



Research Update

Prejudice and Tolerance in Northern Ireland

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Over the past decade there has been extensive discussion over the scale and nature of prejudice towards minority ethnic and new migrant communities in Northern Ireland. During this period the size and diversity of the minority ethnic population has increased considerably and so has the number of racist incidents recorded by the police. Figure 1 indicates the number of such incidents recorded by the police each year since 1999 and shows a dramatic rise in the total from 185 in 2002 to 1047 in 2007. This increase would have been even more dramatic if hate crimes against minority faiths were included in the total. This Research Update uses survey data to explore prejudice and tolerance among people living in Northern Ireland.

Are we becoming more racist?

The Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey and, more recently, the **Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT)** have periodically monitored perceptions of prejudice and attitudes towards people from minority ethnic communities. Measuring 'prejudice' is fraught with difficulty and there are no standard measures that would be without criticism. Two ways that this can be done are (a) to ask people what they believe about levels of prejudice in general and (b) to ask respondents whether or not they would describe themselves as prejudiced.

Since 2005, NILT has asked people whether they think there is a lot, a little, or hardly any prejudice against minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. In each year between 90 and 93 per cent of people said they believed there was 'a lot or 'a little' prejudice, with only between six and eight per cent believing there was 'hardly any'.

'Self-reported' prejudice has been on the rise in Northern Ireland since the mid 1990s. Fifteen years ago only one in ten people in Northern Ireland described themselves as at all prejudiced. As Figure 2 indicates, by a decade later this had risen to one in four, and over the following few years, about one in three people were prepared to say that they were 'very' or 'a little' prejudiced against people of minority ethnic communities. In the 2008 NILT survey, two per cent of respondents described themselves as 'very prejudiced' and 30 per cent as 'a little prejudiced'.

These responses indicate that a large majority of the population are aware of the levels of prejudice in Northern Ireland, while a sizeable percentage considers themselves to be prejudiced. Although there were no notable differences by age, gender or community background in terms of recognising prejudice within society as a whole, men were more willing to admit to being prejudiced than women (35% compared to 30%) and Protestants (41%) were more willing to admit prejudice than Catholics (23%) or people with no religion (24%).

The percentage of people admitting to being prejudiced has increased among all backgrounds between 2005 and 2008, but amongst Protestants it has increased from 33 per cent to 41 per cent, whilst amongst Catholics and among those of no religion the increase has been less: from 18% to 23% and from 19% to 24% respectively.

Figure 1: Racist incidents recorded by the police 1999-2009

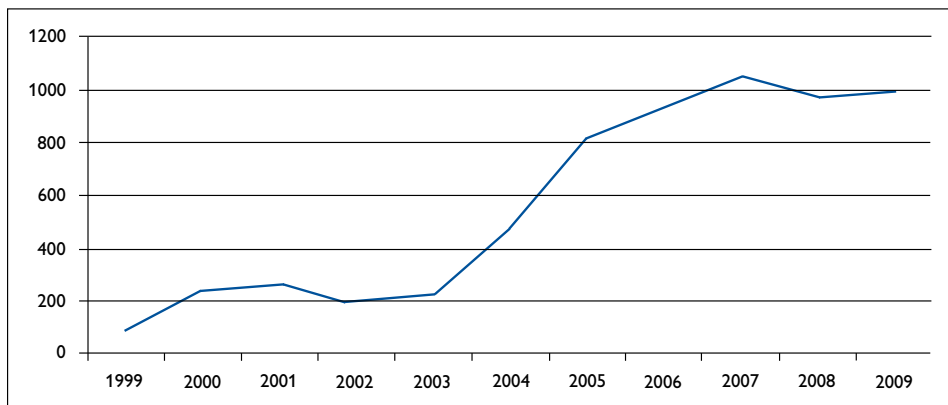


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents describing themselves as 'very' or 'a little' prejudiced against people of minority ethnic communities

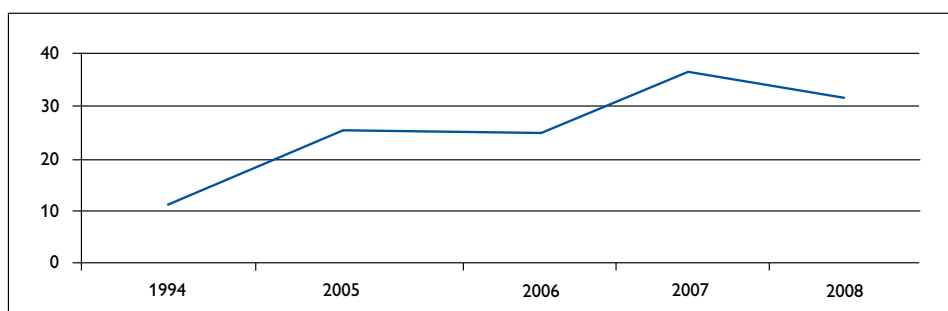


Table 1: Which minority ethnic community do you think there is most prejudice against?

