



No more 'us and them' for 16 year olds

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'Apart from specific troubled areas I would like to think community relations in Northern Ireland are generally good and racism is falling thankfully.'

'Still huge problems with prejudice in society between Catholic and Protestant societies; often this prejudice is blind bigotry. Many in society are disdainful of ethnic minority groups and immigrants.'

Community relations research within Northern Ireland has often focused on the two communities – Protestant and Catholic. In 2004, Devine and Schubotz demonstrated that 16 year olds in Northern Ireland, despite growing up since the 1994 cease fires, and the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, identified with a 'us and them' mentality. However,

since then, many societal changes have taken place in Northern Ireland. Devolution has been in place since May 2007. At the same time, immigration from an expanded European Union and beyond has resulted in a much more diverse society than ever before. So how much mixing takes place by those who turned 16 in 2011?

This Research Update draws on the **Young Life and Times** (YLT) survey which has been recording the attitudes of 16 year olds living in Northern Ireland to a range of community relations topics since 2003. We will primarily use YLT data from 2003 and 2011 to explore if the 'us and them' mentality still exists and what it means for young people

today. In addition to the quantitative data collected in the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to make additional comments, and we have selected some of these to help illustrate the findings.

Before looking at young people's attitudes and opinions it is helpful to first note their self-reported community background. In 2011, around four out of ten respondents said that they felt part of the Protestant community, and a slightly higher proportion felt part of the Catholic community. One in five said that they felt part of neither community, and this has risen since 2003 – see Figure 1.

Feelings about other traditions

'It is difficult to answer a question about what religion of people you prefer to be around or what race you prefer to be around because I feel that this does not reflect my view that I choose to be around, or not be around, someone as a result of their personality not what their race or religion is.'

This comment is illustrative of many made by the young people. This may suggest a blurring of the traditional 'us and them' categories (Catholic-Protestant) to encompass a wider range of identities (including religion, race or ethnicity). Table 1 is based on the 'traditional' religious divide, and asks how favourable respondents feel about people from the

Figure 1: Religious community background

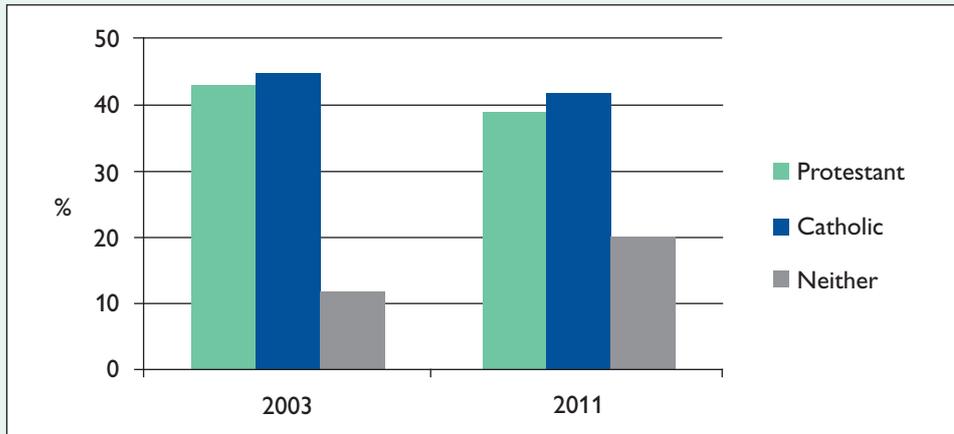


Table 1: Feelings about people from different religious communities

	%					
	Feeling about Catholic Community			Feeling about Protestant community		
	Part of the Protestant community	Part of the Catholic community	Neither	Part of the Protestant community	Part of the Catholic community	Neither
	2003					
Favourable	38	77	47	74	45	48
Neither favourable nor unfavourable	49	20	50	25	43	50
Unfavourable	11	1	2	1	9	2
	2011					
Favourable	43	69	36	68	41	32
Neither favourable nor unfavourable	48	29	55	30	50	58
Unfavourable	6	1	1	<1	6	1

Table 2: Feelings about people from minority ethnic communities

	%						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
Favourable	40	30	36	34	36	37	43
Neither favourable nor unfavourable	48	55	49	52	50	43	47
Unfavourable	7	8	8	6	8	7	6
Don't know	6	7	8	9	7	13	5

Catholic or Protestant communities. The data reveal a complicated picture. With the exception of feelings towards the Catholic community by those who are part of the Protestant community, the proportion of respondents feeling favourable has dropped. However, this

is not to say that respondents say that they feel unfavourably about people from particular communities, but rather, the proportion saying 'neither favourable nor unfavourable' has increased. This may suggest a sense of not making a judgement on an entire group of people (that is, people

from a particular community), but instead, making more personal judgements based on an individual person, rather than their community background – a point made in the comment above.

Northern Ireland is no longer a society solely defined by whether someone is Protestant and Catholic. In 2011, 12 per cent of respondents considered themselves to be a member of a minority ethnic community. A question on feelings about people from minority ethnic communities was introduced in 2004 and the percentages feeling favourable have fluctuated over time (see Table 2). In 2011, 43 per cent of respondents report feeling favourable towards people from minority ethnic communities, which is similar to feelings about the 'other' religious community shown in Table 1.

Cross-community contact

'Community relations have got better in some areas in Northern Ireland. But children get their opinions from their parents. In the area I live, there is a high number of Protestants, and my friends are Protestants too. But I have no objection to other communities or making friends with them. I just haven't had the chance.'

'At present my two sisters are both taking part in a cross-community homework project. Both really enjoy it and seem to get a lot out of it. So this all seems positive.'

'Because I attended an integrated primary school and now doing my A levels at an integrated secondary school I have always had a big mixture of friends from all backgrounds.'

