



Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2021

(Updated 30 October 2023)

Technical Notes

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt

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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 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 subsequent years.

The survey aims to provide:

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

We would like to thank the funders for the 2021 survey who have been supportive of the overall aims of the project: Mental Health Champion, Ulster University, Ohio University, The Executive Office, Public Prosecution Service, Police Ombudsman Office, Department of Justice and the Economic and Social Research Council. 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 from comparisons with Britain. It is largely Northern Ireland focused, it is social policy focused, and it is designed to be accessible to the 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.

Technical details of the 2021 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 contact the survey team if they require more precise details on the survey set-up. Contact details are provided on page x of this document.

The overall design

The 2021 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey involved 1,397 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).

The survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible, presenting participants with a range of ways in which they could complete the survey. Fieldwork was carried out by Ipsos UK.

Ethical approval

The 2021 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 2021 survey are:

- Introductory questions
- Respect
- Attitudes to minority ethnic groups
- Good relations
- Mental Health
- COVID and work
- Income and poverty
- Criminal Justice system
- Political attitudes
- Background

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

Pilot and mainstage fieldwork

Once Ipsos UK received approval from the NILT project team, the CAWI survey link was activated. At this stage, Ipsos mailed the advance letters and monitored the real-

time progress of the survey, as householders began completing it. The CATI script was also released to the interviewing panel, for those participants who wanted to complete the interview with an interviewer over the phone.

98% of the total interviews completed used Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), the remaining 2% using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Interviewing was conducted between 12th October 2021 and 22nd December 2021, and interviews lasted 59.5 minutes, on average.

Ipsos' field team was responsible for all aspects of data collection. This included managing the online sample, preparing the briefing notes for CATI 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 on the project's aims and target audience, and to familiarise them with the questionnaire and any sensitive or complex questions within it.

The fieldwork was split into two phases: a pilot phase preceded the 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.

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 developed four 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, with the subsequent letters acting as reminders to households. The initial letter contained a copy of the Ipsos 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, at any stage, if they did not want to take part.

Each letter that was sent contained that household's unique URL survey link. This URL would grant access to the survey for the person in the household who was to complete the survey i.e. 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 2021 survey consisted of a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF) database of addresses. The PAF is the most widely used sample frame for high quality social surveys in the

UK. It is the most up to date and complete a list of addresses in the United Kingdom and is maintained by the Royal Mail. Business addresses were removed from the database prior to sample selection.

A total of 10,000 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.

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*	Total in scope
10,000	9,889	9,889

*The remaining 111 addresses no longer existed, were inaccessible or addressee had gone away

Table 1.2 Breakdown of response		
	Number	Percent
Total co-operating	1,397	14%
Fully co-operating	1,397	14%
Partially co-operating	0	0
Refusal to co-operate	85	1%
Non-contact	8,499	85%
Other	13	0%
Total	10,000	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. These intervals are based on unweighted data. Note that the margin of error for all sample estimates is within the parameters of $\pm 2.6\%$.

Table 1.4 Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)				
		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence Limits
Age	18 – 24	4.5	1.1	3.4-5.6
	25 – 34	14.0	1.8	12.2-15.8
	35 – 44	18.0	2.0	16.0-20.0
	45 – 54	20.3	2.1	18.2-22.4
	55 – 64	21.3	2.1	19.2-23.4
	65 and over	21.8	2.2	19.6-24.0
Sex	Male	44.3	2.6	46.9-41.7
	Female	55.2	2.6	52.6-57.8
Marital status	Single	29.1	2.4	26.7-31.5
	Married/Civil Partnership	53.9	2.6	51.3-56.5
	Separated	3.1	0.9	2.2-4.0
	Divorced	7.5	1.4	6.1-8.9
	Widowed	5.6	1.2	4.4-6.8
Religion	Catholic	30.9	2.4	28.5-33.3
	Protestant	38.5	2.5	36.0-41.0
	None	26.3	2.3	24.0-28.6
	Other	2.0	0.7	1.3-2.7
	Refused/Don't know	2.2	0.8	1.4-3.0

Data preparation

The survey data was captured through Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software packages, designed by UNICOM Intelligence. The data from all the interviews were collated into one database with both numerical data and text from the open-ended questions. 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 to ensure representation of the Northern Ireland population. The weighting variable is called WTFACOR.

As is common practice for a CAWI survey of this nature, the data are subsequently weighted to ensure representation of the general population of Northern Ireland. Weighting is the process of correcting for sample differences by increasing the relative importance (or weight) of underrepresented groups and decreasing the importance of overrepresented groups (where over/under representation is determined by comparing to a target).

Given the method of collection, a weighting variable to account for age, gender and location based on Northern Ireland Census data (2011) was added. Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting was selected as the most appropriate technique as this is most commonly used to weight market research data to known demographics, without intrinsically altering the findings of the raw data. Northern Ireland Census targets were used, given that Census data are the most accurate counts of the population at a specific point in time.

