



PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

September 2019 – February 2020



**Public
Prosecution
Service**

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Introduction

The Public Prosecution Service

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), which is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions, is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.

The primary role of the PPS is to reach decisions to prosecute or not to prosecute and to have responsibility for the conduct of criminal proceedings. A range of options is also available for dealing with offenders other than through prosecution. These options include cautions, informed warnings and youth conferencing. Prosecutors may also refer offenders to the National Driver Alertness Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.

Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Between 2013 and 2018, the PPS published *Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service: Findings from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey*, including results from a module of 5 questions relating to public awareness and public confidence in the PPS. Survey information is used by the PPS for a variety of purposes, such as informing the development of policy and assessing the effectiveness of communication. Data in respect of the PPS's effectiveness and its fairness and impartiality are also used as key performance indicators for the Service. Findings from *Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service* can be found on the PPS website at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/perceptions-pps-survey-results>.

Due to the discontinuation of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey in 2018, the PPS commissioned a module for inclusion in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2018. This particular survey was selected due to its methodology broadly matching that of the Omnibus Survey and its representativeness across Northern Ireland. The PPS commissioned a module in the survey for a second time in 2019.

The Life and Times Survey

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey was launched by the University of Ulster and Queen's University of Belfast in the autumn of 1998. Its mission is to monitor the attitudes and behaviour of people in Northern Ireland annually to provide a time-series and a public record of how attitudes and behaviour develop on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey is run on a modular format and aims to provide a local resource for use by the general public and a data source for public and academic debate.

The survey consists of a number of different modules, each based on a specific topic. The modules included in the 2019 survey were: respect, ethnic minorities, good relations, breastfeeding, the criminal justice system, political attitudes, road safety and community safety and perceptions of paramilitary influence.

Whilst the NILT Survey closely mirrors the Omnibus Survey in terms of the methodology for selecting respondents, there are some differences. For example, the NILT Survey tends to focus on a small range of related policy issues, involving in-depth questioning, whereas the Omnibus Survey usually involved a larger number of unrelated modules. This has provided a new context for the PPS module to that of the Omnibus Survey.

A total of four questions specific to the PPS were included in the 2019 NILT Survey in order to gauge the following:

- Public awareness of the PPS (Question 1);
- Views as to the PPS's effectiveness in prosecuting people accused of committing a crime (Question 2);
- Public perceptions of the PPS's fairness and impartiality (Question 3); and
- Public perceptions of the PPS's independence (Question 4).

Question 1 was asked of all respondents. Questions 2, 3 and 4 relate only to those respondents who had heard of the PPS (i.e. respondents who had answered 'yes' at (Question 1).

Detailed notes have been supplied, which provide an account of the technical aspects of the survey, including the origin of the sample, response rates and its representativeness (see Annex 2: Technical Notes, page 15).

About this Report

This report provides information in respect of the 2019 NILT Survey, conducted between September 2019 and February 2020. As this is the second year the PPS has commissioned a module in the Survey, comparisons can be made across the two years.

Analysis of each of the PPS questions is available across ten key variables, as follows: Age-group, gender, religion, partnership status, limiting health condition/disability status, dependant status, employment status, qualification level, socio-economic classification and PPS Region. For the purposes of this report, the analysis has been limited to age, gender and religion. However, data in respect of any of the remaining variables can be provided on request (see contact details below).

It should be noted that the 2019 NILT Survey has produced a relatively high proportion of people who answered 'don't know' in response to the questions. These 'don't knows' have been excluded from the main body of the report. As such, the focus of the bulletin is on those people who have offered an opinion regarding the PPS. However, in the interests of transparency, the full results (including the 'don't know' responses) have been set out at Annex 1: Survey Data - see page 11. As the proportion of 'don't knows' within the Omnibus Survey results was small, these were normally included within the published results. Therefore this bulletin differs in this respect when compared with previous Omnibus Survey publications.

Percentages in the tables may not add to 100% due to rounding. Unweighted base numbers across the tables will vary due to the exclusion of 'don't knows'.

