



Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Annual Report on the Public Awareness  
of the Police Complaints System in  
Northern Ireland, 2020.

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## **Introduction**

This statistical report presents the findings from the Police Ombudsman's module in the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey, 2020. The results from the survey are used to monitor public awareness and confidence in the Police Ombudsman's Office (the Office).

The Office has been monitoring the public's awareness and confidence in it since 2000. Up to 2017 this was measured through a module in the Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency's (NISRA) Omnibus Survey. Since 2018 it has been measured by a survey module in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) which is jointly conducted by Queens University and the Ulster University.

This is an Official Statistics publication, which means the statistics are produced to a high standard in-line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and are free from political interference.

## **The Life and Times Survey**

This survey was launched by University of Ulster and Queen's University of Belfast in the autumn of 1998. Its mission is to monitor the attitudes and behaviour of people in Northern Ireland 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 carried out annually and run on a modular format. It 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 public and academic debate.

The NILT survey is a constituent resource of ARK which is a research, policy and impact hub, based jointly in Queens's University and Ulster University. ARK runs a suite of three surveys, including the NILT survey, in order to record the attitudes of people of all ages in Northern Ireland to the key issues affecting their lives. Information on this survey and others, along with detailed technical notes can be found on the ARK website ([ARK Website Link](#)).

## **About this Report**

This report provides information from the Police Ombudsman's module in the 2020 NILT survey. The fieldwork for the survey was split into two phases; a pilot phase followed by the mainstage fieldwork. The mainstage fieldwork was undertaken during the period 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Unlike previous years, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a multi-modal approach was used by the researchers (see Appendix 2: Technical notes, page 16 for more details).

The Police Ombudsman's module has five questions and the results for each question have been presented by age group, gender and religion. The results from the survey are used by the Office to monitor its performance against some of the indicators in the Office's Balanced Scorecard.

Also included in this report, is a comparison for the main five questions asked in the survey with the two previous years (2018 and 2019). Comparisons have not been made for age group, gender or religion with the previous two years, however tables of data are included in this report (Appendix 1, Page 12) and in the accompanying excel spreadsheet (Accompanying excel spreadsheet 2018 to 2020) if the reader wishes to carry out further analysis.

It should be noted that a larger proportion of respondent's answer the questions with "don't know" in the NILT survey than would have been seen in the previous Omnibus Surveys. For this reason, the "don't know" answers are excluded from the analysis of the results.

Percentages in the tables may not add to 100% due to rounding. Unweighted base numbers within the tables will vary due to the exclusions of "don't know" responses.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

The results from this year's survey along with the two previous years, have been published in an excel spreadsheet (Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet 2018 to 2020) and the results from the previous Omnibus surveys are available in a different excel spreadsheet (Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet Omnibus Data up to 2017). Both of these spreadsheets are available on the Office website (website details are highlighted on the back page of this report).

Detailed notes have been supplied, which provide an account of the technical aspects of the survey, including the origin of the sample, response rates and its representativeness (see Appendix 2: Technical Notes, page 16).

We are always keen to receive feedback on all our statistical publications. If you have any feedback or comments on this report we would like to hear them. Please contact us by email at: [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org) or see our alternative contact details on the back page of this report.

## **Target Monitoring**

The results are used by the Office to measure its performance against three targets in its Balanced Scorecard, in the “To be accountable and ethical in the delivery of our service and use of public funds”.

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% public awareness of the Office***

- Target met as 95% of respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman’s Office

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% awareness of the independence of the Office***

- Target met as 92% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman’s Office were aware that it is independent from the police

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% confidence that the Office deals with complaints in an impartial way***

