



Research Update

Attitudes to minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, 2005-2016

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Historically, immigration to Northern Ireland was very limited, perhaps due to the negative publicity caused by the Troubles. Following the ceasefires in 1994, and the expansion of the European Union, Northern Ireland has become more ethnically diverse. Given the potential implications of Brexit on immigration and rights to work, it is timely to explore how welcoming Northern Ireland is to people from minority ethnic groups.

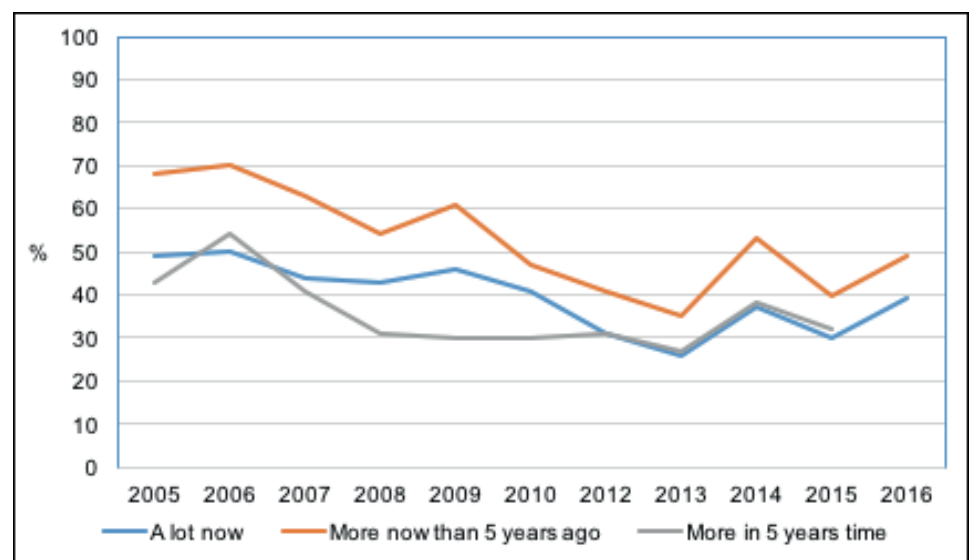
Whilst some communities (such as Chinese) have lived in Northern Ireland for many years, relevant policy and legislation is relatively new. The first major piece of legislation was the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, whilst Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 included people of different racial groups as one of the nine equality groups. The first *Racial Equality Strategy* (OFMDFM, 2005) related to 2005-2010, which was followed by the current *Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025* (OFMDFM, 2015). Also relevant is the *Together: Building a United*

Community Strategy (OFMDFM, 2013), which provides a framework to tackle sectarianism and racism. Notably, within these strategies, racism is used to refer to all forms of racial intolerance and discrimination including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

The **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey** has been running annually since 1998. Initially, only a few questions were asked each year about immigration and minority ethnic groups, with more emphasis being placed on recording attitudes

to relations between Catholic and Protestant communities. Reflecting the increasing diversity of the population, a larger set of questions on attitudes towards minority ethnic groups has been asked regularly since 2005. Five Research Updates have focused on these findings: Gilligan (2008), Jarman (2009), McDermott (2013), McDermott (2015), and Michael (2017). This Research Update reports on data from the 2016 survey, and explores how, or if, attitudes have changed over time.

Figure 1: Perceived prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities



Prejudice in Northern Ireland

As Neil Jarman highlighted in 2009, finding a comprehensive or acceptable measure of prejudice is difficult. Thus, the Life and Times survey has consistently asked about perceptions of levels of prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland as a whole, as well as self-reported prejudice.

Every year since the question was first asked in 2005, at least three quarters of NILT respondents have said that there is some level of racial prejudice in Northern Ireland (either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’), ranging from 94 per cent in 2009 to 77 per cent in 2013. The figure for 2016 is 86 per cent. It is useful to focus solely on the proportion of respondents thinking that there is ‘a lot’ of prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities – this has fallen from 49 per cent in 2005, to 39 per cent in 2016.

While the overall trend was downward from 2005 to 2013, it has been more erratic since then – see Figure 1.

There has been a general downward trend in the proportion of respondents thinking that there is more racial prejudice now compared to five years previously (49% in 2016, compared to 68% in 2005). In addition, fewer respondents in 2015 (32%) than in 2005 (43%) thought that racial prejudice would increase in the future. (This question was not asked in 2016).

Despite the perception that there is ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ racial prejudice in Northern Ireland, the levels of self-reported prejudice are low. Every year since the question was first asked in 2005, a majority of NILT respondents described themselves as ‘not prejudiced at all’ against people from minority ethnic communities. Table 1 shows that the figure in 2016

(74%) is nearly the same as in 2005 (73%). One statistically significant trend is that a higher proportion of Protestant respondents would describe themselves as ‘very’ or ‘a little’ prejudiced, compared to Catholic respondents. This gap was highest in 2008 (18 percentage points), and was at its lowest in 2016 (8 percentage points).