Official Statistics

The statistics within this report are '*Official Statistics*' as defined in Section 6 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency are seconded to the PPS and are responsible for ensuring that the statistics produced comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

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Survey Findings

Question 1 – Had you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, ‘the PPS’?

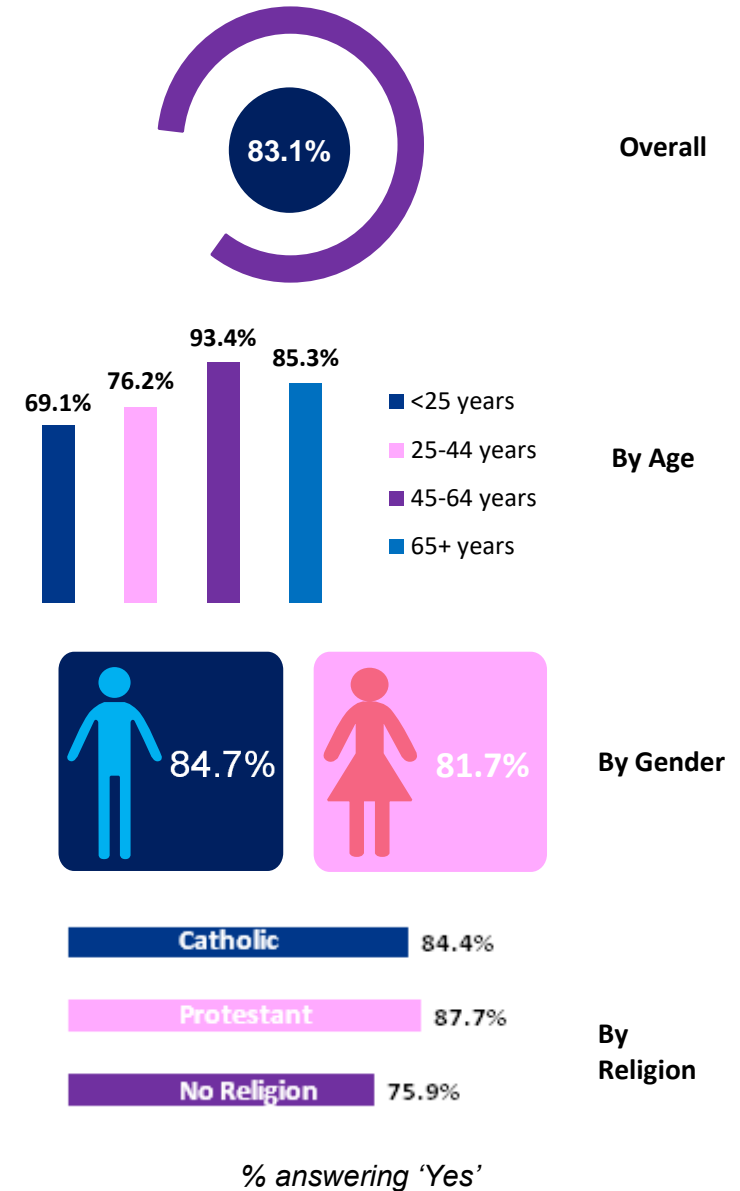
Key Findings

- Overall, more than four-fifths of respondents (83.1%) stated that they had heard of the PPS – higher than in 2018 (80.8%).
- Those in the 45-64 age band reported the highest level of awareness (93.4%) which was an increase on 2018 (86.3%). While those aged 25 and under had the lowest level of awareness (69.1%), awareness has increased by more than 10 percentage points on 2018 (58.9%).
- As was the case in 2018, a higher proportion of males (84.7%) than females (81.7%) reported that they had heard of the PPS, however the gap between the two has narrowed since 2018.
- Awareness among Protestant respondents increased from 81.8% in 2018 to 87.7% in 2019, which resulted in a higher proportion of Protestants than Catholics (84.4%) stating that they heard of the PPS. Respondents in the ‘no religion’ category continue to have a lower level of awareness of the PPS (75.9%).