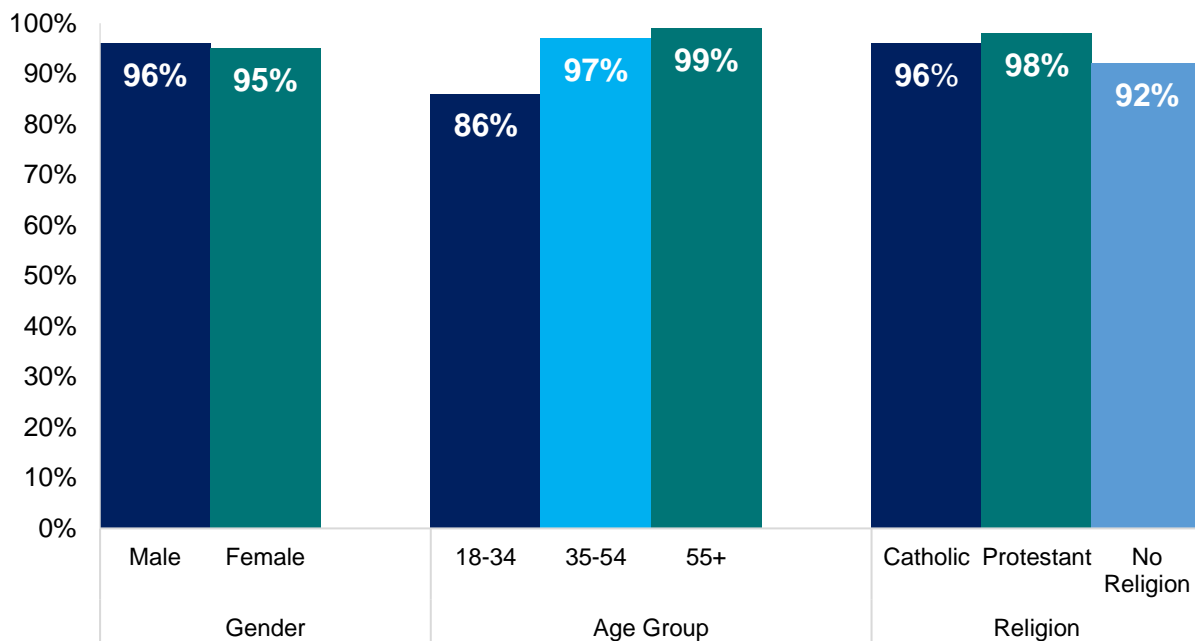
- Target not met as 76% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman’s Office were confident that it deals with complaints in an impartial way.

## Survey Findings

### Awareness of the Police Ombudsman

In 2020, 95% of respondents stated that they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. This has increased from the previous two years, when 86% awareness was reported in each of these years.

**Figure 1: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by Gender, Age and Religion, 2020**



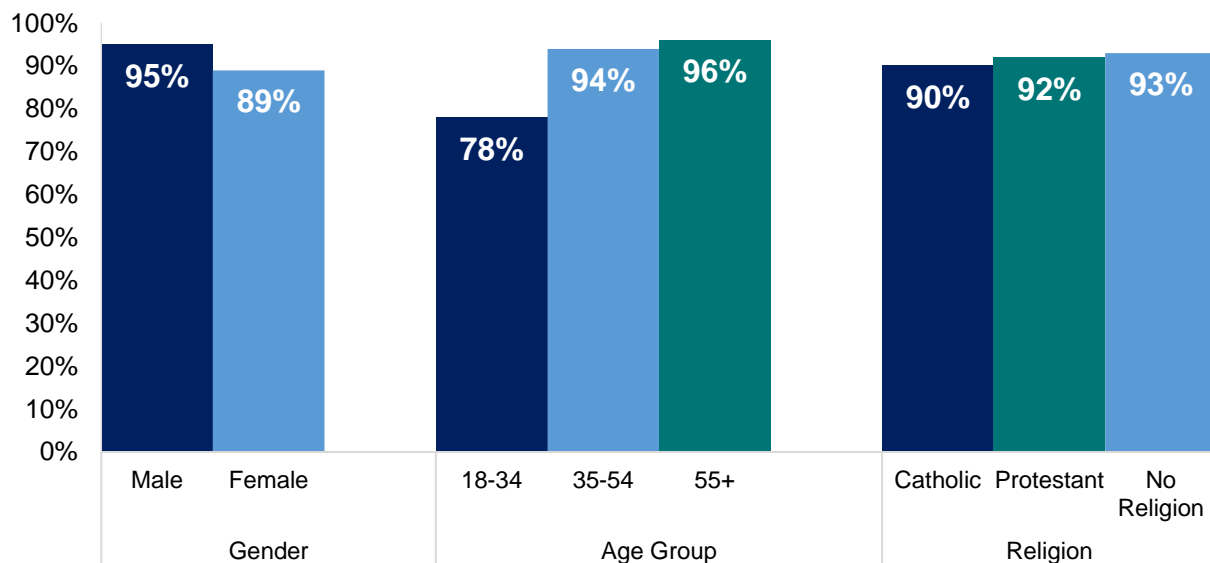
- Awareness of the Office was similar for both males and females.
- Older respondents, i.e. those aged 55 and over, were more likely to be aware of the Office than younger respondents.
- Awareness of the Office was similar between Catholic and Protestant respondents. However, those who reported to have No Religion, were less likely to be aware of the Office.

