



Northern Ireland
Statistics & Research Agency

Perceptions of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland: Summary findings from the Young Life and Times survey 2017 to 2023

August 2024



Department of
Justice

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Key figures for 2023

Fear and intimidation

21%
of young people
agree that
paramilitary
groups create
fear and
intimidation



+7.2%

Law and justice



-18.3%

47% of young people agree
people in their area feel protected
by the law and justice system

Young people

13% felt young people
are being influenced too
much by paramilitary
groups



+2.9%

Area safety

85% of young people
feel safe living
in their area






-7.0%

Controlling influence

13% of
young people felt
paramilitary groups
have a controlling
influence in their area



+0.6%

-  Significant positive change from baseline
-  No significant change from baseline
-  Significant negative change from baseline

Summary Statistics

About the data

The Young Life & Times (YLT) survey examines the social attitudes of people living in Northern Ireland. The survey provides a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of young people in Northern Ireland. Following on from results of the 2017 survey, further questions have been commissioned annually to provide ongoing insight into young peoples' perceptions of paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland.

Figure 1: Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2023

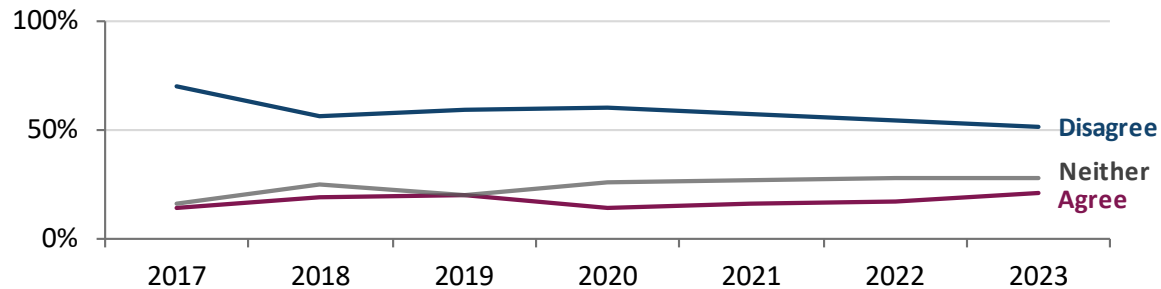


Figure 2: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2023

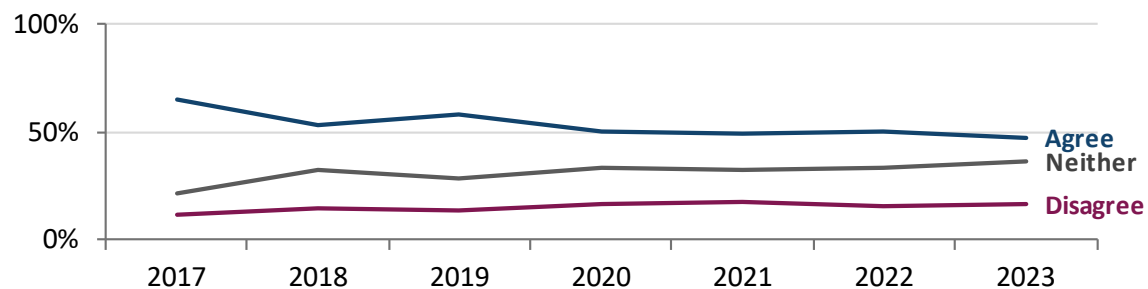


Figure 3: How safe do you feel living in this area? (%), 2017 to 2023

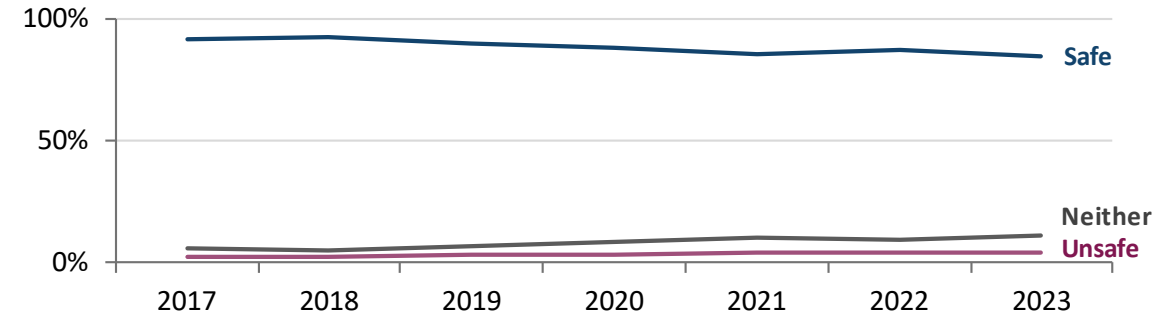


Figure 4: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence (%), 2017 to 2023