Table 1: Awareness of the PPS*

Response	2019			2018		
	Yes	No	Unweighted Base	Yes	No	Unweighted Base
All Adults	83.1%	16.9%	1,185	80.8%	19.2%	1,184
Age						
<25 years	69.1%	30.9%	95	58.9%	41.1%	87
25-44 years	76.2%	23.8%	371	79.3%	20.7%	371
45-64 years	93.4%	6.6%	331	86.3%	13.7%	395
65+ years	85.3%	14.7%	383	83.7%	16.3%	318
Gender						
Male	84.7%	15.3%	541	85.2%	14.8%	497
Female	81.7%	18.3%	641	77.4%	22.6%	687
Religion						
Catholic	84.4%	15.6%	388	84.9%	15.1%	423
Protestant	87.7%	12.3%	492	81.8%	18.2%	491
No Religion	75.9%	24.1%	242	74.5%	25.5%	200

* Excluding ‘Don’t Know’ responses.



Question 2 - How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime?

Key Findings

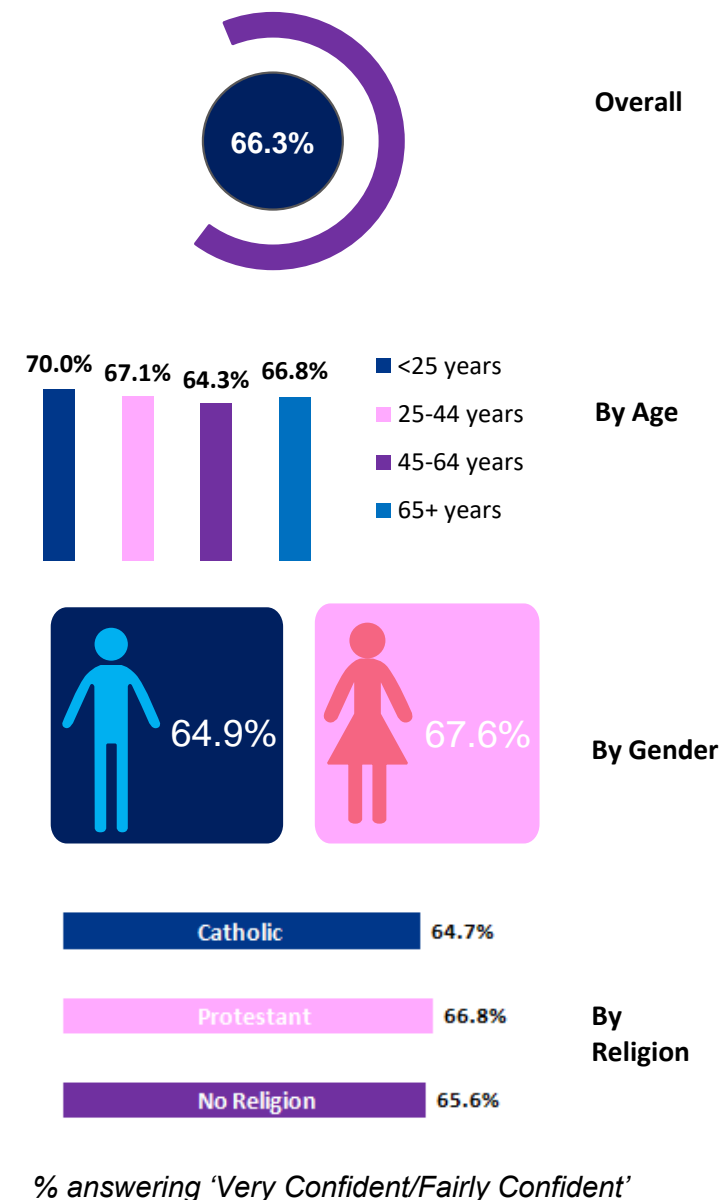
- Overall, approximately two-thirds of respondents (66.3%) were confident that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime – a small increase on 2018 (64.2%).
- Those in the 25 and under age band reported the highest level of confidence (70.0%). Like 2018, 45-64 year olds showed the lowest level of confidence (64.3%) – however confidence levels in this age group has increased from 2018 (59.5%).
- As was the case in 2018, there was a higher proportion of females (67.6%) than males (64.9%) having confidence in the effectiveness of the PPS.
- Just as in 2018, a higher proportion of Protestants (66.8%) than Catholics (64.7%) had confidence in the effectiveness of the PPS. Those in the 'no religion' category had a similar level of confidence (65.6%), an increase on 2018 (59.5%).

