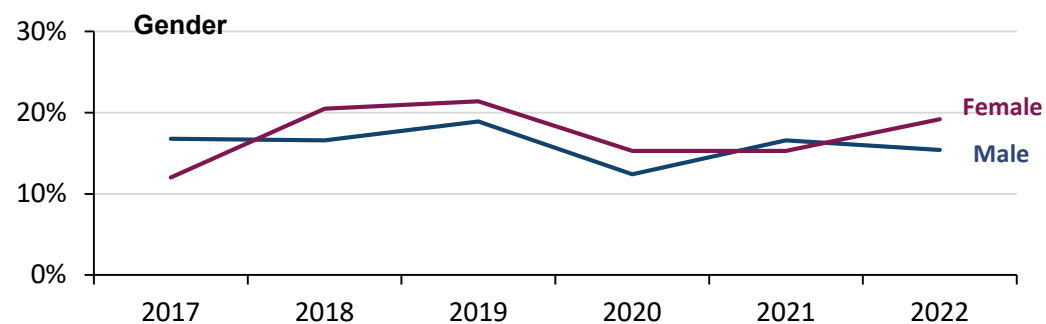
Over the last six years, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagreed that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area, whilst there has been a significant increase in respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement indicating increasing uncertainty within this area. The proportion of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed or disagreed showed no significant change from the baseline.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2017	3.4%	10.4%	16.3%	26.3%	43.6%
2018	4.9%	13.6%	25.4%	27.1%	29.0%
2019	7.1%	13.3%	20.3%	26.4%	33.0%
2020	5.1%	9.0%	25.8%	30.4%	29.7%
2021	4.3%	12.0%	26.7%	26.6%	30.5%
2022	4.9%	12.7%	27.7%	23.5%	31.3%
Change from Baseline	1.5%	2.3%	11.4%	-2.8%	-12.3%

*Significant changes from the baseline are highlighted in blue within the table.

Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in this area

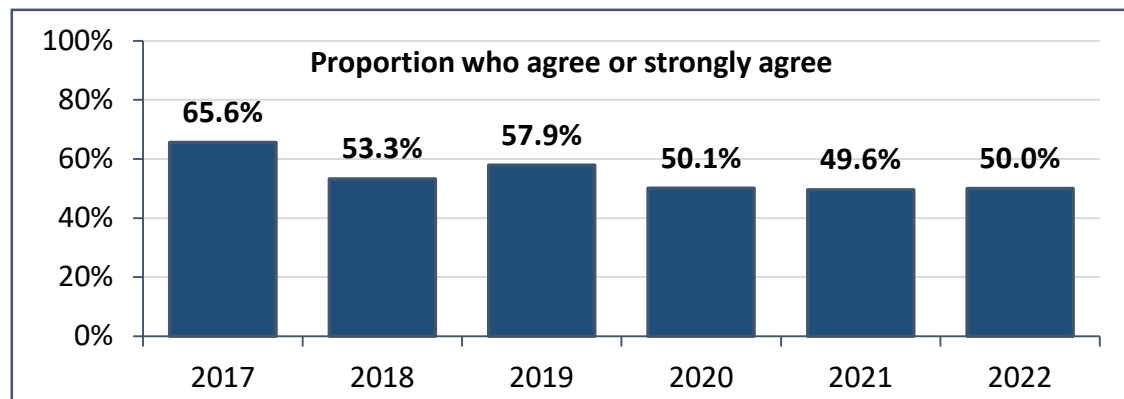
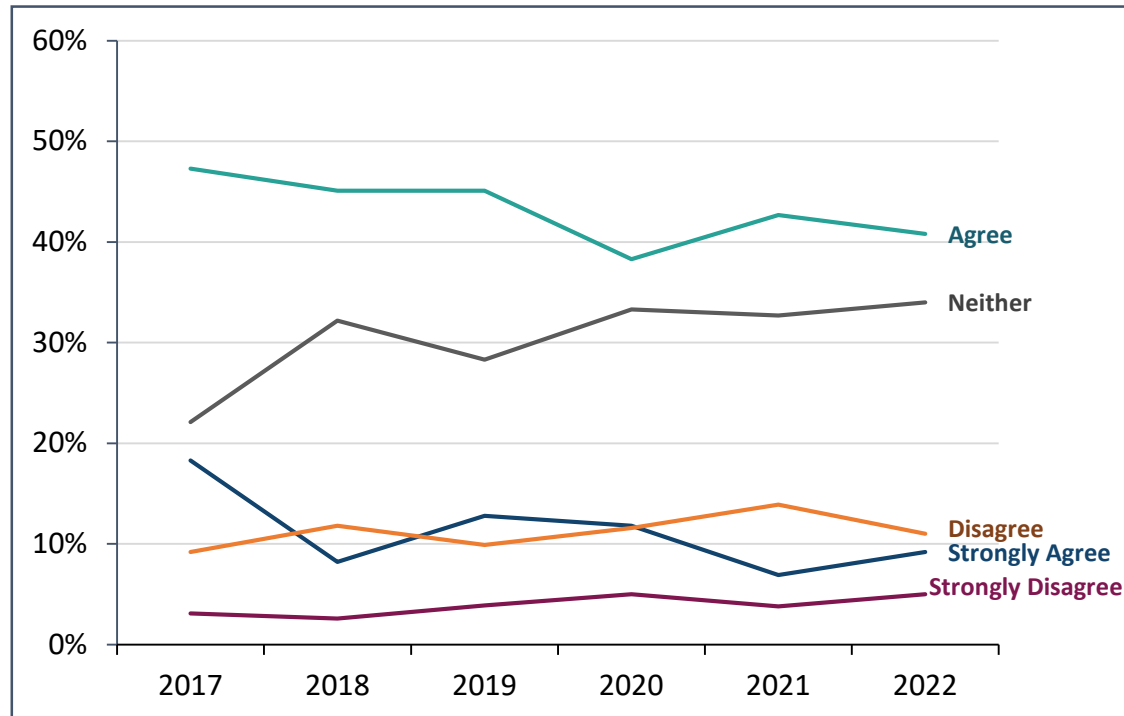
This data shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 0% - 30%, with the exception of Area Identity which is set to 40%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'). Responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50; however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Those who identified their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican and/or lived in rural areas were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area. In contrast, those who lived with one parent were more likely to agree with this statement. There were no significant differences to report between gender and school attended. See Worksheet 12 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

People Feel Protected by the Law and Justice System



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that people in their area feel protected by the law and justice system, These are offset by an increasing proportion of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement indicating increasing uncertainty within this area.