A RIM weighting factor was calculated by comparing the NILT data population proportions to the known population statistics for each variable (age, gender and location). This weighting factor was calculated using an advanced analytics tool which accounts for the differences in the survey population to the general population of Northern Ireland using a pre-calculated algorithm. When applied, the weighting factor (WTFACOR) will weight the data accordingly to ensure research findings are representative of the general population in Northern Ireland.

Deriving social class variables

Occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010. The SOC2010 information was also used to derive the National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS SEC) variable, which is contained in this dataset 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 tables below provide NILT data alongside two data sources:

- Continuous Household Survey – undertaken by the Central Survey Unit within the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. This survey provides an ongoing snapshot of social and economic conditions in Northern Ireland based on a representative sample of households across Northern Ireland. For more information, see 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

Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2021* (unweighted)	CHS 2020/21 (unweighted)	N Ireland Census 2011
<i>Characteristics of sampled households</i>			All households	
<i>Tenure</i>	Owned outright	45.8	51	32
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	31.8	30	35
	Rented Local Authority	4.9	4	12
	Rented other***	14.9	14	18
	Rent free	1.1	1	3
	Other	0.4	-	-
	Refused	1.1	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1,397</i>	<i>637</i>	<i>703,275</i>

* 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 (aged 18+)

		NILT 2021 (weighted)	CHS 2020/21 (weighted)	N Ireland Census 2011
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			%	
<i>Sex</i>	Male	44.3	50	49
	Female	55.2	50	51
<i>Age</i>	18-24	4.5	11	13
	25-34	14.0	16	18
	35-44	18.0	16	18
	45-54	20.3	18	18
	55-64	21.3	17	14
	65 and over	21.8	23	19
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1,397</i>	<i>1,759</i>	<i>1,380,100*</i>
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	29.1	33	36
	Married/Civil Partner	53.9	51	48
	Widowed	3.1	5	7
	Divorced/Separated	7.5	10	9
	Refused/ Don't know	5.6	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1,397</i>	<i>1,617</i>	<i>1,431,540*</i>

*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 2021 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	96	65	31	22	8	38
Married/Civil Partner	4	33	62	59	63	49
Divorced/separated/ widowed	0	2	7	18	29	13
Base=100%	178	244	254	446	265	1,387

Individual characteristics – CHS 2020/21 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	96	56	29	19	12	33
Married/Civil Partner	2	42	64	64	55	51
Divorced/separated/ widowed	2	3	7	18	33	15
Base=100%	182	250	250	569	364	1,615

Stated religious denomination

	NILT 2021 (weighted)	CHS 2020/21** (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2011
	%		
Protestant	35	44	48
Catholic	32	35	45
Other or no religion*	30	21	6
Missing/refused	2	0	1
Base=100%	1,397	1,676	1,108,630

* Include 'no religion' and religion not stated

** Supplemented from household membership

The NILT dataset

The dataset for the 2021 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 find anything that looks like a mistake, please let us know as soon as you can. Contact details are available on page xi of this document.

Variables on the dataset

The variable name relating to each question can be seen above each question in the questionnaire. The dataset includes the variables relating to the majority of questions. However, in order to maintain confidentiality, some variables are omitted or recoded. For example, demographic variables relating to other people in the household are excluded from the dataset, as is the ETHGROUP variable.

Variables relating to religion are also excluded, and are replaced by the following recoded versions of these variables:

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 the RELIGION, FAMRELIG AND PRTNRRLG variables can be found on the NILT website (www.ark.ac.uk/nilt) from 26 May 2022.

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

<i>WTFACTOR</i>	Weighting variable to ensure representation of the general population of Northern Ireland having used RIM weighting to align to Northern Ireland Census data (2011)
<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> <i>(Respondent)</i> <i>NSSEC2 (Partner)</i>	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 9 Refused/not answered/not classified
<i>URBRUR</i>	Urban/rural status, based on NINIS data 1 Rural 2 Urban

Finding a module in the questionnaires

The table below provides a list of modules within the 2021 survey, and their page number within the questionnaire.

Module	Page number
A: Introductory questions	W4 - W8
B: Respect	W9 – W10
C: Minority Ethnic People	W11 - W24
D: Good relations	W25 - W38
E: Mental health	W39 - W42
F: COVID and work	W43 – W48
G: Income and poverty	W49 – W57
H: Criminal justice system	W58 - W60
I: Political attitudes	W61 - W69
J: Community safety	W70 – W72
K: Background	W73 – W93

NILT website

The NILT website (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, sex and religion are also available online.

A query service is also available for users – please contact the Life and Times team 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 coordinator using the details below:

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