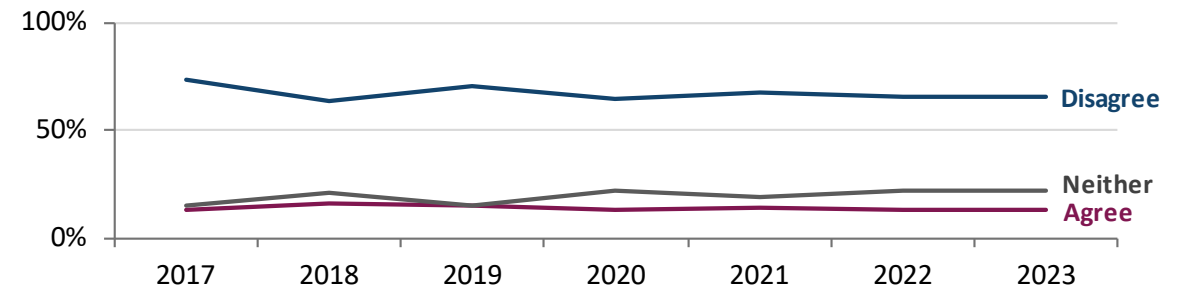
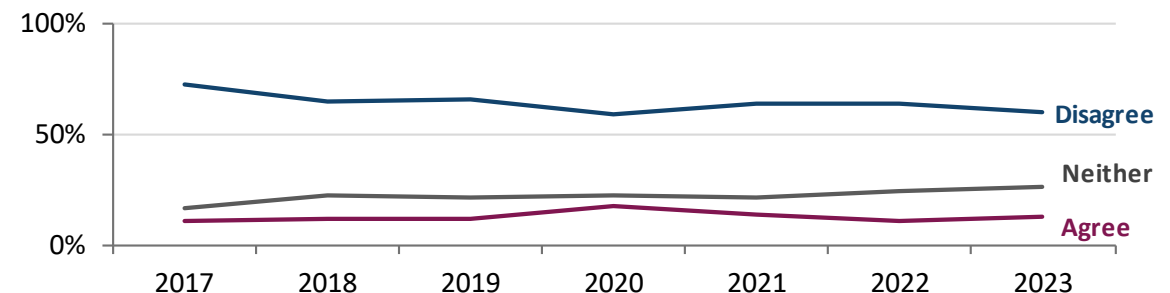


Figure 5: Young people are influenced too much by paramilitaries (%), 2017 to 2023



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The Young Life & Times (YLT) Survey

The YLT survey was launched in October 1998 as a resource for everyone interested in the social attitudes of people living in Northern Ireland. Set up by [Queen's University Belfast \(opens in a new window\)](#) and [Ulster University \(opens in a new window\)](#) and run every year, the survey aims to put on record the attitudes, values and beliefs of the young people in Northern Ireland on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of young people in Northern Ireland. Further information on sample selection can be found in the [Technical Annex](#). The survey comprises of two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances; and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients. This allows, where appropriate, for responses to the survey to be broken down by a variety of key demographic characteristics. The survey receives ethical approval from the School Ethics Committee of the [School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work \(opens in a new window\)](#), Queen's University Belfast.

The Focus of this Publication

The Cross-Executive Programme for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime started its second phase of delivery in 2021, with a revised overall outcome: 'safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control'. This marks a conscious shift away from the 38 projects that existed under the original Executive Action Plan to increase cohesion and collaboration across the Programme. Sitting under this overall outcome are two complementary workstreams, each of which will deliver the following end outcomes:

- People and communities are safe from the harm caused by paramilitarism; and
- People and communities are more resilient to paramilitary influence and involvement in paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

Projects supported by the Programme must contribute towards the achievement or realisation of one or both of these Programme level outcomes.