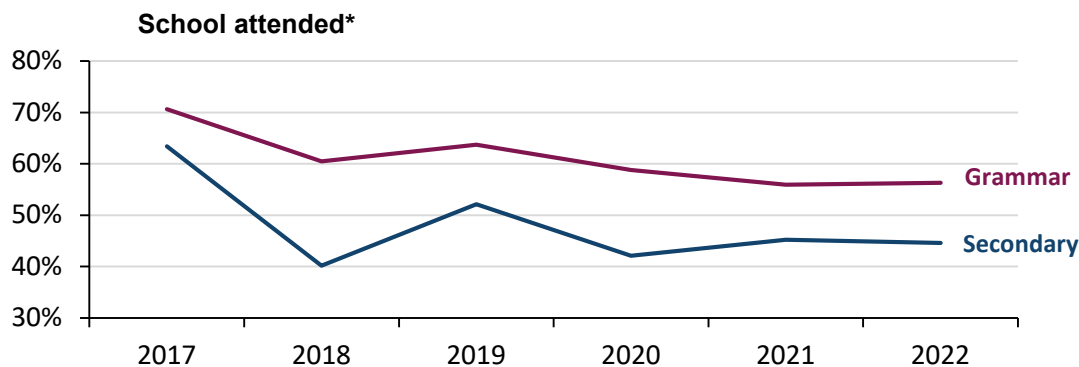
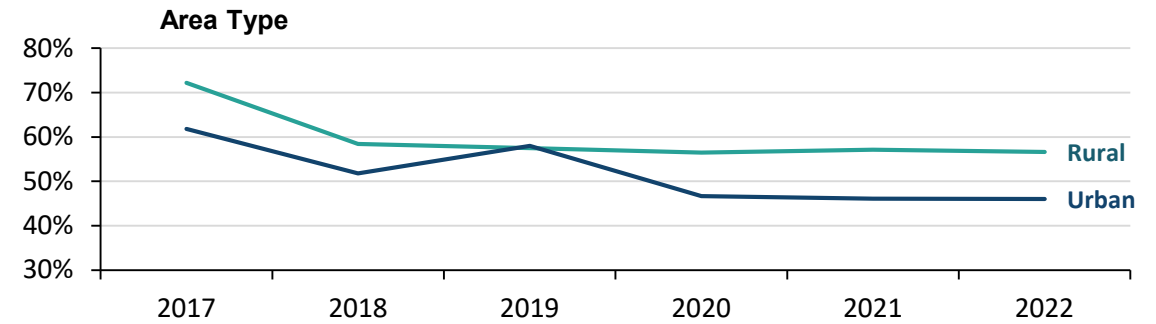
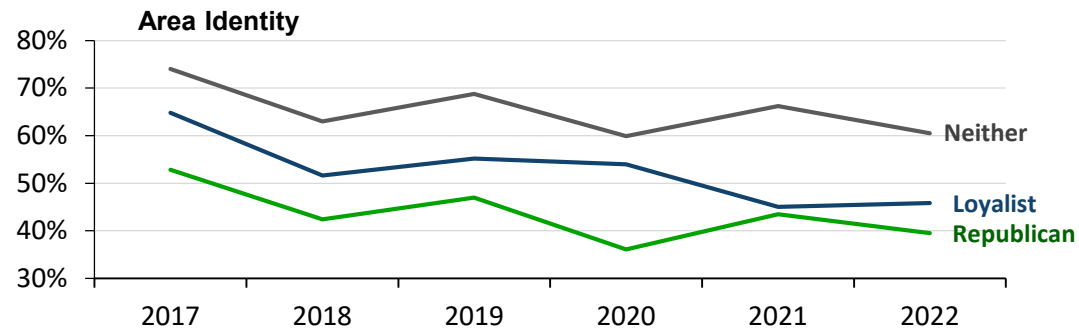
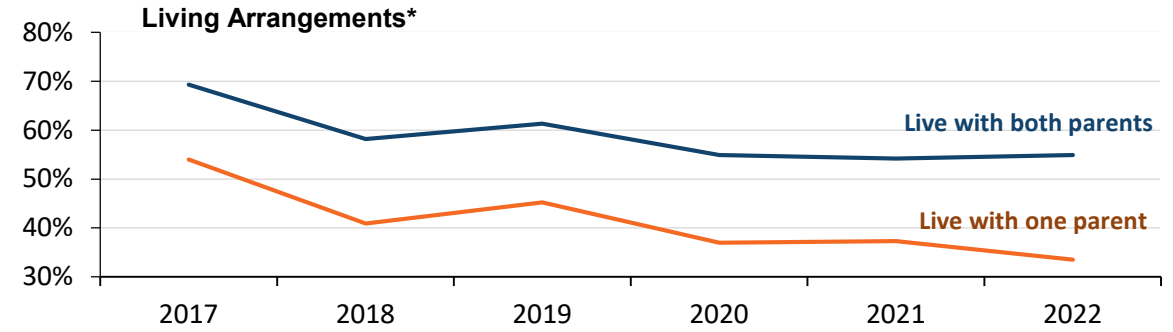
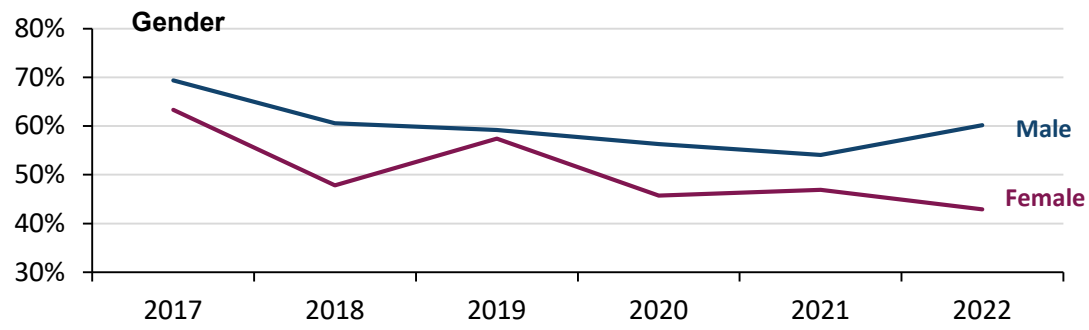
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2017	18.3%	47.3%	22.1%	9.2%	3.1%
2018	8.2%	45.1%	32.2%	11.8%	2.6%
2019	12.8%	45.1%	28.3%	9.9%	3.9%
2020	11.8%	38.3%	33.3%	11.6%	5.0%
2021	6.9%	42.7%	32.7%	13.9%	3.8%
2022	9.2%	40.8%	34.0%	11.0%	5.0%
Change from Baseline	-9.1%	-6.5%	11.9%	1.8%	1.9%

*Significant changes from the baseline are highlighted in blue within the table.

