



Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2020

Technical Notes

(updated 30 October 2023)

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt

Contents

	Page
What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?	i
Links with other surveys	i
Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: change of method	ii
Technical details of the 2020 survey	
The overall design	iii
Ethical approval	iii
Survey content	iii
Pilot and mainstage fieldwork	iv
Advance letter	iv
Sampling design	v
Response rate	v
Sampling errors and confidence intervals	vi
Data preparation	vi
Weighting	vi
Deriving social class variables	vii
Personal and household income	vii
Comparison with other data sources	vii
The NILT dataset	x
Variables on the dataset	x
Finding a module in the questionnaires	xii
NILT website	xii
Contact information	xii

What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey was launched 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 our attitudes and behaviour develop on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey is run on a modular format and while some modules are repeated every year (for example, Community/Good Relations) the rest of the survey varies annually, with all the modules designed to be repeated in years to come.

The survey aims to provide:

- A local resource for use by the general public;
- Trusted and independent evidence to inform policy making; and
- A data source for a more theoretical academic debate.

We would like to thank the funders for the 2020 survey who have been supportive of the overall aims of the project: The Executive Office, Department of Justice, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Police Ombudsman's Office, Public Health Agency, Public Prosecution Service and Queen's University Belfast. We would especially like to thank all the respondents to the survey.

Links with other surveys

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey is a direct descendent of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey (NISA) which ran from 1989 to 1996. NISA was a sister survey to the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), and, by running the same modules as BSA, it provided a time-series of social attitudes allowing comparisons with Britain. Against the background of the new political arrangements in Northern Ireland it was agreed that the new Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey would be better served by cutting its links with its British counterpart. NILT now carries on the tradition of a time-series of attitudes but has shifted the focus away from comparisons with Britain. It is largely Northern Ireland focused, it is social policy focused, and it is designed to be accessible to wider public in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, every year includes a substantial component which either continues an old NISA time-series, or replicates a BSA module.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey is a constituent resource of ARK (www.ark.ac.uk), which is a research, policy and impact hub, based jointly in Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. ARK runs a suite of three surveys in order to record the attitudes of people of all ages in Northern Ireland to the key issues affecting their lives:

- Northern Ireland Life and Times survey of adults aged 18 years or over
- Young Life and Times survey of 16 year olds (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt)
- Kids' Life and Times survey of 10-11 year olds (www.ark.ac.uk/klt)

Where possible and appropriate, we include questions across these surveys, in order to compare attitudes among different ages.

Northern Ireland Life and Times survey: change of method

Since its inception in 1998, the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey has been an important record of public attitudes to key social issues. A number of issues are highlighted below which users should take into account when using the 2020 NILT survey.

While Northern Ireland has faced many challenges since the inception of NILT, some unique social and political instabilities were evident in 2020. COVID-19 brought lockdowns and new and evolving public health regulations that negatively impacted the physical and mental health of many. Political change included the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, and Brexit, a feature of the latter being the ongoing protracted and contested negotiations about the Protocol. These factors are very likely to have affected public attitudes and behaviours.

Alongside these factors, NILT was faced with methodological challenges. Traditionally, the NILT survey involved a face-to-face interview; however, in 2020, face-to-face household interviews were suspended due to COVID-19 restrictions. Nonetheless, the NILT team and the survey funders felt that it was vital to continue with the survey and ensure that public attitudes were recorded at such an unsettled time. Thus, the NILT interviews were carried out remotely, with most participants completing online and a small number by phone or video call. The achieved response rate in 2020 was 9%, compared to 56% in 2019. This differential is a recognised outcome of utilising a remote as opposed to face-to-face mode.

The move to a remote process may affect results. In the case of NILT, participants were responding anonymously without an interviewer in the room, thereby reducing social desirability bias. The number of questions had to be reduced, and the wording and response options for some questions changed.

Compared with 2019, the profile of participants of the 2020 survey was different. For example,

- There was an under-representation of people aged 65 years.
- A higher proportion of respondents self-reported as middle income, and a lower proportion said they did not know how to describe their income.
- There was an overrepresentation of Alliance voters, and Sinn Féin voters were underrepresented.

Analysis of the NILT data involves the use of a weighting factor that takes into account the sampling methodology (i.e. one person selected at random from a random selection of households). Nevertheless, this weighting variable cannot eliminate all forms of bias which may be present in the data.

In conclusion, given the methodological and contextual specificities and complexities noted above, care should be taken in reaching conclusions based on NILT 2020 data, and/or making comparisons with previous years. Moreover, differentiating the relative impact of the societal, political and methodological changes highlighted using just one year of data would be impossible. However, a key strength of NILT is that it is carried out annually, and, as such, enables assessments of trends over time. Changes in behaviour and attitudes contained in the 2020 results should, therefore, be considered in relation to future NILT data to more accurately gauge whether, or not, the 2020 results might be indicative of more permanent changing trends.