Social distance

NILT has explored the willingness of respondents to accept members of four specific communities (Irish Travellers, Eastern Europeans, other minorities, and Muslims) in different kinds of relationships (as tourists, neighbours, colleagues, friends, and in-laws). Irish Travellers, people from Eastern Europe, and Muslims were not asked these questions relating to their own group.

The results from 2016 indicate a hierarchy of acceptance depending upon how much personal

Table 1: Self-reported prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
						%					
Very or a little prejudiced	26	24	34	32	32	32	27	26	24	28	25
Not prejudiced at all	73	75	66	68	68	67	71	72	73	69	74
% saying ‘very’ or ‘a little’ prejudiced											
Catholic	18	18	25	23	26	22	21	18	18	23	21
Protestant	33	33	42	41	40	40	34	35	35	33	29
No religion	19	15	30	24	27	30	23	29	16	27	24

Table 2: Acceptance of particular groups in different circumstances (2016)

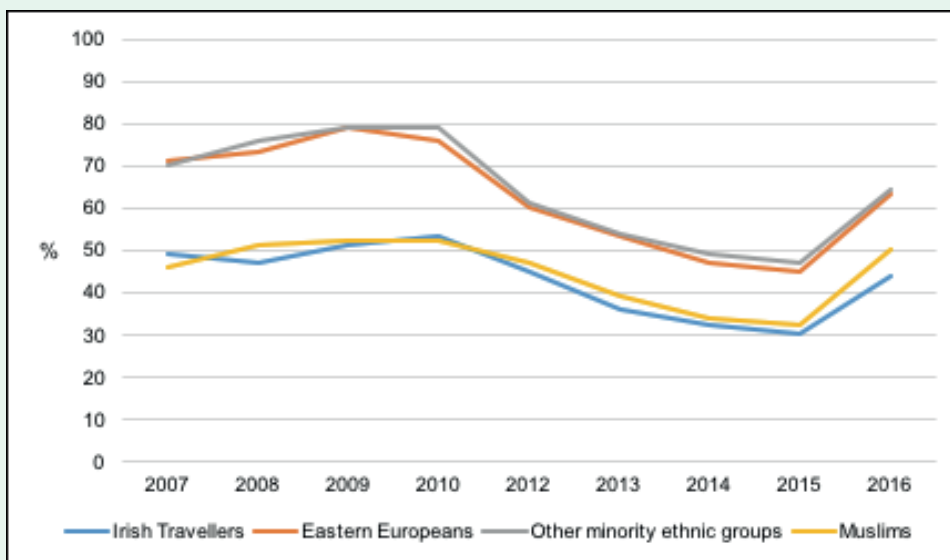
	% willing to accept minority groups as ...			
	Travellers*	Eastern Europeans** Ethnic Groups	Other Minority	Muslims***
A tourist visiting Northern Ireland	-	95	96	85
A resident of Northern Ireland living and working here	-	92	95	77
A resident in my local area	-	85	89	71
Living in a house as a resident in my local area	62	-	-	-
A colleague at my work	61	76	77	63
A close friend of mine	48	66	68	54
A relative by way of marrying a close member of my family	44	63	64	50

* excludes respondents who are Irish Travellers

** excludes respondents who are Eastern European

*** excludes respondents who are Muslim

Figure 2: Acceptance of different group as relative by marriage



contact the respondent would have – in other words, the ‘social distance’ – see Table 2. Thus, most respondents would be willing to accept someone from these groups as tourists or local residents. However, they are less welcoming

when it comes to more personal relationships, such as a relative by marriage. This pattern reflects the findings of previous years.

Table 2 also shows that other minority ethnic groups and

Eastern Europeans are the most welcome groups, followed by Muslims and Irish Travellers. For example, around three quarters of respondents would be happy to accept Eastern Europeans (76%) or other minority ethnic groups (77%) as their colleagues, whilst they would be less willing to accept Irish Travellers (61%) or Muslims (63%) in this situation. Again, this pattern was found in previous NILT surveys.

Figure 2 focuses on accepting someone from a different group as a relative by marriage, and shows fluctuations over time. The increasingly welcoming attitudes between 2007 and 2010 were reversed in 2012, and the lowest levels were recorded in 2015. It is important to monitor these time series, in order to ascertain whether the increase in acceptance seen in 2016 reflects a long-term trend.