People feel protected by the law and justice system

This data shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 30% - 80%.

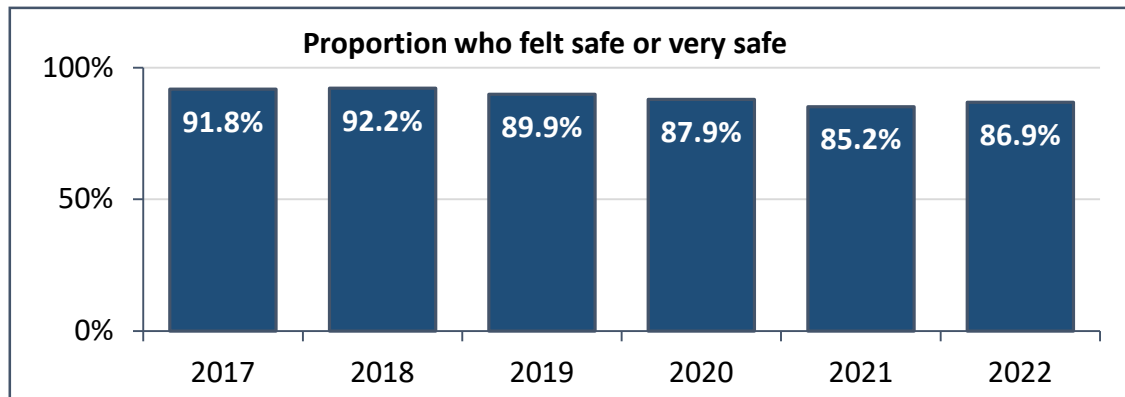
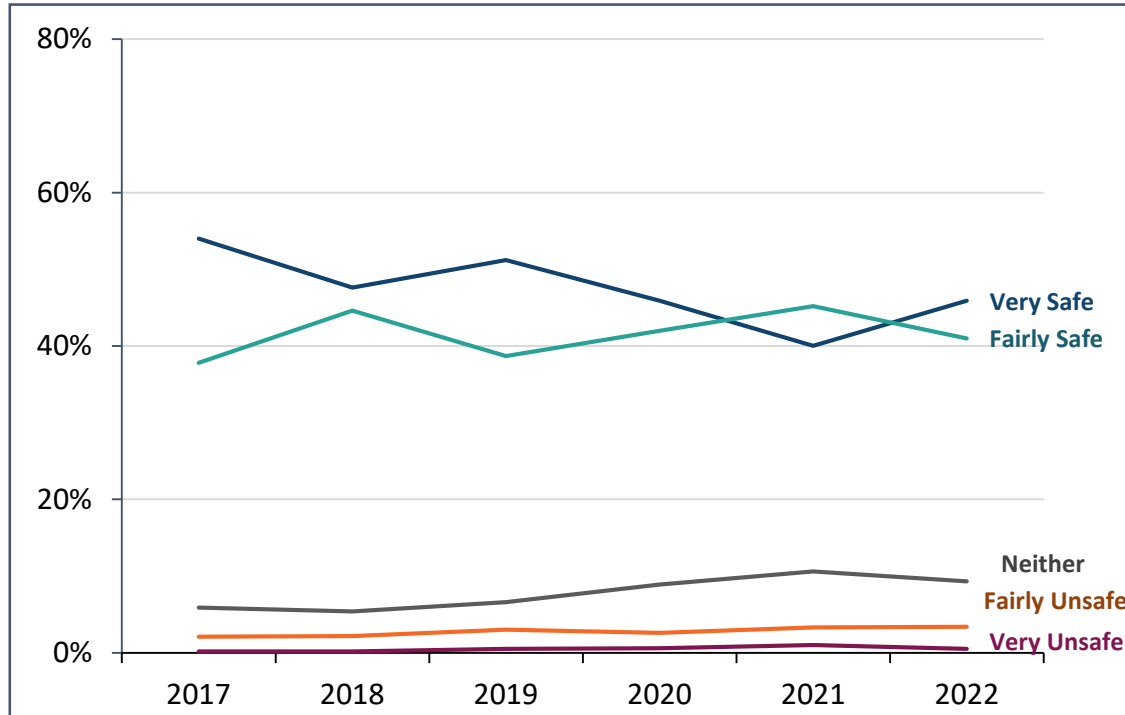
Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'). Responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50; however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Overall, across all years, a higher proportion of respondents who lived with both parents, attended a grammar school or identified their area as neither Loyalist or Republican strongly agreed or agreed that people in their area felt protected by the law and justice system. In contrast, a lower proportion of respondents who were female and came from an urban area agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. See Worksheet 7 in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Area Safety



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents who feel very safe living in their area, but a significant increase in the proportion who reported feeling neither safe nor unsafe. Nonetheless, across all years, the overall proportion of those feeling safe has remained consistently high (over four fifths). Across all years, a consistently low number of respondents have reported feeling unsafe living in their area.