	%			
	2005	2006	2007	2008
Black (African, Caribbean)	8	8	10	10
Chinese	22	6	8	3
South Asian	12	12	10	8
Filipino	2	2	1	1
Irish Traveller	16	14	14	19
East European	15	11	13	7
Polish		27	32	30
Portuguese	8	6	4	3
Romanian				5
None of these	12	4	5	8
Don't know	2	11	5	5

Perhaps more worrying, given the high numbers of racist incidents being recorded, is that while 84 per cent of respondents who admitted being prejudiced said they would avoid displaying prejudiced behaviour towards minority ethnic people, 15 per cent said that their behaviour would be consistent with the prejudice they feel. Furthermore, men were more likely than women to say that they would act in a way that reflected their prejudice (17% compared to 12%);

people aged between 45-54 years were most likely to do so (25% compared to 10% of 35-44 year olds and 16% of 25-34 year olds); and Protestants (18%) were more likely to do so than Catholics (11%).

Recognising Diversity

Although members of the majority communities are aware of social and

personal prejudice towards minority ethnic communities, it is important to acknowledge that the term 'minority ethnic community' covers a broad range of ethnic, national and faith constituencies. Moreover, if attitudes are to be challenged then it is important to explore how people feel and behave towards different groups of people.

The survey asked respondents which particular communities they think there is most prejudice against, and the responses set out in Table 1 throw up some interesting findings in relation to changing perceptions of prejudice. In 2005, 22 per cent of people thought that most prejudice was directed towards the Chinese community, but in 2008, only 3 per cent believed this. Instead, the Polish community (which was only beginning to be established in 2005) was identified as the community facing most prejudice.

The Polish community has replaced the Chinese as the one perceived to experience most prejudice, whilst the Traveller community has retained second highest perceptions of prejudice in each of the last four years. In contrast, the Filipino and Portuguese communities are those least identified as facing prejudice over all four years. It is important to note, however, that the response categories for the question were changed over the years. Thus, Romanian was added as a specific category in 2008, and five per cent of respondents identified the Romanian community as being subjected to most prejudice. Six months after the end of the survey fieldwork, however, incidents in south Belfast resulted in the forced re-housing and eventual repatriation of large numbers of Roma.

Table 2: I would accept the following ethnic/religious groups as colleagues, near residents, friends or in-laws (2008)

	%			
	Colleague	Resident	Friend	In-law
Chinese/Asian	90	89	80	76
East European	86	81	76	73
Muslim	71	68	62	51
Irish Traveller	69	41	47	47

Table 3: I would accept the following ethnic/religious groups as colleagues, near residents, friends or in-laws by community background (2008)

	%							
	Colleague		Resident		Friend		In-Law	
	C	P	C	P	C	P	C	P
Chinese/Asian	94	86	94	84	85	74	82	68
East European	92	81	88	74	83	69	81	65
Muslim	78	64	77	60	74	51	60	41
Irish Traveller	77	62	50	33	54	39	52	40

Table 4: Do you have work colleagues, neighbours or friends from the following minority ethnic community backgrounds? (2008)

	%		
	Work Colleagues	Neighbours	Friends
Black	15	3	12
Chinese	17	4	12
South Asian	16	5	9
Filipino	11	2	6
Irish Traveller	4	1	2
East European	14	3	6
Polish	38	9	17
Portuguese	9	1	5
Romanian	8	1	3
Other	3	3	4

Another way to explore people's prejudices is to ask whether they would accept members of different communities as work colleagues, close neighbours, friends or relations through marriage. Table 2 indicates the different attitudes to levels of engagement or interaction with four broad categories of minority communities: 'Chinese or Asian', East European, Muslims or Travellers. The table indicates that in general, respondents appear to be most comfortable with a more distant or formal type of relationship, such as one maintained through the workplace, rather than a closer friendship or a relationship based on marriage.

It is notable, given the findings in relation to general perceptions of prejudice in Table 1 that the most positive attitude is towards members of the Chinese or Asian communities, with less positive attitudes towards Muslims and Travellers. Only around one in two people said they were willing to accept a Muslim or a Traveller as a relative by marriage, and just 41 per cent were prepared to accept a Traveller as a near resident.