Technical details of the 2020 survey

The documentation provided here is designed to be easy to use rather than technically exhaustive. Users who intend to carry out sophisticated statistical analyses or to manipulate the data to investigate particular features can get in touch with the survey team if they require more precise details on the survey set-up. Contact details are provided on page xi of this document.

The overall design

The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey involved 1,292 interviews with adults aged 18 years or over.

In order to achieve the objectives of the research while considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a multi-modal approach was used. A large-scale Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed and this was supplemented with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) and Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) via Microsoft Teams video calls. Face-to-face interviewers also called directly to selected households to encourage participation.

The survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible, presenting participants with a range of ways in which they could complete the survey. It is important to note that face-to-face visits were conducted within Government COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines, and all interviewers wore full personal protective equipment (PPE).

Ethical approval

The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast, where the survey coordinator is based.

Survey content

The survey consists of a number of different modules, each based on a specific topic. The modules included in the 2020 survey are:

- Introductory questions
- Respect
- Minority ethnic people
- Good relations
- Coercive behaviour
- Criminal justice system
- Political attitudes
- COVID-19
- Community safety and perceptions of paramilitary influence
- Background

Some of these questions were also included in the Young Life and Times survey of 16 year olds – see <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt>

Pilot and mainstage fieldwork

Once Ipsos MORI received approval from the NILT project team, the CAWI survey link was activated. At this stage, Ipsos MORI mailed the advance letters and monitored the real-time progress of the survey, as householders began completing it. The CATI/CAPI script was also released to the interviewing panel, for those participants who wanted to complete the interview with an interviewer over the phone or via Microsoft Teams.

95% of the total interviews completed were completed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). 5% were completed using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) via Microsoft Teams. Interviewing was conducted between 8th October 2020 and 8th December 2020. Interviews lasted 52.5 minutes, on average.

Ipsos MORI's field team was responsible for all aspects of data collection. This included managing the online sample, preparing the briefing notes for CATI/CAPI interviewers, allocation and scheduling of work and monitoring of progress. The fieldwork was conducted by a team of highly experienced interviewers. Interviewers were fully briefed so they understood the project aims and target audience, and so they were familiar with the questionnaire and any sensitive or complex questions within it.

The fieldwork was split into two phases; a pilot phase followed mainstage fieldwork. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire and script, and to allow for any changes to be made ahead of the mainstage fieldwork. Question wording and understanding was tested, alongside any routing and filtering. Interviewers were then invited to attend an online debriefing session, where they were able to provide feedback on the CATI and CAPI script.

Following a successful pilot, the mainstage fieldwork was launched with some changes to the questionnaire, including removing some questions and adjusting the ordering of the questionnaire sections. During fieldwork, all interviewers worked in accordance with the ISO 20252 system which incorporates much of the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) and the old MRQSA/BS7911.

Respondents were offered a £15 Love 2 Shop voucher as a thank you for taking part.

Advance letter

Ipsos MORI developed three different letters to be sent to the selected households. The initial letter informed participants about the study, its importance and how they could take part. The subsequent letters would act as reminders to households. The letter contained a copy of the Ipsos MORI privacy policy and a copy of the NILT information leaflet. Individuals were informed how their personal data would be handled in line with GDPR, and about their right to withdraw from the research if they did not want to take part.

Each letter that was sent contained the household's unique URL survey link. This URL would grant access to the survey for the person with the next birthday. Alternatively, the participant could call a freephone number and book a telephone interview.

Sampling design

The sample for the 2020 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. The PAF is the most widely used sample frame for high quality social surveys in the UK and is a list of addresses in the United Kingdom that is maintained by the Royal Mail. Private business addresses were removed from the database prior to sample selection.

A total of 15,000 address were selected for invitation. To provide a random sample of Northern Ireland households, the sample was stratified proportionately by District Council area. 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 survey.

The person to be interviewed was randomly selected using the ‘next birthday’ rule. Each letter sent to the selected addresses clearly stated that only the person with the next birthday was eligible to complete the survey online. At the beginning of the interview, the participant also had to confirm that they were the person within the household with the next birthday. The CATI/CAPI scripts were also set up to validate that the participant was the member of the household with the next birthday.

Response rate

Table 1.1 shows the status of addresses, and the number of addresses in scope.

Table 1.2 shows the breakdown of response

Table 1.3 shows the response rate for the self-completion questionnaires.