In order to measure the impact of the Programme, the NILT was commissioned to provide baseline data on the public's perceptions of and attitudes towards paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland. These survey questions have been repeated each year since 2017 to monitor any changes in attitudes and perceptions as work on the delivery of the Programme progresses. This publication presents key findings from the survey and compares year-on-year responses. This will be updated as additional information becomes available. The current version highlights trends and findings over a seven year period, from 2017 to 2023.

Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation

Figure 6: Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2023

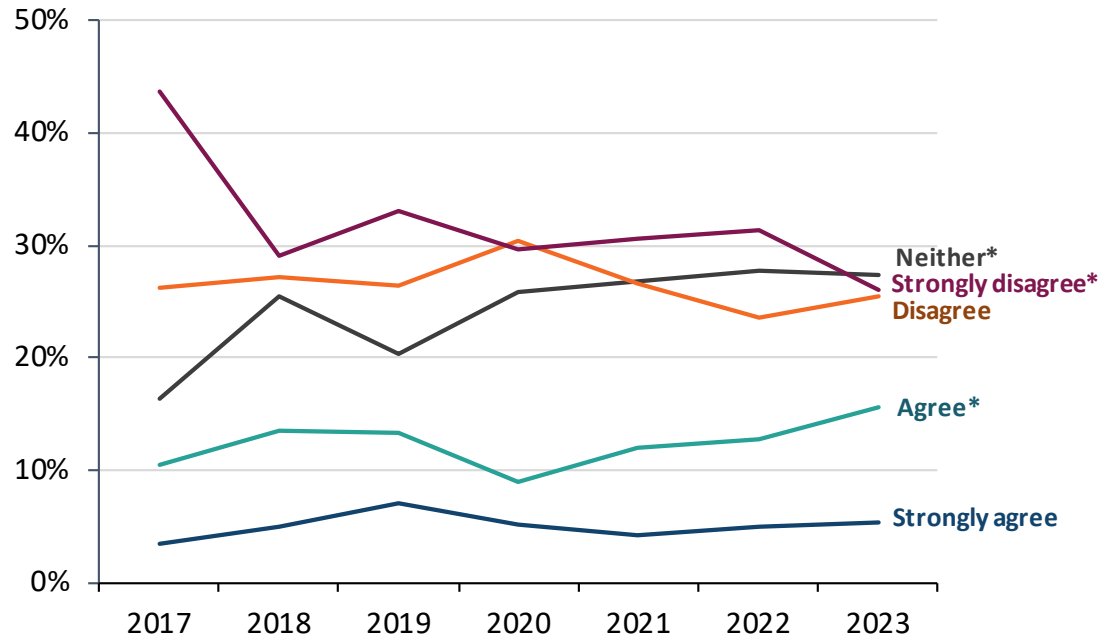
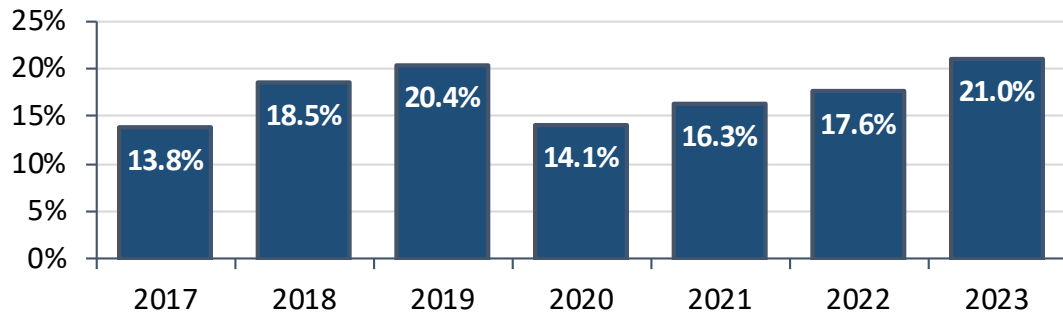


Figure 7: Proportion who strongly agree or agree paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area (%), 2017 to 2023



Data Trends

Over the time series, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagree that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area. Alongside this, there has also been a significant increase in respondents who agree or neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree or disagree has showed no significant changes from the 2017 baseline figures.