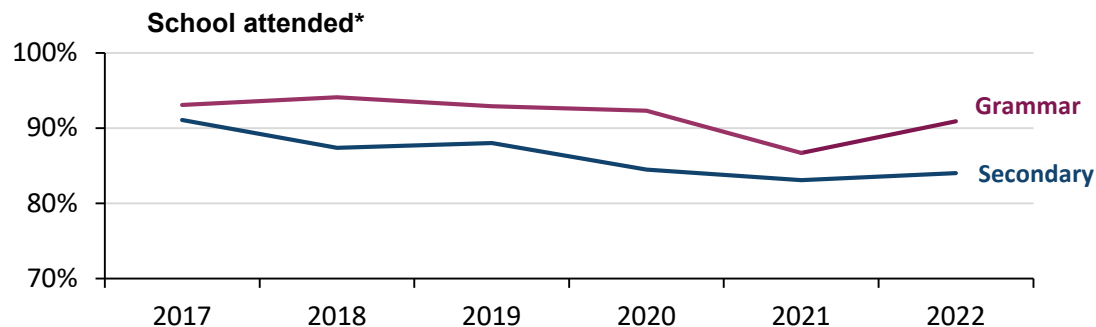
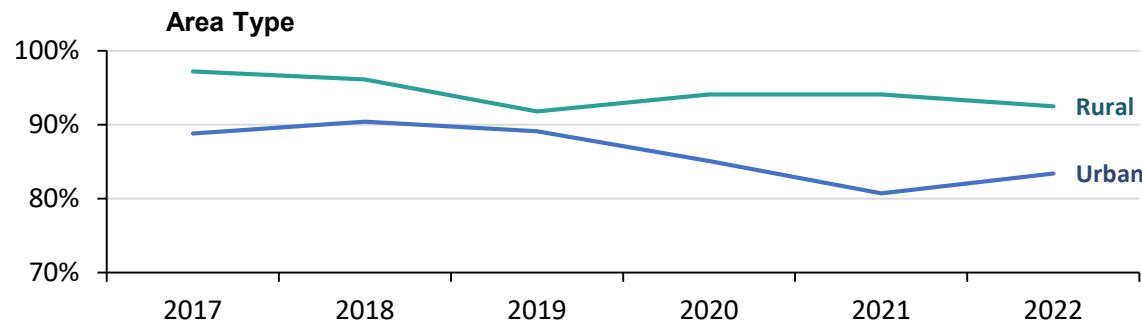
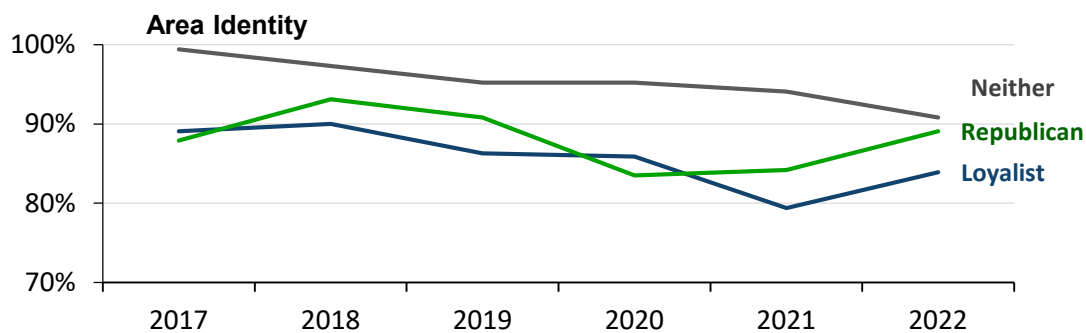
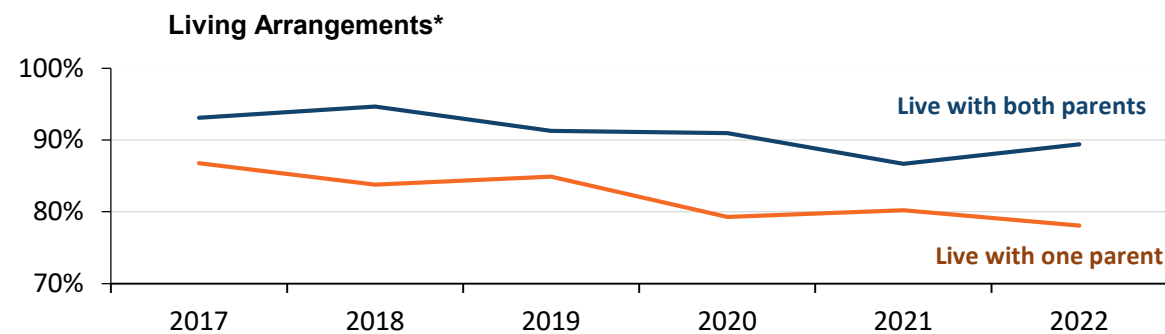
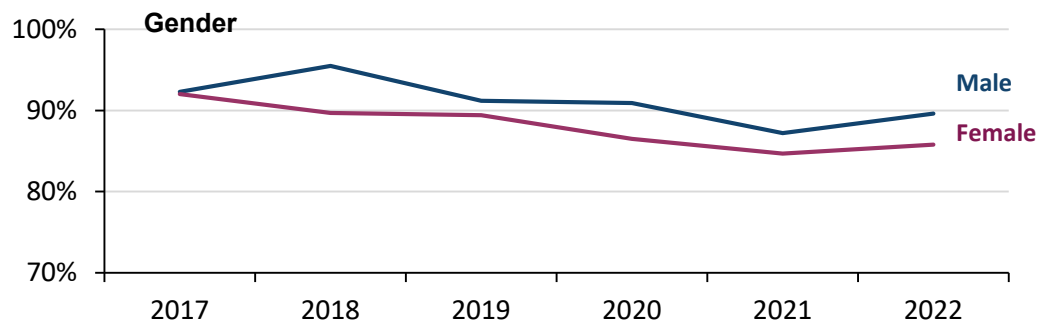
	Very safe	Fairly safe	Neither safe nor unsafe	Fairly unsafe	Very Unsafe
2017	54.0%	37.8%	5.9%	2.1%	0.2%
2018	47.6%	44.6%	5.4%	2.2%	0.2%
2019	51.2%	38.7%	6.6%	3.0%	0.5%
2020	45.9%	42.0%	8.9%	2.6%	0.6%
2021	40.0%	45.2%	10.6%	3.3%	1.0%
2022	45.9%	41.0%	9.3%	3.4%	0.5%
Change from Baseline	-8.1%	3.2%	3.4%	1.3%	0.3%

*Significant changes from the baseline are highlighted in blue within the table.

How safe do you feel living in your area?

This data shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'fairly safe' and 'very safe'. All Y axes ranges are set at 70% - 100%.