Table 2: Confidence in the effectiveness of PPS*

Response	2019			2018		
	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base
All Adults	66.3%	33.7%	857	64.2%	35.8%	843
Age						
<25 years**	70.0%	30.0%	53	N/A	N/A	46
25-44 years	67.1%	32.9%	254	68.4%	31.6%	252
45-64 years	64.3%	35.7%	280	59.5%	40.4%	306
65+ years	66.8%	33.2%	267	64.0%	36.0%	228
Gender						
Male	64.9%	35.1%	412	61.7%	38.3%	397
Female	67.6%	32.4%	445	66.5%	33.6%	446
Religion						
Catholic	64.7%	35.3%	290	61.6%	38.4%	303
Protestant	66.8%	33.2%	377	66.7%	33.3%	365
No Religion	65.6%	34.4%	161	59.5%	40.4%	138

* Excluding 'Don't Know' responses.

** Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.



Question 3 - How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?

Key Findings

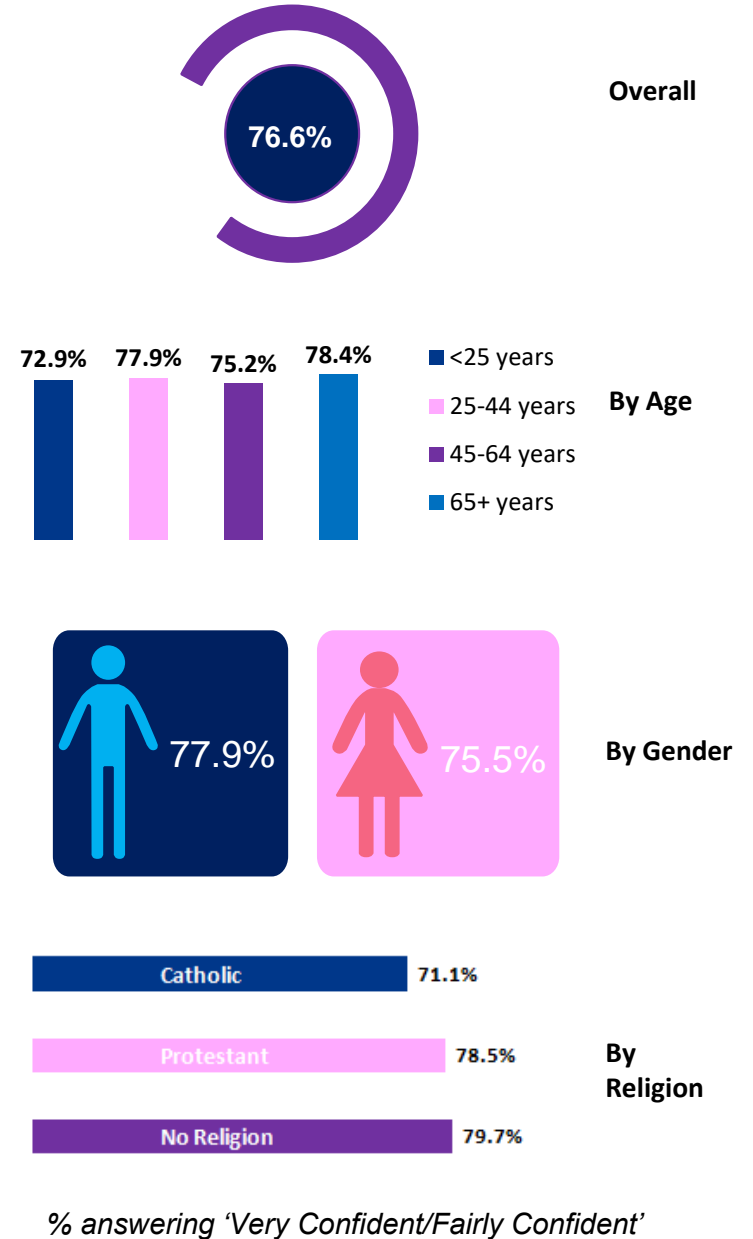
- Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents (76.6%) were confident that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service – a 7.9 percentage point increase on 2018 (68.7%).
- Similar to 2018, those in the 65+ age band reported the highest level of confidence (78.4%) – an increase on 2018 (71.9%), with those aged 25 and under reporting the lowest level of confidence (72.9%). High levels of confidence were reported across all four age groups.
- As in 2018, there was a slightly higher proportion of males (77.9%) than females (75.5%) who reported confidence in a fair and impartial service– an increase for both on 2018.
- A higher proportion of Protestants (78.5%) than Catholics (71.1%) expressed confidence in a fair and impartial service - with the 'no religion' category having the highest level of confidence (79.7%).