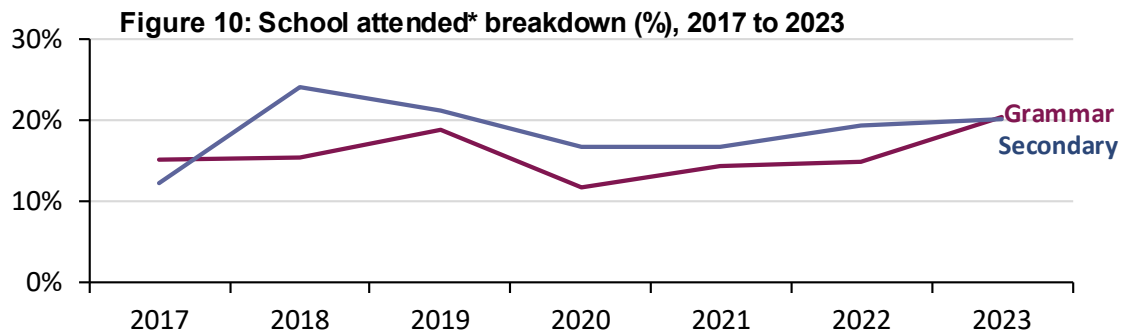
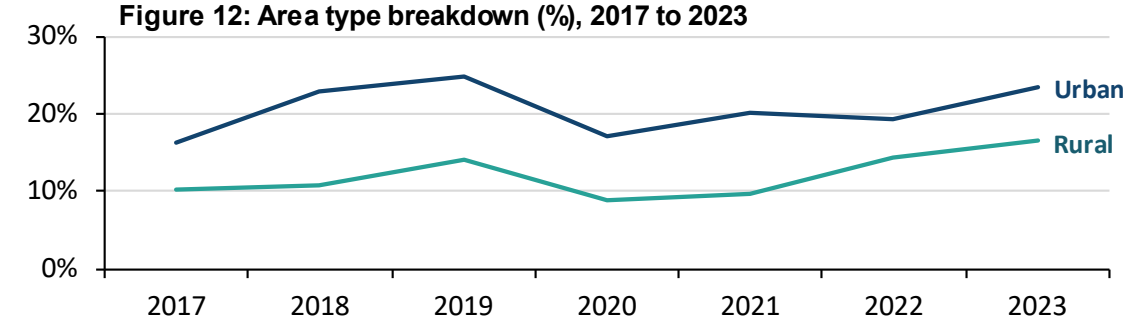
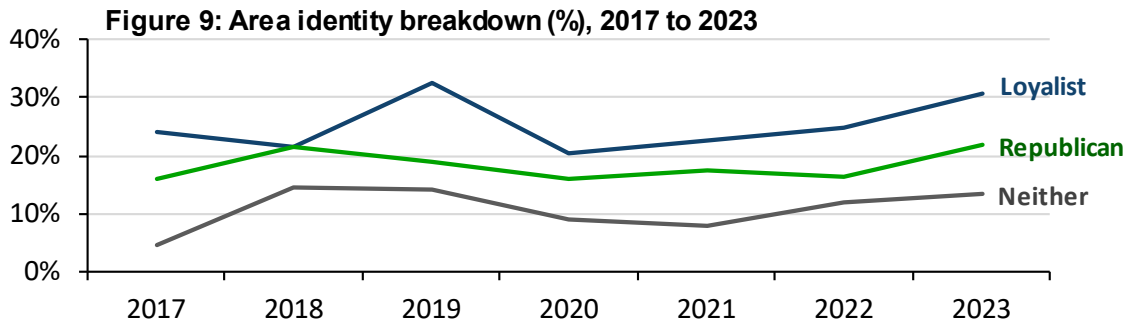
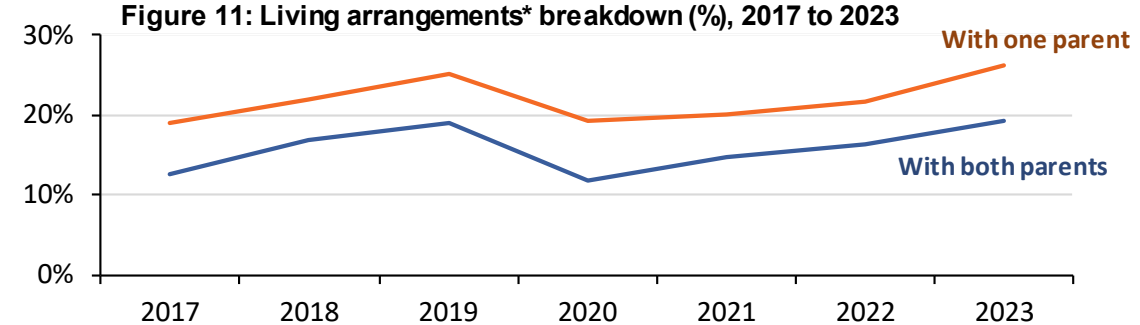
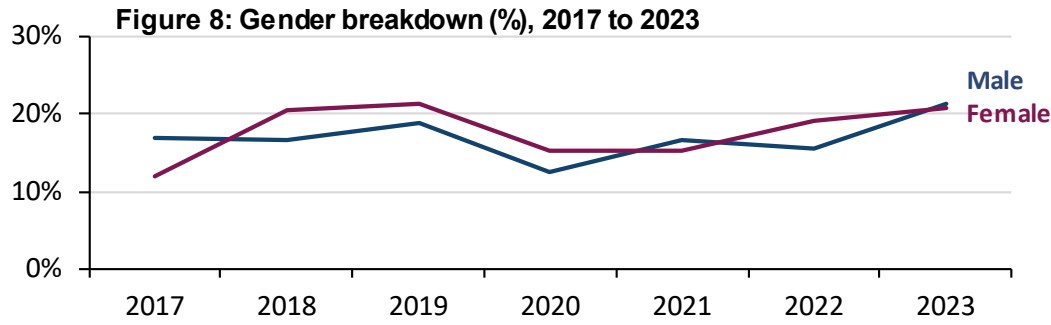
Table 1: Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2023