**NOTE: The following results in this report are based only on respondents that answered 'yes' to the question 'Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?'**

## Independence of the Police Ombudsman

In 2020, of those respondents who had heard of the Office, 92% were aware that it was independent from the police. This has increased from 2018 and 2019, when 88% of respondents were aware of the Office's independence in each of these years.

**Figure 2: Perception of independence of the Office by Gender, Age and Religion, 2020**



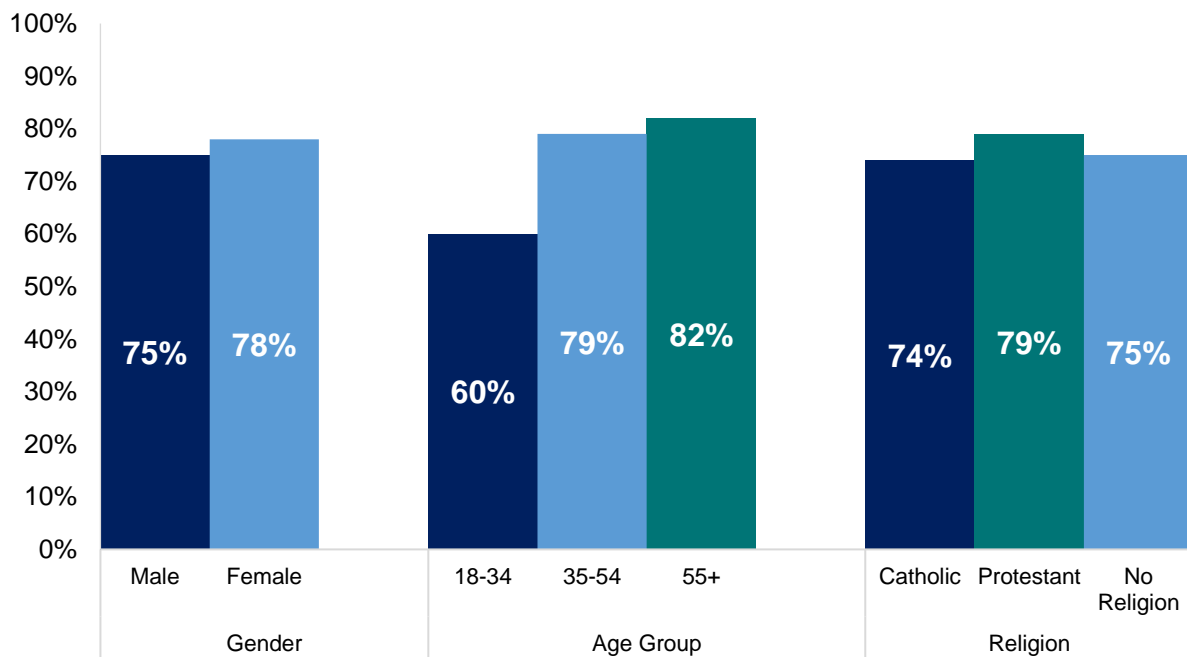
- Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to be aware that the Office is independent from the police.
- Respondents in the older age groups (35-54 and 55+) were more likely to be aware of the Office's independence from the police, when compared with those aged 18 to 34.
- The results between the religion categories were similar.