Table 3: Confidence in the PPS providing a fair and impartial service*

Response	2019			2018		
	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base
All Adults	76.6%	23.4%	858	68.7%	31.4%	825
Age						
<25 years**	72.9%	27.1%	55	N/A	N/A	46
25-44 years	77.9%	22.1%	254	69.6%	30.5%	247
45-64 years	75.2%	24.8%	276	65.5%	34.5%	298
65+ years	78.4%	21.6%	270	71.9%	28.1%	223
Gender						
Male	77.9%	22.1%	413	69.4%	30.6%	385
Female	75.5%	24.5%	445	68.0%	32.0%	440
Religion						
Catholic	71.1%	28.9%	286	62.0%	37.9%	304
Protestant	78.5%	21.5%	381	73.2%	26.8%	355
No Religion	79.7%	20.3%	158	68.7%	31.3%	129

* Excluding 'Don't Know' responses.

** Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.



Question 4 - How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service takes its prosecution decisions independently? (That is, independent of police, Government or any other body).

Key Findings

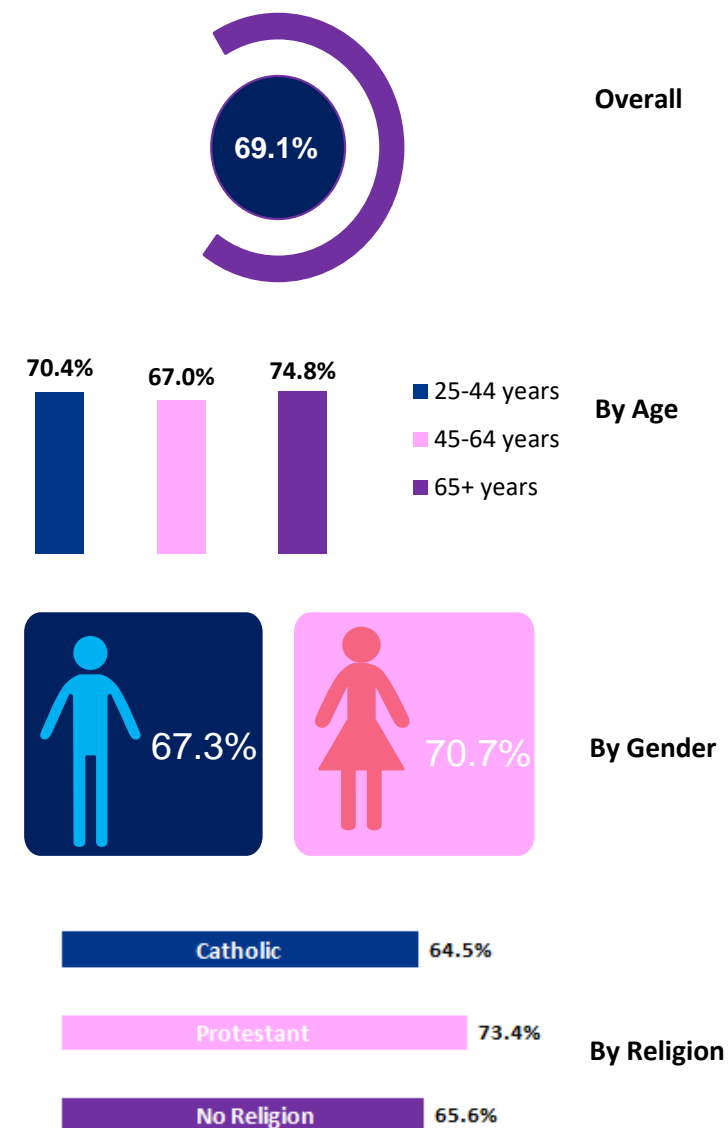
- Overall, nearly seven-tenths of respondents (69.1%) were confident that the PPS takes prosecution decisions independently – a 4.3 percentage point increase on 2018 (64.8%).
- Those in the 65+ age band reported the highest level of confidence (74.8%). As in 2018, those aged 45-64 reported the lowest level of confidence at 67.0% - up from 62.1% in 2018.
- A higher proportion of females (70.7%), than males (67.3%) were confident in the PPS taking prosecution decisions independently. Both have seen an increase on 2018 from 65.0% and 64.6% respectively.
- Similar to 2018, a higher proportion of Protestants (73.4%) than Catholics (64.5%) stated that they were confident in an independent service. Respondents in the 'no religion' category had a confidence level of 65.6% - all groups have seen a rise in confidence on 2018.