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	3.4%	10.4%	16.3%	26.3%	43.6%
2018	4.9%	13.6%	25.4%	27.1%	29.0%
2019	7.1%	13.3%	20.3%	26.4%	33.0%
2020	5.1%	9.0%	25.8%	30.4%	29.7%
2021	4.3%	12.0%	26.7%	26.6%	30.5%
2022	4.9%	12.7%	27.7%	23.5%	31.3%
2023	5.4%	15.6%	27.4%	25.4%	26.1%
Change from baseline	+2.0%	+5.2%	+11.1%	-0.9%	-17.5%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart

Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in this area

This data shows the percentage of young people who answered 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. All Y axes are set at 0% to 30%, with the exception of Area Identity which is set to 40%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'); responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50, however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Those who identified their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican and/or lived in rural areas were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area. Those who lived with one parent were more likely to agree with this statement. There was little difference in level of agreement between genders and schools attended. See Worksheet 12 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

People feel protected by the law and justice system

Figure 13: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2023

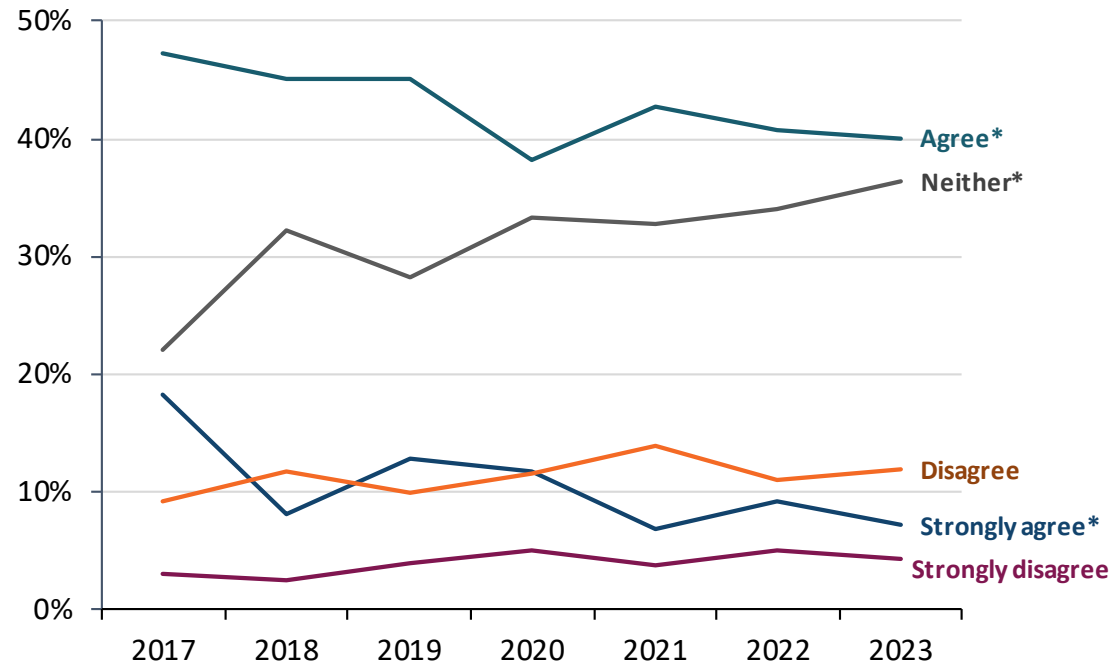
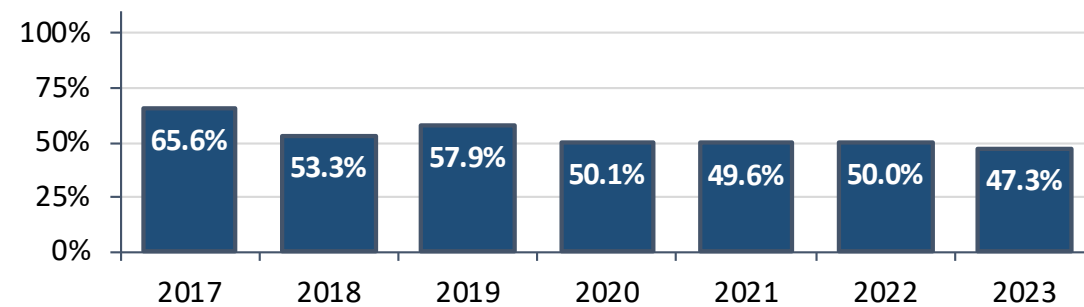


Figure 14: Proportion who strongly agree or agree people feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2023



Data Trends

There have been significant decreases in the percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree that people in their area feel protected by the law and justice system. In contrast, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who neither agree nor disagree with this indicating increasing uncertainty within this area. There have been no significant changes in the proportions who disagree or strongly disagree that people feel protected by the law and justice system.

