



Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2023

Technical Notes

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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 our attitudes and behaviour develop on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey runs on a modular format and while some modules are repeated every year (for example, Community/Good Relations) the remainder 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 2023 survey who have been supportive of the overall aims of the project: The Executive Office, Department of Justice, Public Prosecution Service, Commissioner for Victims of Crime, Office of the Mental Health Champion, Office of the Police Ombudsman, and the Road Safety Partnership.

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); and
- 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 2023 survey

The document is designed to be easy to use rather than technically exhaustive. Users who intend to carry out sophisticated statistical analyses or wish 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 2023 Northern Ireland Life and Times involved 1,200 completed survey with adults aged 18 years or over.

In 2020, the survey transitioned to a push-to-web methodology, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and this approach was retained in 2021, 2022 and again in 2023. A large-scale Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed, which was supplemented with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), where necessary.

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

Ethical approval

The 2023 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at 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 2023 survey are:

- A. Introductory questions
- B. Respect
- C. Minority ethnic groups
- D. Good relations
- E. Mental health
- F. Criminal justice system
- G. Gender-based violence
- H. Road safety
- I. Politics
- J. Community safety
- K. 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 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 majority (97%) of the total surveys achieved were completed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), while 3% were completed using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Data collection was conducted between 7th September 2023 and 14th January 2024. On average, it took participants 55 minutes to complete the survey.

Ipsos' Operations 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 small number of interviews completed using the CATI method were conducted by a team of highly experienced interviewers. Interviewers were fully briefed and understood the project aims and target audience. Prior to undertaking any telephone interviewing, they were familiar with the questionnaire and any sensitive or complex questions contained within it.

The fieldwork was split into two phases; a pilot phase followed by the mainstage fieldwork. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire and the 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 minor changes to the questionnaire, including removing and adding a few questions, and adjusting the wording on some of the questions. During fieldwork, data was continuously quality assured to ensure the highest quality of the final outputs.

The telephone 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 letters to be sent to the selected households. The initial letter informed the potential participants about the study, its importance and how they could take part. The subsequent letters acted as reminders to households to participate in the study. All the letters contained the link to the Ipsos privacy policy, however, a copy of the NILT information leaflet was included in the initial letter only.

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 2023 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 8,000 addresses 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 complete the survey was randomly selected using the 'next birthday' rule. Each letter sent to the selected addresses clearly stated that only the person over 18 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 1.1 Status of addresses		
Total addresses drawn from PAF	Addresses contacted by post*	Total in scope
8,000	8,000	8,000

Table 1.2 Breakdown of response		
	Number	Percent
Total co-operating	1,412	18%
Fully co-operating	1,200	15%
Partially co-operating	212	3%
Refusal to co-operate	98	1%
Non-contact	6,355	79%
Other	135	2%
Total	8,000	100%

Sampling errors and confidence intervals

Table 1.3 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 $\pm 2.8\%$.

Table 1.3 Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)				
		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence Limits
Age	18 – 24	4.7	1.2	3.5-5.9
	25 – 34	14.1	2.0	12.1-16.1
	35 – 44	16.0	2.0	14.0-18.0
	45 – 54	18.6	2.2	16.4-20.8
	55 – 64	20.1	2.3	17.8-22.4
	65 and over	26.5	2.5	24.0-29.0
Sex	Male	43.4	2.8	40.6-46.2
	Female	56.5	2.8	53.8-59.4
Marital status	Single	25.3	2.5	22.8-27.8
	Married/Civil Partnership	56.4	2.8	53.5-59.1
	Separated	3.9	1.1	2.8-5.0
	Divorced	8.6	1.6	7.0-10.2
	Widowed	5.9	1.3	4.6-7.2
Religion	Catholic	33.5	2.7	30.8-36.2
	Protestant	38.2	2.7	35.5-40.9
	None	25.2	2.5	22.7-27.7
	Other	2.1	0.8	1.3-2.9
	Don't know	1.0	0.6	0.4-1.6

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

As would be common practise for a CAWI survey of this nature, data was 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, for which a quota-based sampling approach is not possible, a weighting variable to account for age, gender and location based on the

most recent 2021 Northern Ireland Census data, was added. While this helps to align sample data to Census data, thorough checks were conducted to ensure that the sample does not become distorted as the aim is not to reproduce the market exactly. With this in mind, 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 as Census data are the most accurate statistics 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. Each data entry point within the NILT datafile subsequently has a weighting factor attributed, that when applied to the dataset, will weight the data accordingly to ensure research findings are representative of the general population in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, all analyses of the individual-level data should be weighted to ensure representation of the Northern Ireland population. The weighting variable is called WTFactor.