Table 4: Confidence in the independence of the PPS*

Response	2019			2018		
	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base	Very/Fairly Confident/	Not very /Not at all Confident	Unweighted Base
All Adults	69.1%	30.9%	838	64.8%	35.2%	818
Age						
<25 years**	N/A	N/A	48	N/A	N/A	42
25-44 years	70.4%	29.6%	246	68.6%	31.4%	247
45-64 years	67.0%	33.0%	276	62.1%	37.9%	292
65+ years	74.8%	25.2%	264	64.3%	35.7%	226
Gender						
Male	67.3%	32.7%	408	64.6%	35.3%	386
Female	70.7%	29.3%	430	65.0%	34.9%	432
Religion						
Catholic	64.5%	35.5%	273	59.9%	40.0%	299
Protestant	73.4%	26.6%	374	70.8%	29.1%	346
No Religion	65.6%	34.4%	160	57.8%	42.3%	136

* Excluding 'Don't Know' responses.

** Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.



% answering 'Very Confident/Fairly Confident'

Annex 1: Survey Data

Table 1.1
Had you heard of the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland, ‘the PPS’?

Response	2019				2018			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Unweighted Base	Yes	No	Don't Know	Unweighted Base
All Adults	82.2%	16.7%	1.1%	1,203	79.8%	19.0%	1.2%	1,201
Age								
<25 years	68.1%	30.5%	1.4%	98	58.9%	41.1%	0.0%	87
25-44 years	75.4%	23.5%	1.1%	375	78.2%	20.4%	1.4%	377
45-64 years	92.9%	6.6%	0.5%	333	85.3%	13.6%	1.1%	399
65+ years	84.3%	14.5%	1.2%	390	82.4%	16.0%	1.6%	325
Gender								
Male	84.2%	15.2%	0.5%	545	84.6%	14.6%	0.8%	501
Female	80.3%	18.0%	1.7%	658	76.2%	22.2%	1.6%	700
Religion								
Catholic	83.6%	15.4%	1.0%	393	83.6%	14.8%	1.5%	431
Protestant	86.8%	12.1%	1.0%	499	81.0%	18.0%	1.0%	496
No Religion	75.3%	23.8%	0.8%	246	73.8%	25.2%	1.0%	202

Table 1.2
How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime?

Response	2019				2018			
	Very/ Fairly Confident	Not Very/ Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base	Very/ Fairly Confident	Not Very/ Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base
All Adults	58.6%	29.8%	11.7%	983	57.8%	32.1%	10.1%	950
Age								
<25 years*	58.3%	25.0%	16.7%	64	N/A	N/A	N/A	49
25-44 years	61.3%	30.1%	8.6%	283	60.4%	27.9%	11.8%	289
45-64 years	58.6%	32.5%	8.9%	308	53.8%	36.6%	9.7%	343
65+ years	56.0%	27.8%	16.1%	323	57.3%	32.2%	10.4%	256
Gender								
Male	58.1%	31.4%	10.5%	465	57.9%	35.9%	6.3%	429
Female	59.0%	28.3%	12.6%	518	57.6%	29.1%	13.3%	521
Religion								
Catholic	58.6%	32.0%	9.3%	324	54.2%	33.9%	11.9%	355
Protestant	59.6%	29.6%	10.9%	430	61.3%	30.7%	8.0%	397
No Religion	56.1%	29.4%	14.4%	186	54.0%	36.7%	9.3%	152

* Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.