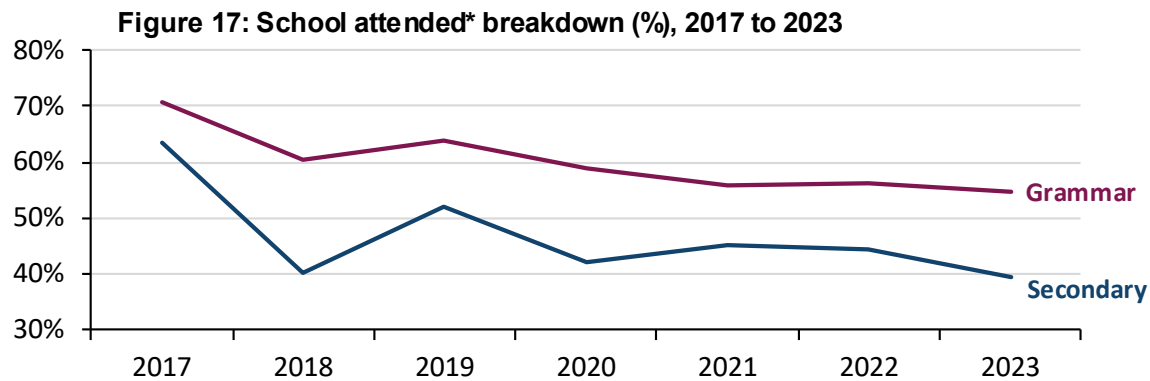
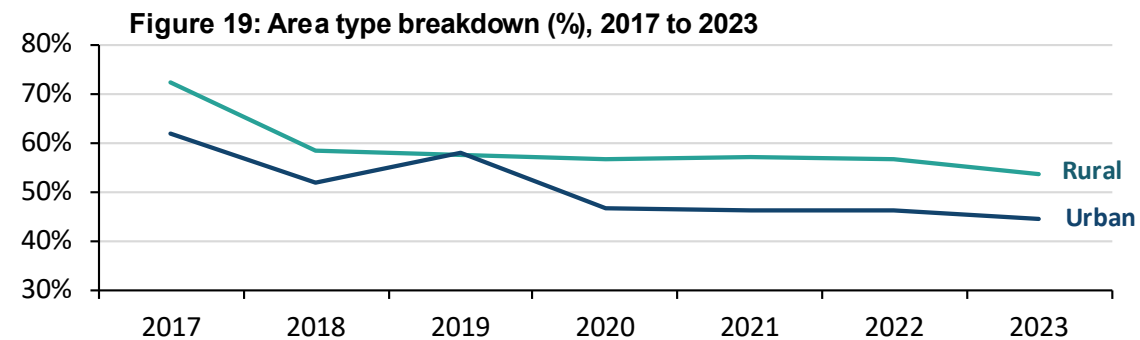
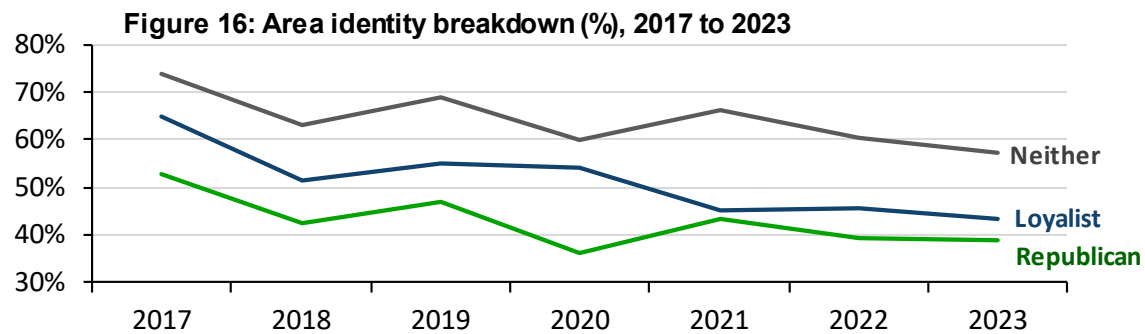