Table 1.1 Status of addresses			
Total addresses drawn from PAF	Addresses contacted by post*	Addresses contacted by interviewer**	Total in scope
15,000	14,784	798	14,784

*The remaining 216 addresses no longer existed, were inaccessible or addressee had gone away

**Reminder calls made by interviewers

Table 1.2 Breakdown of response		
	Number	Percent
Total co-operating	1,292	9%
Fully co-operating	1,292	9%
Partially co-operating	0	0
Refusal to co-operate	411	3%
Non-contact	13,131	88%
Other	166	1%
Total	14,784	100%

Sampling errors and confidence intervals

Table 1.4 sets out 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 1.4 Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)				
		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence Limits
Age	18 – 24	8.0	1.48	6.5-9.5
	25 – 34	18.0	2.10	15.9-20.1
	35 – 44	18.0	2.10	15.9-20.1
	45 – 54	19.9	2.18	17.7-22.1
	55 – 64	18.8	2.13	16.7-20.9
	65 and over	17.4	2.07	15.3-19.5
Sex	Male	40.5	2.67	37.8-43.2
	Female	59.3	2.68	56.6-62.1
Marital status	Single	27.8	2.44	25.4-30.2
	Married/Civil Partnership	59.5	2.68	56.8-62.2
	Separated	3.5	1.0	2.5-4.5
	Divorced	5.6	1.25	4.3-6.8
	Widowed	3.5	1.0	2.5-4.5
Religion	Catholic	28.1	2.45	25.4-30.6
	Protestant	41.8	2.69	39.1-44.5
	None	27.2	2.43	24.8-29.6
	Other	1.2	0.59	0.6-1.8
	Refused/Don't know	1.4	0.64	0.7-2.0

Data preparation

Main survey data was collected via a computer aided interviewing software package. This was converted to SPSS format prior to analysis. All data were subject to an extensive range of inter and intra variable logic checks.

Weighting

Please note that all analyses of the adult data should be weighted in order to allow for disproportionate household size. The weighting variable is called **WTFactor**. The only exceptions are the few household variables (for example, tenure and household income), which do not need to be weighted.

Deriving social class variables

Occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010. The SOC2010 information was also used to derive the 5-item National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS SEC) variable, which is contained in this data set for the respondent and their partner.

Personal and household income

Please note that the number of response codes for the personal and household income questions has been reduced, in order to make it easier for respondents, and to aid analysis.

Comparison with other data sources

For comparative purposes, the following tables provide NILT data alongside two data sources:

- Continuous Household Survey – this survey is undertaken by the Central Survey Unit within the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Using a representative sample of households across Northern Ireland, the survey is designed to provide an ongoing snapshot of social and economic conditions in Northern Ireland. For more information, see <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/central-survey-unit/continuous-household-survey>
- 2011 Northern Ireland Census – this was designed to collect information on the usually resident population of Northern Ireland on 27 March 2011. Whilst this data is old, it provides the most recent data population-level available. The most recent Census took place in March 2021.

Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2020* (unweighted)	CHS 2019/20	Northern Ireland Census 2011
<i>Characteristics of sampled households</i>			All households	
<i>Tenure</i>	Owned outright	39.4	43	32
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	39.9	27	35
	Rented Local Authority	5.2	10	12
	Rented other***	13.5	19	18
	Rent free	1.2	1	3
	Other	0.8	-	-
	Refused		-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		1,292	4,557	703,275

* Household characteristics are based on unweighted data from the NILT survey

*** 'Rented' includes rented from a housing association and rented privately

Comparison of individual characteristics

		NILT 2020 (weighted)	CHS 2017/18	Northern Ireland Census 2011
		%		
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			18+	
Sex	Male	40.5	43	49
	Female	59.3	57	51
<i>Age</i>				
	18-24	8.0	5	13
	25-34	18.0	14	18
	35-44	18.9	16	18
	45-54	19.9	20	18
	55-64	18.8	17	14
	65 and over	17.4	27	19
<i>Base=100%</i>		1,292	3,262	1,380,100*
			18+	
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	27.7	26	36
	Married/Civil Partner	59.1	54	48
	Widowed	3.5	9	7
	Divorced/Separated	9.0	11	9
	Refused/ Don't know	0.6	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>n</i>	1,292	3,262
				1,431,540*

*The bases for Census data are different due to age including those aged 18 and over, whereas, marital status includes those aged 16 and over.