Table 1.3

How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?

Response	2019				2018			
	Very/Fairly Confident	Not Very/Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base	Very/Fairly Confident	Not Very/Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base
All Adults	67.6%	20.7%	11.7%	983	60.4%	27.6%	12.0%	950
Age								
<25 years*	63.9%	23.7%	12.4%	64	N/A	N/A	N/A	49
25-44 years	70.6%	20.1%	9.3%	283	59.9%	26.2%	14.0%	289
45-64 years	67.2%	22.2%	10.7%	308	57.6%	30.4%	12.0%	343
65+ years	66.5%	18.4%	15.1%	323	63.0%	24.6%	12.3%	256
Gender								
Male	70.5%	20.0%	9.5%	465	63.4%	28.0%	8.6%	429
Female	65.2%	21.2%	13.6%	518	57.9%	27.2%	14.9%	521
Religion								
Catholic	63.6%	25.9%	10.5%	324	54.5%	33.3%	12.2%	355
Protestant	70.1%	19.2%	10.7%	430	65.5%	24.0%	10.6%	397
No Religion	68.2%	17.3%	14.5%	186	59.1%	26.8%	14.1%	152

* Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.

Table 1.4

How confident are you that the Public Prosecution Service takes its prosecution decisions independently? (That is, independent of police, Government or any other body).

Response	2019				2018			
	Very/Fairly Confident	Not Very/Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base	Very/Fairly Confident	Not Very/Not at all Confident	Don't Know	Unweighted Base
All Adults	58.6%	26.3%	15.2%	983	56.6%	30.6%	12.7%	950
Age								
<25 years*	41.2%	35.1%	23.7%	64	N/A	N/A	N/A	49
25-44 years	60.6%	25.4%	14.0%	283	59.1%	27.0%	13.9%	289
45-64 years	58.9%	29.0%	12.1%	308	53.9%	33.0%	13.1%	343
65+ years	61.9%	20.9%	17.2%	323	57.3%	31.8%	10.9%	256
Gender								
Male	58.2%	28.3%	13.5%	465	59.1%	32.3%	8.5%	429
Female	58.9%	24.4%	16.8%	518	54.6%	29.3%	16.2%	521
Religion								
Catholic	53.0%	29.2%	17.8%	324	52.0%	34.7%	13.3%	355
Protestant	64.7%	23.5%	11.8%	430	61.5%	25.3%	13.2%	397
No Religion	55.8%	29.3%	14.9%	186	52.0%	38.0%	10.0%	152

* Percentage breakdown not provided where base number is under 50.

Annex 2: Technical Notes

Ethical Approval

The 2019 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queens University Belfast, where the survey coordinator is based.

The overall design

The 2019 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey involved 1,203 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 18 years or over. The main interview was carried out using computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and the respondent was then asked to complete a self-completion questionnaire.

The PPS module was part of the main interview carried out via CAPI.

Pilot and mainstage fieldwork

All interviews were conducted by Ipsos MORI interviewers in the participants' homes. Pilot interviews with 45 participants were carried out during the period 17th August – 6th September 2019. The main stage of the fieldwork was undertaken during the period 10th September 2019 – 6th February 2020.

An advance letter was issued by Ipsos MORI to all sampled addresses prior to the interviewer calling at each address. The letter explained the purpose and rationale for the survey, as well as contact details for the staff managing the project. Individuals were informed how their personal data would be handled in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and their right to withdraw from the research if they did not wish to take part.

Sampling and Response Rate

The sample for the 2019 survey consisted of a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF) database of addresses. This is the most up-to-date and complete listing of addresses. Private business addresses were removed from the database prior to sample selection. A total of 2,262 addresses were selected for interview. Throughout the survey period, an additional 500 addresses were extracted. However, the figure in Table 2.1 below only refers to addresses which were issued and where attempts were made to obtain an interview.