Table 3: Respondents with friends from different ethnic or nationality backgrounds

	%							
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2014	2015	2016
Polish	11	14	17	21	20	22	27	37
Chinese	12	12	12	14	14	16	15	22
Black (African, Caribbean)	11	12	12	15	15	18	16	19
Other Eastern European	8	8	6	7	8	9	12	16
South Asian (Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi)	9	9	9	11	10	11	11	15
Filipino	4	5	6	7	7	7	7	12
Portuguese	4	3	5	5	4	6	10	12
Romanian	*	*	3	4	3	6	9	10
Irish Traveller	3	3	2	2	4	4	8	8
Bulgarian	*	*	1	2	3	4	8	7

* Not asked

Results from the 2016 survey indicate varying levels of friendship with specific communities (see Table 3). Over one third of respondents (37%) say that they have Polish friends. Whilst other groups (for example, Chinese, and Black) are identified as friends by approximately one in five respondents, Irish Travellers and Bulgarians continue to be identified as friends by less than one in ten respondents. Across the board, there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents with friends from ethnic or nationality backgrounds different from their own. The largest increase relates to respondents with Polish friends, which rose by 26 percentage points between 2006 and 2016.

Migrant workers

Between 2004 and 2007, twelve countries joined the European Union, which resulted in a marked increase in the number of people coming to live, work or study in Northern Ireland, especially from Eastern Europe. Table 3 indicates that public attitudes to migrant workers are complex.

Looking first at the most recent findings from 2016, many NILT participants responded positively about the contribution of migrant workers. Nearly nine out of ten respondents (88%) believe that 'it is good for Northern Ireland that migrant workers come to work as doctors and nurses when there is a shortage of medical staff'. Seven out of ten respondents (72%)

agree that migrants workers take up jobs that Northern Ireland workers don't want, and a slightly lower proportion (66%) feel that migrant workers are generally good for Northern Ireland's economy.

At the same time, however, there is some concern about strain on the Health Service (57%), schools (49%), and housing (43%). There is little support for the statement that migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland (31%), or that they come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits (27%).

There has been some change in attitudes between 2006 and 2016. In particular, there is increased

Table 3: Attitudes to migrant workers

	% agree/strongly agree						
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013	2016
It is good for Northern Ireland that migrant workers come to work as doctors and nurses when there is a shortage of medical staff	82	83	81	82	78	77	88
Migrant workers make Northern Ireland open to new ideas and cultures	67	68	66	68	69	66	75
Migrant workers mostly take up jobs that Northern Ireland workers don't want	80	77	78	74	73	67	72
People's perceptions of migrant workers are tainted by the media	66	65	58	66	61	57	71
Migrant workers are generally good for Northern Ireland's economy	53	59	52	50	50	56	66
The number of migrant workers coming into Northern Ireland puts a strain on the Health Service	60	65	60	60	59	58	57
The needs of migrant workers' children are putting a strain on schools.	43	55	51	48	48	47	49
The number of migrant workers moving into Northern Ireland means that there is a shortage of local housing	51	49	42	40	38	42	43
Migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland	48	42	46	42	43	43	31
Migrant workers come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits	27	28	31	32	32	36	27

support for the statement that migrant workers are generally good for Northern Ireland's economy (up by 13 percentage points), which is complemented

by the fall in the proportion of respondents thinking that migrant workers taking jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland (down 17

percentage points). These could be seen as indicators that attitudes towards migrant workers have become more accepting, especially in relation to their role within the economy and labour force.

Conclusion

This exploration of public attitudes to different or new communities in Northern Ireland paints a complex picture over the past eleven years. There has been a consistent feeling that Northern Ireland is prejudiced against people from minority ethnic communities, with at least three quarters of respondents each year believing that there is racial prejudice. On a more positive note, there has been a fall in the proportion saying that there is 'a lot' of racial prejudice. At the same time, levels of self-reported prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities are low. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is to be expected, as previous research has shown that people often assign higher levels of prejudice to society in general that they report in relation to themselves. Self-reported prejudice remains higher among Protestant respondents, compared to Catholic respondents. However, this differential has decreased in recent years.

The attitudes of NILT respondents towards migrant workers remain positive, especially in relation to their contribution to the labour force. However, with the impending exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, it is inevitable that there will be considerable change in patterns of immigration, and the make up of the labour force. In turn, these will most likely impact on how the public

feels about migrant workers, and immigration in general. Thus, it is imperative to monitor these attitudes over these next years.

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Key points

- 86% of NILT respondents in 2016 believe there is a lot or a little racial prejudice in Northern Ireland.
- Across different situations (tourist, neighbour, colleague, friend and in-law), respondents are less willing to accept an Irish Traveller or Muslim, than someone from Eastern Europe or another minority ethnic group.
- In 2016, 76% of respondents would accept someone from Eastern Europe as a colleague, whilst 61% would accept an Irish Traveller.
- 37% of respondents in 2016 had a Polish friend, but only 7% had a Bulgarian friend.
- 88% think that it is good for Northern Ireland that migrant workers come to work as doctors and nurses when there is a shortage of medical staff.
- 72% think that migrant workers mostly take up jobs that Northern Ireland workers don't want.
- 57% are concerned that the number of migrant workers is putting a strain on the Health Service.

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The **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey** is carried out annually and documents public opinion on a wide range of social issues. NILT is a joint project of the two Northern Ireland universities and aims to provide an independent source of information on what the public thinks about the social issues of the day. Check on the website for more information on the survey findings (www.ark.ac.uk/nilt).



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