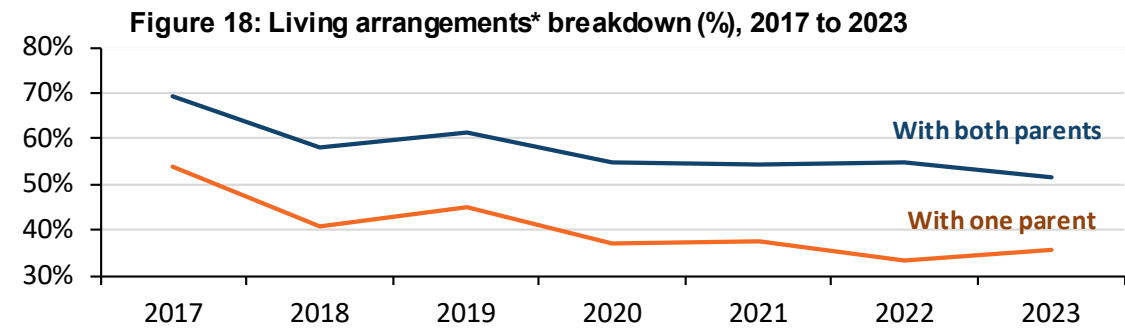
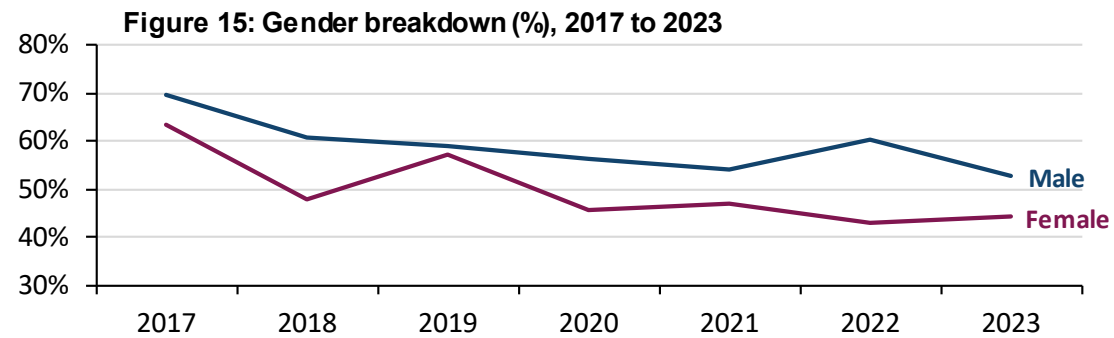
Table 2: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2023