The Postcode Address File (PAF) provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but contains no information about the number of people living at an address. Further selection stages were therefore required to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of individuals from which one person ('the selected respondent') is chosen to complete the questionnaire.

The person to be interviewed was randomly selected using the 'next birthday' rule. The interviewer asked the householder to list the birthdays of all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample: that is, all persons aged 18 or over living at the address.

The person with the next birthday, at the time of the call, was the person with whom the interview was to be conducted. Where the selected respondent was not available, an appointment was made to call back to interview them at a more suitable time.

From a set sample of 2,167 addresses, 1,203 interviews were achieved giving a response rate of 56%.

Table 2.1 shows the status of addresses, and the number of addresses in scope.

Table 2.2 shows the breakdown of response.

Table 2.1: Status of addresses		
Total addresses issued	Ineligible (e.g. vacant/derelict/commercial)	Total in scope
2,311	144	2,167

Table 2.2: Breakdown of response		
	Number	Percent
Total co-operating	1,203	56
- Fully co-operating	1,203	56
- Partially co-operating	0	0
Refusal to co-operate	728	34
Non-contact	218	10
Other	18	1
Total	2,167	100

Representativeness

Selecting only one individual for interview at each address means individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in smaller households. The data presented in this bulletin has been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households. To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the Northern Ireland population from Mid-Year Population Estimates. The NILTS Sample has also been compared to the achieved sample of the Continuous Household Survey (CHS). Table 2.3 shows this comparison and Table 2.4 a profile of the survey sample.

Table 2.3: Representativeness of the NILTS 2019 sample by age and gender			
Individual Characteristics	NILTS 2019 (weighted)	CHS 2017/18	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2019
		%	
Age			
18-24 years	11.8	5	11.0
25-34 years	17.0	14	17.1
35-44 years	13.9	16	16.6
45-54 years	14.5	20	17.7
55-64 years	15.9	17	15.9
65+ years	27.0	27	21.7
Gender			
Male	46.8	43	48.6
Female	53.2	57	51.4
Base=100%	1,203	3,262	1,452,962

Source: NISRA, NILTS 2019

Table 2.4: Representativeness of the NILTS 2019 sample by religion			
Individual Characteristics	NILTS 2019 (weighted)	CHS 2018/19**	Northern Ireland Census 2011
		%	
Religion			
Protestant	38	45	48
Catholic	35	43	45
Other or no religion*	24	11	6
Missing/refused	3	1	1
Base=100%	1,203	10,902	1,108,630

Source: NISRA, NILTS 2019

*Includes 'no religion' and religion not stated

** Supplemented from household membership

Weighting

Selecting only one individual for interview at each sampled address means that the probability of selection for the survey is inversely related to the size of the household. In other words, individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals in small households.

Before analysis, all households which provided a selected respondent are examined and the data are weighted in relation to the number of eligible adults at the address derived from the details of household structure recorded by interviewers on the questionnaire. This weighting process adjusts the results to those that would have been achieved if the sample had been drawn as a random sample of adults rather than of addresses.

On occasions, in tables showing weighted data, the sum of column totals does not equal the grand total. This is due to the rounding process associated with weighting. The percentages in the tables are based on weighted data but the totals are unweighted.

Sampling Errors and Confidence Intervals

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. The Public Prosecution Service does not routinely publish estimates where the Unweighted Base is less than 50 cases.

Because NILTS estimates are subject to sampling error, differences between population subgroups may occur by chance.

The table below set outs sampling errors and confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level relating to a Systematic Random Sample design as used in the survey. Note that the margin of error for all sample estimates is within the parameters of $\pm 2.81\%$.

Table 2.5: Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)

	%	Margin of Error
Age		
18-24	8.1	1.54
25-34	16.7	2.10
35-44	14.7	2.00
45-54	12.6	1.88
55-64	15.4	2.04
65 and over	32.5	2.65
Sex		
Male	45.3	2.81
Female	54.7	2.81
Religion		
Catholic	32.7	2.65
Protestant	39.4	2.76
None	20.4	2.28
Other	3.9	1.09
Refused/Don't Know	3.6	1.05

Source: NILTS 2019

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