## Impartiality of investigation

In 2020, 76% of respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were confident that complaints were dealt with impartially. This has decreased from 85% in 2019 and 80% in 2018.

**Figure 3: Level of confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way by Gender, Age and Religion, 2020**

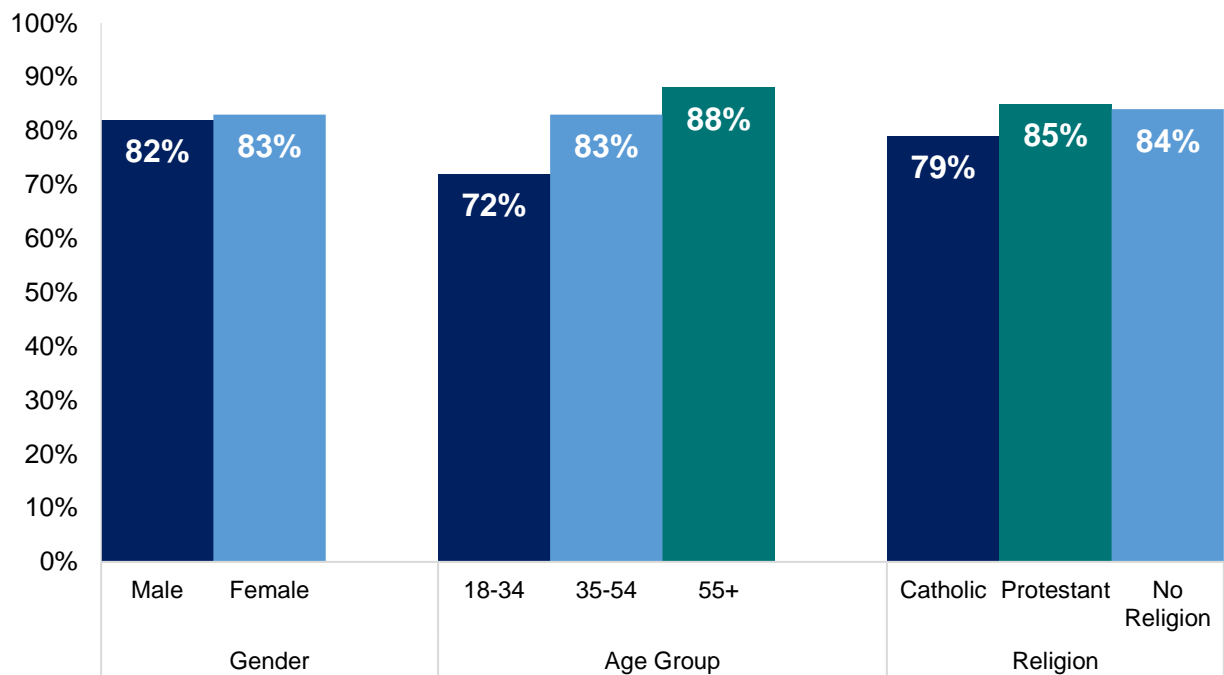


- Similar proportions of male and female respondents were confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially.
- Respondents aged 18 to 34, were less confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially when compared with those aged 35 to 54 and those aged 55 and over.
- The results between the religion categories were similar.

## Fairness of treatment

In 2020, 83% of respondents thought they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office. This is similar to the result of 86% reported in 2019 and 81% reported in 2018.