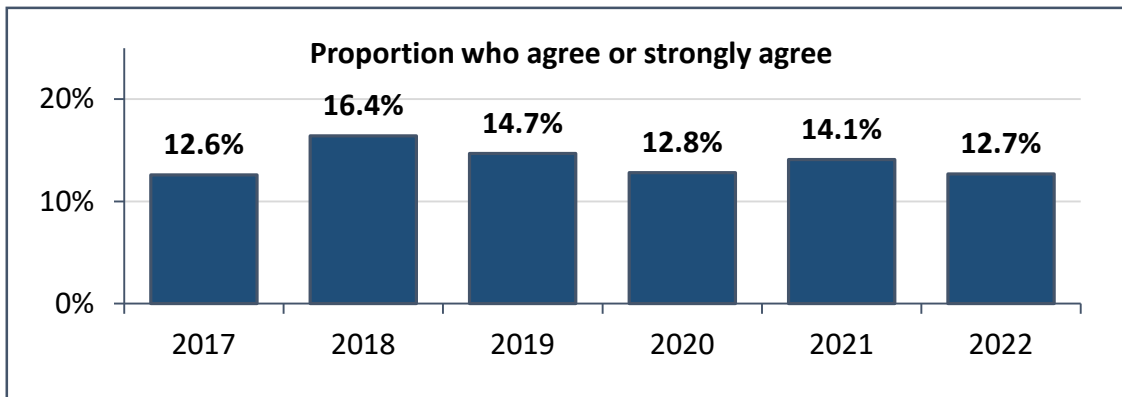
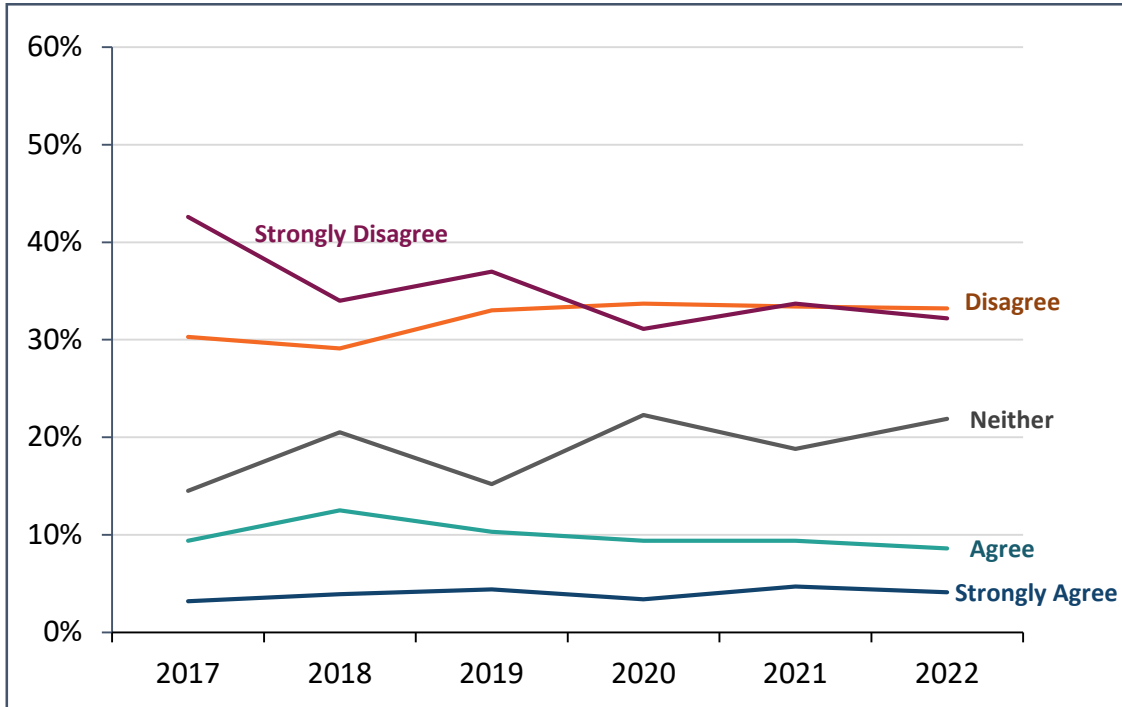
Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'). Responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50; however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file



Data Trends

Overall, across all years, a higher proportion of respondents who were male, described their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican and/or who attended a grammar school felt very safe or fairly safe living in their area. In contrast, a lower proportion of respondents who live in urban areas and/or live with one parent reported that they felt very safe or fairly safe living in their area. See Worksheet 3 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Paramilitary Groups Have a Controlling Influence



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagreed that paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in their area. However, this has been offset by a significant increase in respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. The proportion of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed or disagreed showed no significant change since the baseline.