Individual characteristics – NILT 2020 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	100	59	24	11	7	28
Married/Civil Partner	1	40	65	72	71	59
Divorced/separated/ widowed	0	3	11	17	22	13
<i>Base=100%</i>	100	229	228	500	230	1,287

Individual characteristics – CHS 2017/18

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	93	56	30	15	8	26
Married/Civil Partner	5	42	58	63	56	54
Divorced/separated/ widowed	2	2	13	21	36	20
<i>Base=100%</i>	164	460	525	1,201	865	3,262

Stated religious denomination

	NILT 2020 (weighted)	CHS 2018/19**	Northern Ireland Census 2011
	%		
Protestant	40	45	48
Catholic	28	43	45
Other or no religion*	28	11	6
Missing/refused	1	1	1
<i>Base=100%</i>	<i>1,292</i>	<i>10,902</i>	<i>1,108,630</i>

* Include 'no religion' and religion not stated

** Supplemented from household membership

The NILT dataset

The dataset for the 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey is made freely and publicly available within six months of the end of the fieldwork period. The data have been tested extensively, but if you do find anything that looks like a mistake, please let us know as soon as you can. Contact details are available on page xii of this document.

Variables on the dataset

The variable name relating to each question is printed above each question in the questionnaire. The dataset includes the variables relating to the majority of questions. However, in order to maintain anonymity, some variables are omitted (including CBIRTH, ETHGROUP, EECHECK, UMUSLIM, ORIENT2 and GENDERID) or recoded. Demographic variables relating to other people in the household are also excluded from the dataset. Three variables relating to religion have been replaced by the following recoded versions:

Variable	Recoded version
RELIGION	RELIGCAT
FAMRELIG	FAMRCODE
PRTNRRLG	PRTRCODE

These variables are classified into 3 groups: Catholic, Protestant and No religion. The Protestant category was created by grouping together the following denominations:

- Church of Ireland/Anglican/Episcopal
- Baptist
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Free Presbyterian
- Brethren
- United Reform Church (URC)/Congregational
- Pentecostal
- Church of Scotland
- Elim Pentecostal
- Reformed Presbyterian
- Non-subscribing Presbyterian
- Salvation Army
- Church of Nazarene
- Jehovah's Witness
- Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon)
- Other Protestant
- Other Christian
- Protestant – no denomination
- Christian – no denomination

However, tables of results for RELIGION, FAMRELIG, PRTNRRLG CBIRTH, ETHGROUP, ORIENT2 and GENDERID can be found on the NILT website (www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020)

However, tables of results for RELIGION, FAMRELIG, PRTNRRLG CBIRTH, ETHGROUP, ORIENT2 and GENDERID can be found on the NILT website (www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020)

The dataset also contains a set of variables that were specifically created to assist analysis.

<i>WTFACOR</i>	Weighting variable for number of adults aged 18 years or over in the household
<i>ADULT</i>	Number of adults aged 18 years or over in the household
<i>HOUSEHLD</i>	Number of people in each household
<i>RAGECAT</i>	Age of respondent (categorised) 1 18-24 2 25-34 3 35-44 4 45-54 5 55-64 6 65+
<i>NSSEC1</i> (Respondent) <i>NSSEC2</i> (Partner)	National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS SEC) 1 Managerial, administrative and professional occupations 2 Intermediate occupations 3 Small employers and own account workers 4 Lower supervisory and technical occupations 5 Semi-routine occupations
<i>URBRUR</i>	Urban/rural status, based on NINIS data 1 Rural 2 Urban

Finding a module in the questionnaires

Respondents were asked to complete a main questionnaire (face-to-face) and a self-completion questionnaire. The table below provides a list of modules within the 2020 survey, and their page number within the questionnaire.

	CAWI questionnaire
A: Introduction	W4 – W7
B: Respect	W8 – W9
C: Minority ethnic people	W10 – W21
D: Good relations	W22 – W33
E: Coercive behaviour	M34 – W42
F: Criminal justice system	W43 – M45
G: Political attitudes	W46 – W53
H: COVID-19	W54 – W57
I: Community safety and perceptions of paramilitary influence	W58 – W60
J: Background	W60 – W78

NILT website

The NILT website (<https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>) is the key source of information relating to the survey. This includes background information, datasets, questionnaires, technical notes and publications relating to all survey years. In addition, frequencies for every question and a breakdown by age, gender and religion are also available online.

A 'query' service or helpline is run for those who need additional tables or have any query about the survey. Users can contact the Life and Times team directly using the contact information below. The funders of the survey receive the dataset earlier than the public (three months after the end of fieldwork). Nonetheless, one of the guiding principles of the survey is that the information is made available to all and that no one person or organisation has ownership of the results.

Contact information

If you have any further queries, please contact the NILT director using the details below:

Paula Devine
 ARK
 School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work
 Queen's University Belfast
 Email: p.devine@qub.ac.uk
 Phone: +44 (0)28 9097 3034
 URL: <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>