Bearing in mind the high levels of residential and educational segregation in Northern Ireland, as well as the localised clustering of minority ethnic groups, it is interesting to see how the attitudes shown in Tables 1 and 2 are reflected

in behaviour. Those respondents who considered that they were part of the Protestant or Catholic community were asked about their contact with people from the 'other' community. In both 2003 and 2011, around two thirds of these young people said that they had participated in a cross-community project. Of these, the vast majority had positive feelings about these activities. Many of these activities are within a school setting, and may or may not result in long-term cross-community contact and friendship.

In 2011, over one third (36%) of respondents from a Protestant or Catholic community background said that they very often socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community from themselves. A further 30 per cent did so sometimes, whilst 31 per cent did so rarely or never. Table 3 shows that in 2003, 46 per cent of 16 year olds said that they rarely or never did this, suggesting that there has been an increase in this type of cross-community contact. In both 2003 and 2011, these patterns were similar among members of the Catholic and Protestant community.

Unsurprisingly, young people who had attended an integrated school were most likely to say that they very often socialised or played sport with people from a different religious community: 60 per cent, compared with 39 per cent of those attending a grammar school and 29 per cent of those attending a secondary school in 2011. In addition, young people

who have taken part in cross-community projects are more likely to socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community (39% did so very often).

Questions on contact with people from a minority ethnic group were introduced in 2008. Table 3 shows a slight increase in the proportion of respondents who report socialising or playing sport very often or sometimes and a corresponding decrease in the percentage who never do. However comparing this with contact between the two main communities in 2011 shows lower levels of frequent contact with people from ethnic minority groups: 66 per cent of respondents very often or sometimes socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community compared to only 55 per cent doing so with people from a different ethnic background. Respondents attending integrated schools were more likely to socialise or play sport with people from a different ethnic background.

Cross-community friendship

'People tend to feel more comfortable in their own religious groups or neighbourhoods.'

'People tend to stereotype about ethnic minorities and are afraid to come into contact with them.'

'It doesn't matter what your religion or colour is: I have loads of friends and religion and colour never comes into it.'

Of course, some of these cross-community activities (in particular, playing sport) may be school based and not necessarily the choice of the respondent. Thus, it is pertinent to explore more informal friendship patterns. There has been a drop in the proportion of YLT respondents saying that they did not have any friends from the other main religious community, from 33 per cent in 2003 to 22 per cent in 2011. In 2011, only 6 per cent of those attending an integrated school said that they had no friends from the other main religious community, compared to 24 per cent for grammar school students, and 21 per cent for secondary school students. As might be expected, one in five of those with experience of participating in a cross-community scheme said that they had no friends from the other community, compared with 27 per cent of those who had not participated in a cross-community scheme.

Within these friendships, the pattern of reciprocal contact has remained consistent in 2003 and 2011 - see Table 4. Those who had previously participated in a cross-community scheme, or attended a planned integrated school were more likely than others to visit, be visited by, or phone/text people from the other religious community. Since 2003, there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents who phone or text friends from the other religious community. This may reflect the increased availability and use of technology in recent years,

Table 3: How often do you socialise or play sport with people from (a) a different religious community to yourself? (b) a different ethnic background to yourself?

	%			
	Different religious community		Different ethnic background	
	2003	2011	2008	2011
Very often	27	36	13	19
Sometimes	25	30	31	36
Rarely	27	19	33	26
Never	19	12	21	16
Don't know	1	3	2	3

Table 4: Contact with friends from the other main religious community?

	% saying 'very often'	
	2003	2011
Respondent visits friends' home	21	19
Friends visit respondent's home	20	19
Respondents phone or text friends	33	43

especially the use of smart phones and social networking.

We noted earlier that one in five respondents did not have any friends from the other main religious community. A similar question was asked in relation to minority ethnic groups, and 26 per cent said that all of their friends were of the same race or ethnic origin as themselves, and a further 60 per cent said that most of their friends were. This question was first asked in 2006, and at that time, around one half of respondents (48%) said that all their friends were of the

same race or ethnic origin. This suggests that young people are mixing more with people from different backgrounds.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this Research Update suggests that 16 year olds in Northern Ireland increasingly have contact across both the religious and ethnic divides. Only a minority of young people report having no friends from other backgrounds. This reflects an important change since 2003. However it is difficult to dismiss the existence of an 'us and them' situation, since 12 per

cent of young people never socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community, and 16 per cent never do so with people from a different ethnic background. Furthermore, 22 per cent have no friends from the other main religious community and 26 per cent say all their friends are the same race or ethnic group as themselves. Nevertheless, the comments made by young people suggest that whether someone is like 'us' or 'them' is not purely based on their religion, and that friendship patterns are wider than ever before, encompassing both religious and ethnic diversity.

Key points

- Around 4 in 10 16 year olds feel favourable towards people from other religious communities or ethnic backgrounds, and around one half feel neither favourable nor unfavourable.
- There has been an increase in cross-community contact over recent years for both different religious community and different ethnic background.
- 66% of young people very often or sometimes socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community, while 55% do so with people from a different ethnic background.
- Cross community friendship is more common in 2011 than in 2003.
- In 2011, 22% of YLT respondents had no friends from the other main religious community, compared to 33% in 2003.
- In 2011, 26% said that all their friends were of the same race or ethnic group, compared to 48% in 2006.

References

Devine, Paula and Schubotz, Dirk, 2004, *Us and them?*, ARK Research Update 28

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The **Young Life and Times survey** is carried out annually and documents public opinion of 16 year olds on a wide range of issues. It is a joint project of the two Northern Ireland universities. Check the web site for more information on the survey findings (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt) or call the survey director on 028 9097 3947 with any queries.

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