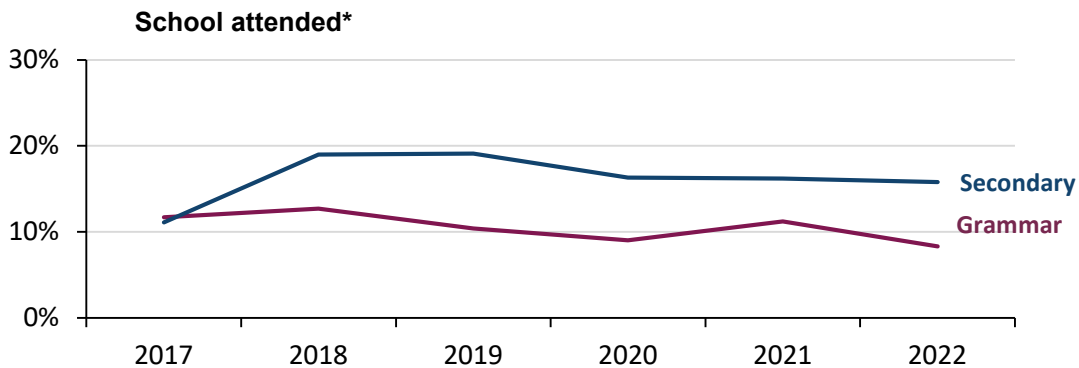
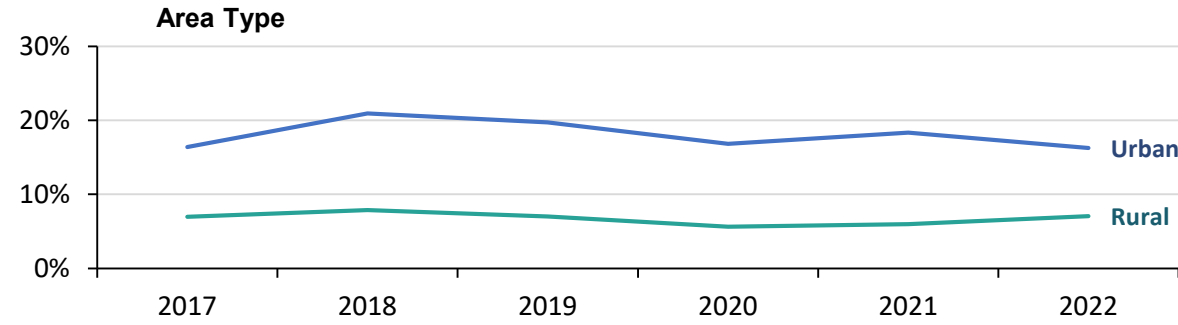
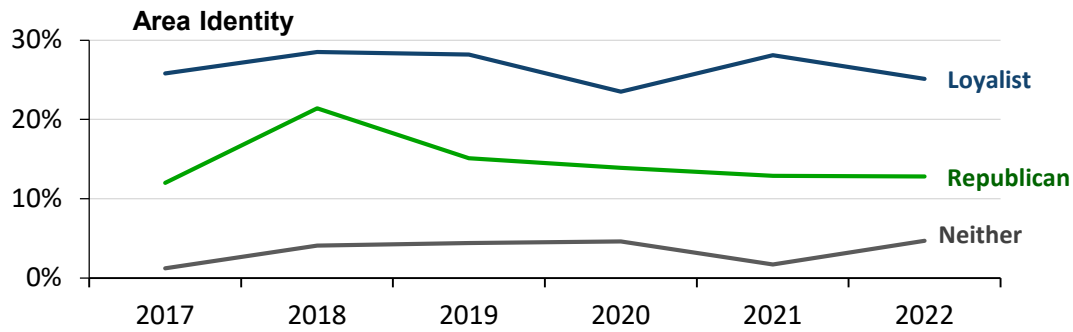
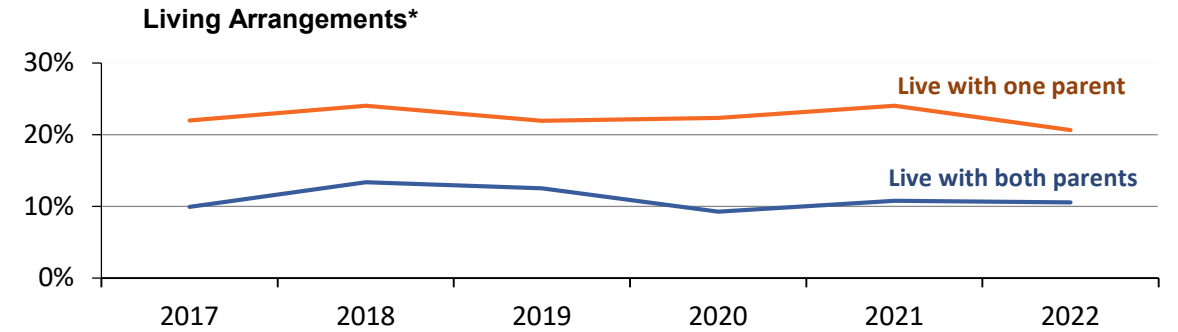
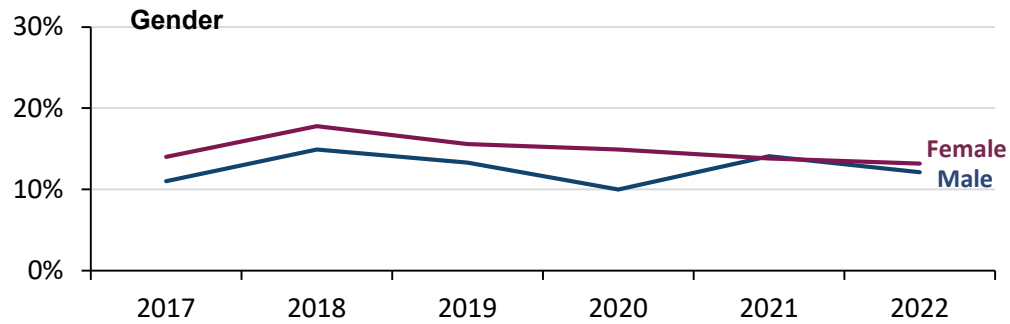
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2017	3.2%	9.4%	14.5%	30.3%	42.6%
2018	3.9%	12.5%	20.5%	29.1%	34.0%
2019	4.4%	10.3%	15.2%	33.0%	37.0%
2020	3.4%	9.4%	22.3%	33.7%	31.1%
2021	4.7%	9.4%	18.8%	33.4%	33.7%
2022	4.1%	8.6%	21.9%	33.2%	32.2%
Change from Baseline	0.9%	-0.8%	7.4%	2.9%	-10.4%

*Significant changes from the baseline are highlighted in blue within the table.

Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in this area

This data shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 0% - 30%,

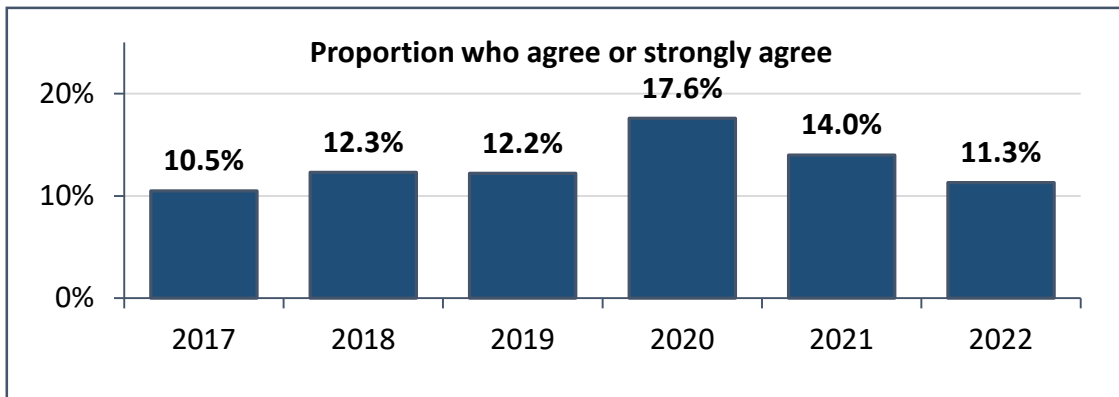
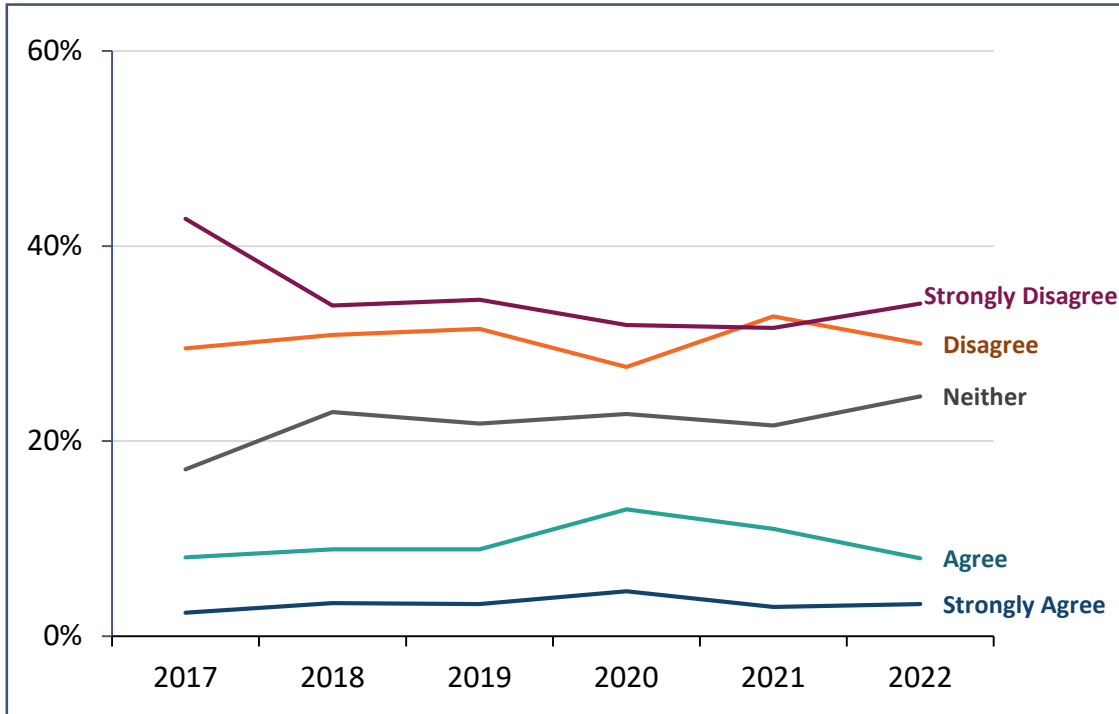
Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'). Responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50; however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Overall, across all years, a lower proportion of respondents who described their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican or those who lived in rural areas agreed or strongly agreed that paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in this area. In contrast, a higher proportion of those who lived with one parent and attended a secondary school agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. There was no significant difference to report for gender. See Worksheet 10 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Paramilitary Influence on Young People



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagree that young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area. This has been offset with a significant increase in those who neither agree nor disagree. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree, agree or disagree has shown little change since 2017.