**Figure 4: Perception of fair treatment when making a complaint by Gender, Age and Religion, 2020**

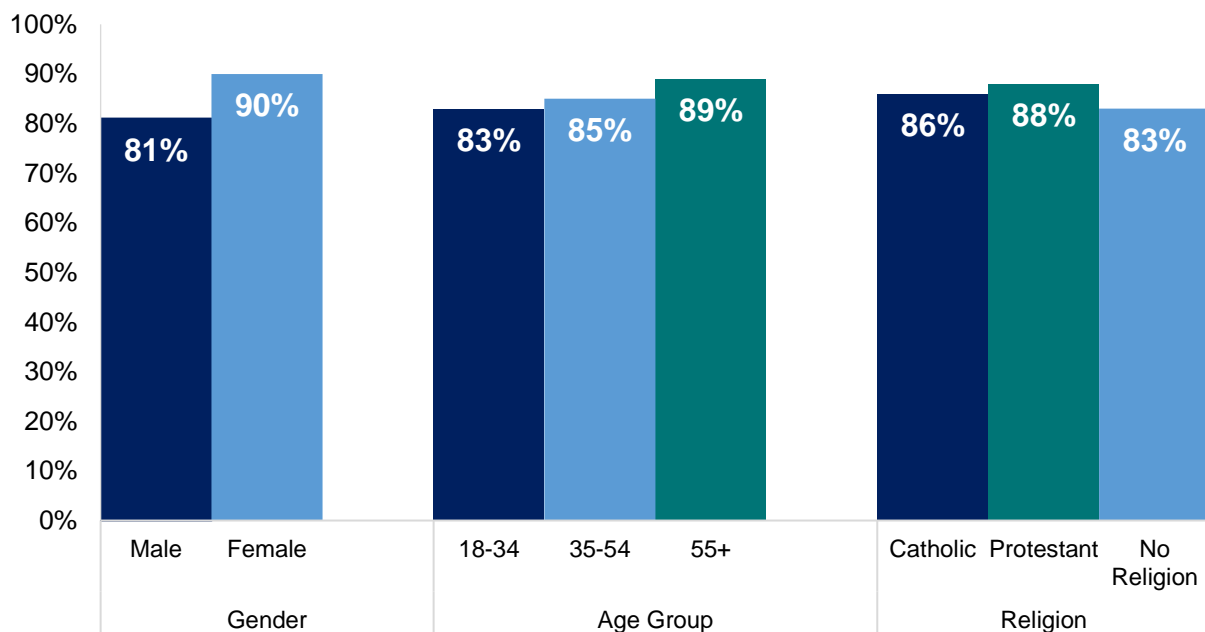


- Similar proportions of male and female respondents were likely to think they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office.
- Respondents aged 18 to 34 were less likely to think that they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office when compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 and those aged 55 and over.
- Protestant respondents were more likely to think they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint when compared with Catholic respondents.

## Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing

In 2020, 86% of respondents thought that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police in Northern Ireland do a good job. This has increased from 82% in 2018 but is similar to last year when 87% of respondents thought the Office would have a positive impact on policing.

**Figure 5: Perception that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure that the police do a good job by Gender, Age and Religion, 2020**



- Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to think that the Ombudsman helps ensure the police do a good job.
- Respondents aged 55 and over were more likely to think that the Police Ombudsman helps ensure the police do a good job when compared with respondents aged 34 and under.
- The results between the religion categories were similar.

## Appendix 1: Tables of Results<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2020?**

	% weighted
Aware	95.3%
Not aware	4.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1279

**Table 2: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by gender, 2020.**

	% weighted
Male	95.9%
Female	94.8%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1276

**Table 3: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by age group, 2020.**

	% weighted
18-34	86.5%
35-54	97.5%
55+	99.1%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1279

**Table 4: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by religion, 2020.**

	% weighted
Catholic	96.3%
Protestant	97.8%
No Religion	91.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1236

**Table 5: Do you think the Police Ombudsman is part of the police or independent, 2020?**

	% weighted
Independent of the police	91.5%
Part of the police	8.5%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1165

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 6: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by gender, 2020.**

	% weighted
Male	95.2%
Female	88.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1162

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

<sup>1</sup> These tables along with results from 2018 and 2019 are available in an excel spreadsheet (accompanying excel spreadsheet 2018 to 2020) on the Police Ombudsman's website.