In a similar fashion to the general admission of prejudice noted earlier in this Research Update, in each case Protestants had less positive attitudes towards different forms of relationship with members of minority communities than did members of the Catholic community (see Table 3).

Levels of Integration

Among the factors that feed levels of prejudice are stereotypical generalisations which are based upon a limited engagement with real people. It is likely therefore that levels of prejudice will only be replaced by increasing tolerance and respect as people develop more understanding of the different minority communities through mixing in different social environments. The previous questions have explored general perceptions and attitudes, but other questions explored the levels of interaction and integration of members of minority ethnic communities within Northern Irish society.

Specifically, people were asked whether they had any work colleagues, neighbours or friends from various minority ethnic community backgrounds. The responses

indicated relatively limited levels of interaction and integration, apart from the relatively high levels of interaction with Polish people as work colleagues (see Table 4). Again, the different patterns of contact are notable, in that respondents were most likely to identify members of minority ethnic communities as work colleagues, but only half as likely to identify them as friends and fewer still to identify them as neighbours.

It is also worth highlighting the apparently extremely limited levels of contact with members of the Traveller community, with only four per cent of respondents identifying a Traveller as a work colleague, one per cent as a neighbour and two per cent as a friend.

There were slightly different patterns of relationships within the majority communities however. Protestants were slightly more likely to admit having work colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds (except for Filipinos, Travellers and East Europeans), while Catholics were more likely to admit having neighbours from such communities (particularly with South Asian, East European and Polish people). In addition, Protestants were slightly more likely to admit having friends from minority backgrounds (with the exception of among Poles and Portuguese).

A further question asked how often people came into contact with someone from a minority ethnic background. Over one half of all respondents had fairly regular contacts, with 29 per cent

of people saying they had contact with a member of a minority ethnic community on a daily basis, 26 per cent once or twice a week and 13 per cent having contact once or twice a month. Just under a third of the population (31%) had contact with members of minority communities rarely or not at all. (see Table 5).

Table 5: How often do you come into contact with people from minority ethnic backgrounds?

	%
Daily	29
About once or twice a week	26
About once or twice a month	13
Very rarely	21
Not at all	11
Don't know	0

Of those who had contact with members of minority communities, 22 per cent said the contact involved an interaction such as a lengthy conversation, while nearly half (45%) said it involved just a greeting and 31 per cent said it was something between the two.

Finally, NILT respondents were asked how much they agreed with the statement 'I personally know quite a bit about the culture of some minority ethnic communities living in Northern Ireland'. One in four (25%) agreed or strongly agreed that they knew 'quite a bit' about minority ethnic cultures, while 30 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed and 37 per cent disagreed.

Conclusions

In recent years there has been a dramatic rise in racist incidents recorded by the police and there has also been an increase in the percentage of people who are prepared to admit to being prejudiced towards members of minority ethnic communities. A sizeable proportion of those admitting prejudice are also unwilling to disguise it in interactions with members of minority communities. However, there is also some evidence that people do not see all minority communities as the same. Thus, respondents are less willing to consider integrating with members of the Traveller community and with Muslims, than with Chinese, Asians or with East Europeans, with generally less receptive

views being held among Protestants than among Catholics.

There is also some evidence of growing levels of interaction between members of the majority and minority communities particularly through the workplace, although in many cases the interaction appears to be relatively superficial. Furthermore, there is still a general lack of knowledge of the wider minority ethnic cultures that have become established in Northern Ireland.

These findings reflect something of the diversity of views and opinions towards minority ethnic communities among the majority population in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse. However,

the NILT survey also reveals the deeply ingrained prejudice towards members of the Traveller community who continue to be subjected to higher levels of prejudice and discrimination than other minority communities.

There has been a considerable amount of research carried out in recent years into views and experiences of the minority ethnic and new migrant communities. The findings highlighted in this Research Update suggest that more detailed qualitative research into the views and attitudes of the two majority communities could be useful in developing a deeper understanding of the patterns of prejudice and tolerance in Northern Ireland.

Key Points

- 93% of respondents in 2008 think there is a lot or a little prejudice against minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland.
- 32% of respondents in 2008 described themselves 'very' or 'a little' prejudiced against people of minority ethnic communities.
- In 2005, respondents identified the Chinese community as experiencing the most prejudice in Northern Ireland; in 2008, this was replaced by the Polish community. The Traveller community was consistently identified as the group receiving the second highest levels of prejudice.
- Respondents are less willing to consider integrating with members of the Traveller community and with Muslims, than with Chinese, Asians or with East Europeans. Generally less receptive views are held among Protestants than among Catholics.
- There are growing levels of interaction with minority communities, particularly through the workplace, although in many cases the interaction appears to be relatively superficial.

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