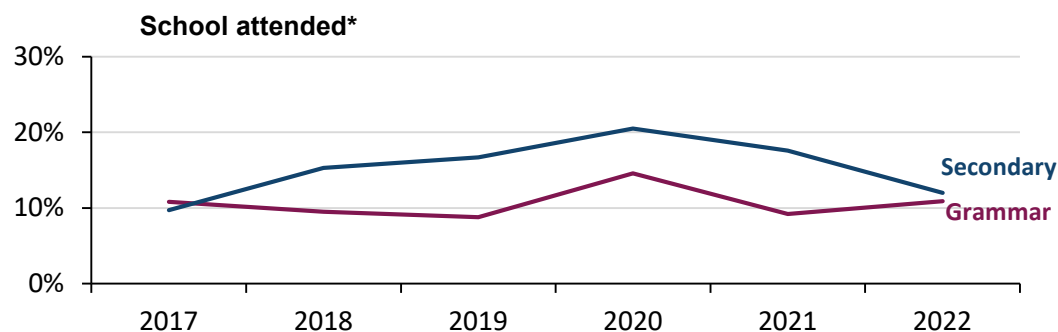
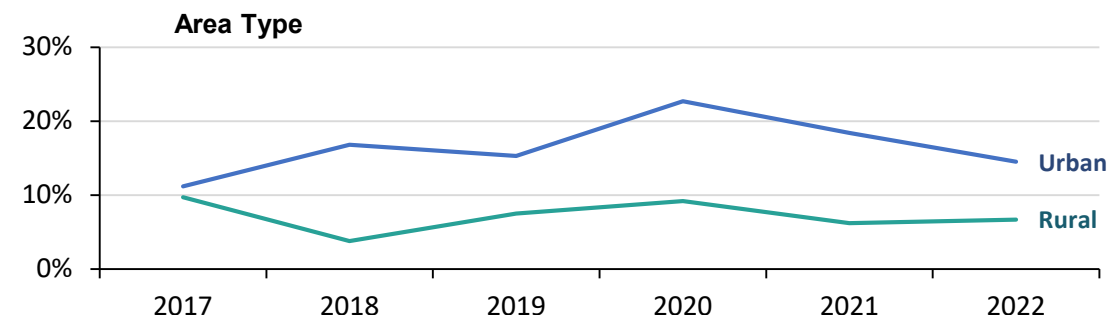
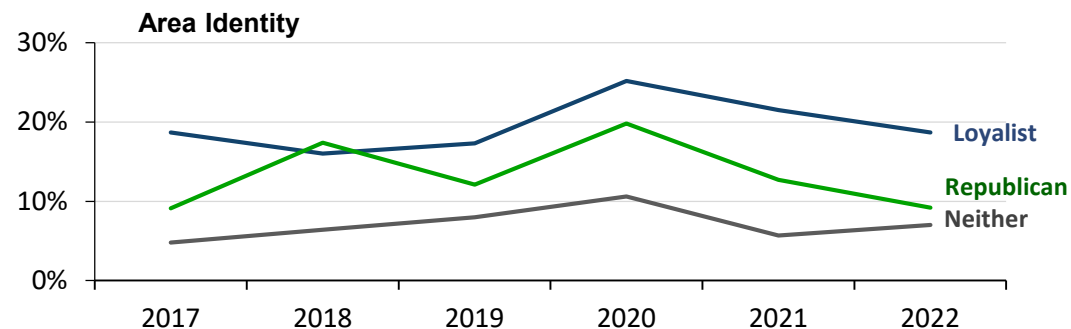
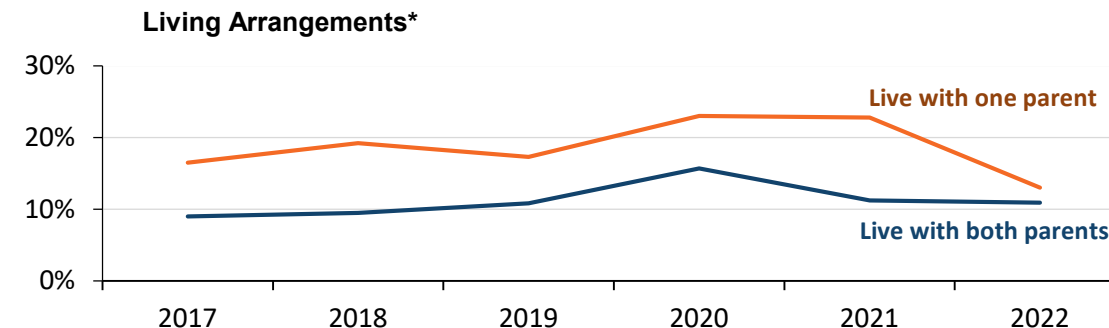
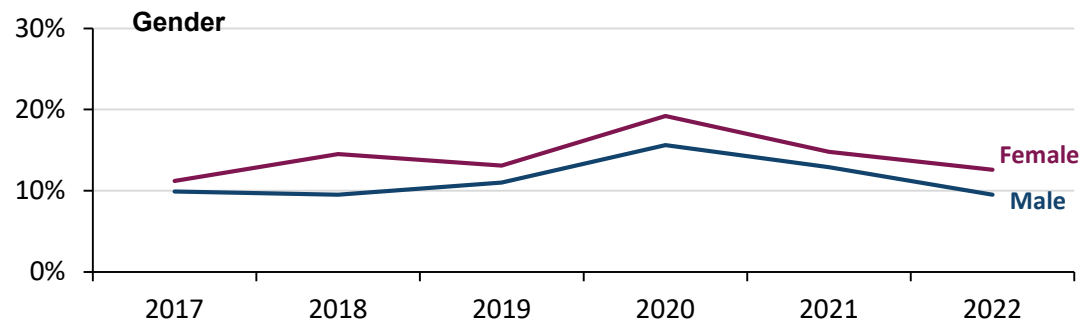
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2017	2.4%	8.1%	17.1%	29.5%	42.8%
2018	3.4%	8.9%	23.0%	30.9%	33.9%
2019	3.3%	8.9%	21.8%	31.5%	34.5%
2020	4.6%	13.0%	22.8%	27.6%	31.9%
2021	3.0%	11.0%	21.6%	32.8%	31.6%
2022	3.3%	8.0%	24.6%	30.0%	34.1%
Change from Baseline	0.9%	-0.1%	7.5%	0.5%	-8.7%

*Significant changes from the baseline are highlighted in blue within the table.

Young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in this area

This data shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 0% - 30%,

Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'). Responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50; however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Overall, across all years, a lower proportion of respondents who lived in rural areas and/or identified their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican agreed or strongly agreed that young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in this area. Although significantly different in the past, there was nothing to report in 2022 between gender, school attended and living arrangements. See Worksheet 15 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Annex 1 – Technical Information

Sampling and Fieldwork

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the Child Benefit Register contains information on all children for whom Child Benefit is claimed. The sample for each of the surveys was provided by HMRC with the sample for the 2017, 2018 and 2019 surveys including all 16 year olds with January, February and March birthdays. Exceptional circumstances in 2020 and 2021, as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, meant that the survey fieldwork, originally planned for the last quarter of 2020 had to be postponed until May 2021 which meant that the sample for the 2020 survey included all 16-year olds with April, May or June birthdays. This reverted back to January, February and March birthdays in the 2022 survey.

Due to the high level of interest in the YLT survey in and the respective number of questions included, a split survey has been run for each year with the exception of 2019. In 2017, the 5,310 individuals were randomly split between the 'Blue' (2,660) and 'Purple' (2,650) surveys. In 2018 the 4,986 individuals were randomly split between the 'Green' (2,499) and 'Purple' (2,487) surveys while in 2019 one survey was completed by 4,966 individuals. In 2020/21 the survey was split into version A and version B and although there are no breakdown of figures for each version, a total of 4,913 individuals responded to one of the surveys. In 2022 the survey was again split into two versions with 5,631 young people completing.

Over the lifetime of the survey respondents have had the following options for completing the questionnaire:

- They could complete the questionnaire online – inputting their personal identifier to enter that part of the YLT website.
- They could complete the paper questionnaire and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.
- They could take part by phone, having quoted their identification number and check letter.

In 2022, while postal or phone completion was offered as an alternative method of taking part in YLT there were no requests for either.

Annex 1 – Technical Information

Weighting

No weighting was applied to the dataset.

Rounding, Error and Statistical Significance

Percentages may not always sum to 100 due to the effect of rounding or because respondents could give more than one response. Due to a combination of both sampling and non-sampling error, any sample is unlikely to reflect precisely the characteristics of the population. The number of cases upon which analysis is based is important, as it influences the precision (standard error) of the estimates. Because NILTS estimates are subject to sampling error, differences between estimates from successive years of the survey or between population subgroups may occur by chance.

For the purposes of this bulletin, where differences have emerged as being statistically significant, these have been reported in the text and/or tables. Statistical significance is reported at the 5% ($p < 0.005$) level of probability (two-tailed tests). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant, one can be 95% confident this has not happened by chance.