Deriving social class variables

Occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020. The SOC2020 information was also used to derive the 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. 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>
- 2021 Northern Ireland Census – this was designed to collect information on the usually resident population of Northern Ireland on 21 March 2021. This is the latest available census data for Northern Ireland and is the most up-to-date and precise view of the total Northern Irish population.

Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2023* (unweighted)	CHS 2022/23 (unweighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
<i>Characteristics of sampled households</i>			All households	
<i>Tenure</i>	Owned outright	48.2	42.3	34.7
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	34.0	29.5	30.5
	Rented (Housing Executive or Housing Association)	7.3	14.0	10.8
	Rented privately**	9.3	13.1	21.7
	Rent free	0.3	1.1	2.3
	Other	0.5	-	-
	Refused	0.3	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1,200</i>	<i>4,267</i>	<i>768,814</i>

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

** Including from a relative/friend

Comparison of individual characteristics

		NILT 2023 (weighted)	CHS 2022/23 (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
		%		
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			18+	
Sex	Male	50.7	48.2	50.8
	Female	49.1	51.8	49.2
	Prefer not to say	0.2	-	-
Age	18-24	10.5	11.2	10.5
	25-34	16.5	16.3	16.5
	35-44	17.0	16.9	17.0
	45-54	17.2	17.0	17.2
	55-64	16.5	16.4	16.5
	65 and over	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Prefer not to say	0.2	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,200	4,846	1,903,175
				Northern Ireland Census 2021
			18+	
Marital Status	Single	30.3	35.4	38.1
	Married/Civil Partner	53.3	47.8	45.8
	Widowed	4.5	7.0	6.4
	Divorced/Separated	10.9	9.7	9.8
	Refused/ Don't know	.9	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,200	4,846	1,514,743*

*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 2023 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	96	56	27	14	8	31
Married/Civil Partner	4	40	62	67	62	54
Divorced/separated/ widowed	0	4	10	19	30	16
Base=100%	125	192	204	403	265	1,189

*11 missing cases have been excluded from this crosstabulation.

Individual characteristics – CHS 2022/23 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	11	10	6	7	2	36
Married/Civil Partner	1	6	10	20	12	48
Divorced/separated/ widowed	0	0	1	7	8	17
Base=100%*						

*CHS data provided by NISRA only included percentages, it did not include bases for marital status by age.

Stated religious denomination

	NILT 2023 (weighted)	CHS 2022/23 (weighted)**	Northern Ireland Census 2021
	%		
Protestant	38	43	46
Catholic	33	39	44
Other or no religion*	27	17	11
Missing/refused/I don't know	2	1	-
<i>Base=100%</i>	<i>1,200</i>	<i>4,958</i>	<i>1,903,175</i>

* Include 'no religion' and religion not stated

** Supplemented from household membership

The NILT dataset

The dataset for the 2023 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 an error, 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 are the ETHGROUP, CBIRTH, GENDERID and ORIENT2 variables.

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 these variables can be found on the NILT website (www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/) from mid-May 2024.

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 (2021)
<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> <i>P2AGECAT etc</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

All analyses of the individual-level data should be **weighted** to ensure representation of the Northern Ireland population. The weighting variable is called **WTFACTOR**.

Finding a module in the questionnaires

The table below provides a list of modules within the 2023 survey, and their page number within the questionnaire.

	Questionnaire page
Introduction	M5 - M9
Respect	M10 - M11
Minority ethnic people	M12 - M23
Good relations	M24 - M37
Mental health	M38 - M44
Criminal justice system	M45 - M49
Gender-based violence	M50 - M54
Road safety	M55 - M57
Politics	M58 – M65
Community safety	M66 - M68
Background (including Income and Poverty questions)	M69 - M91

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, sex and religion are also available online. If you have a query about the survey that isn't answered in this document, please contact the survey team directly using the 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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