**Table 7: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by age group, 2020.**

	% weighted
18-34	78.2%
35-54	94.5%
55+	96.5%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1165

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

**Table 8: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by religion, 2020.**

	% weighted
Catholic	90.4%
Protestant	92.2%
No Religion	92.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1134

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

**Table 9: How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially, 2020?**

	% weighted
Very confident	15.3%
Confident	61.0%
Total confident	76.3%
Not very confident	19.0%
Not at all confident	4.7%
Total not confident	23.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1075

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

**Table 10: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by gender, 2020.**

	% weighted
Male	74.8%
Female	77.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1072

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

**Table 11: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by age group, 2020.**

	% weighted
18-34	60.1%
35-54	79.5%
55+	81.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1075

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

**Table 12: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by religion, 2020.**

	% weighted
Catholic	74.4%
Protestant	78.5%
No religion	74.8%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1048

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 13: If you made a complaint do you think you'd be treated fairly, 2020?**

	% weighted
Yes	82.5%
No	17.5%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	851

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 14: Perception of fair treatment by gender, 2020.**

	% weighted
Male	82.4%
Female	82.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	849

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 15: Perception of fair treatment by age group, 2020.**

	% weighted
18-34	72.1%
35-54	82.8%
55+	88.5%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	851

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 16: Perception of fair treatment by religion, 2020.**

	% weighted
Catholic	78.6%
Protestant	85.1%
No religion	83.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	827

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 17: Do you think the Police Ombudsman will help police do a good job, 2020?**

	% weighted
Yes	85.9%
No	14.1%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	899

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 18: Police Ombudsman will help police do a good job by gender, 2020.**

	% weighted
Male	81.0%
Female	89.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	897

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 19: Police Ombudsman will help police do a good job by age group, 2020.**

	% weighted
18-34	82.7%
35-54	84.9%
55+	88.8%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	899

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

**Table 20: Police Ombudsman will help ensure the police do a good job by religion, 2020.**

	% weighted
Catholic	86.1%
Protestant	87.5%
No Religion	82.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	878

**Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman**

## **Appendix 2: Technical Notes**

The technical information has been provided by ARK and is for the NILT 2020 survey.

The 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 by the researchers. 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.

All interviews whether online, via the telephone or in person were conducted by Ipsos MORI interviewers. The fieldwork was split into two phases; a pilot phase followed by the mainstage fieldwork. The mainstage fieldwork was undertaken during the period 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

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. Private business addresses were removed from the database prior to the sample selection.

Of the 15,000 addresses drawn from the PAF, 14,784 were included in the scope of research (216 addresses no longer existed, were inaccessible or the addressee had gone away). In each household only one person was selected to be interviewed by using the 'next birthday' rule. This is the person with the next birthday, at the time of the call is selected for the interviews (of all persons living at the address who were aged 18 or over). A total of 1,292 persons co-operated fully representing a response rate of 9%. Table 21 (page 17) 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 the margin of error for all sample estimates is within the parameters of  $\pm 2.81\%$



**Table 21: Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)**

		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence limits
Age	18 to 24	8.0	1.48	6.5 to 9.5
	25 to 34	18.0	2.10	15.9 to 20.1
	35 to 44	18.0	2.10	15.9 to 20.1
	45 to 54	19.9	2.18	17.7 to 22.1
	55 to 64	18.8	2.13	16.7 to 20.9
	65 & over	17.4	2.07	15.3 to 19.5
Sex	Male	40.5	2.67	37.8 to 43.2
	Female	59.3	2.68	56.6 to 62.1
Religion	Catholic	28.1	2.45	25.4 to 30.6
	Protestant	41.8	2.69	39.1 to 44.5
	None	27.2	2.43	24.8 to 29.6
	Other	1.2	0.59	0.68 to 1.8
	Refused/Don't Know	1.4	0.64	0.7 to 2.0

The data has been weighted in order to allow for the disproportionate household size.

The religion category in this report includes those respondents who reported to have 'no religion', those who reported a religion that was not Catholic or Protestant (other religion) and those whose religion was not stated.

ARK also publish the survey results. They will be released publically on the internet on the 10 June 2020. The NILT website 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. The NILT website can be accessed by selecting the following link: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>.



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This publication and other statistical information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the internet at:

Website: [www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)



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