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	18.3%	47.3%	22.1%	9.2%	3.1%
2018	8.2%	45.1%	32.2%	11.8%	2.6%
2019	12.8%	45.1%	28.3%	9.9%	3.9%
2020	11.8%	38.3%	33.3%	11.6%	5.0%
2021	6.9%	42.7%	32.7%	13.9%	3.8%
2022	9.2%	40.8%	34.0%	11.0%	5.0%
2023	7.2%	40.1%	36.4%	11.9%	4.4%
Change from baseline	-11.1%	-7.2%	+14.3%	+2.7%	+1.3%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart

People feel protected by the law and justice system

This data shows the percentage of young people who answered 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 30% to 80%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'); responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50, however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Across all years, a higher proportion of respondents who lived with both parents, attended grammar school or identified their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican strongly agreed or agreed that people in their area felt protected by the law and justice system. In contrast, a lower proportion of respondents who were female or came from an urban area agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. See Worksheet 7 in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Figure 20: People feel safe living in their area (%), 2017 to 2023

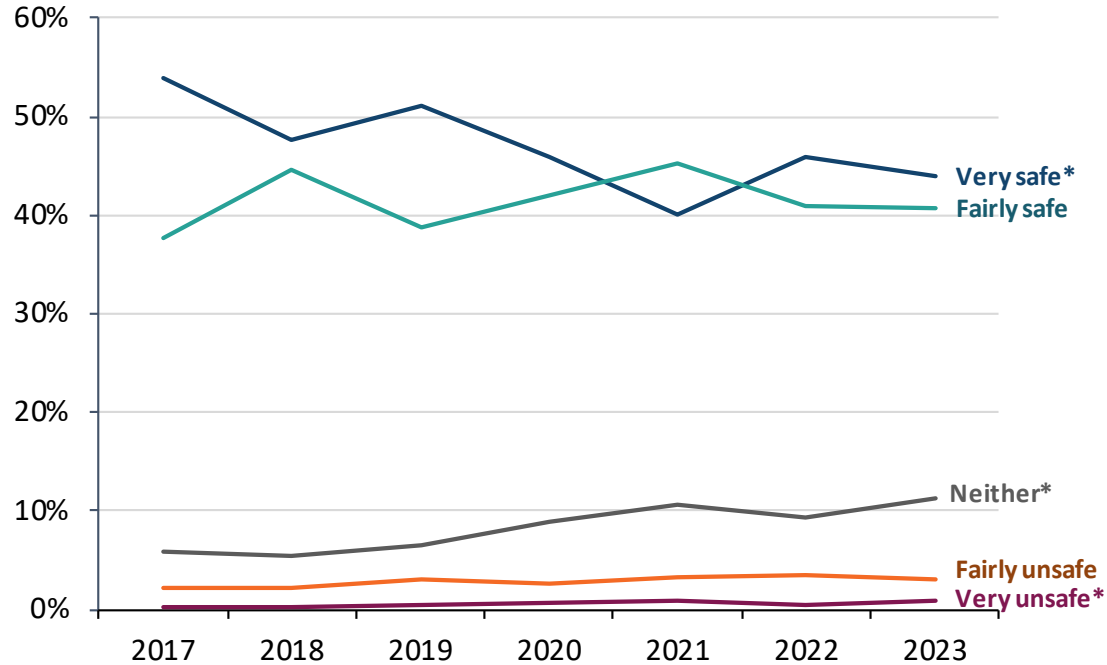
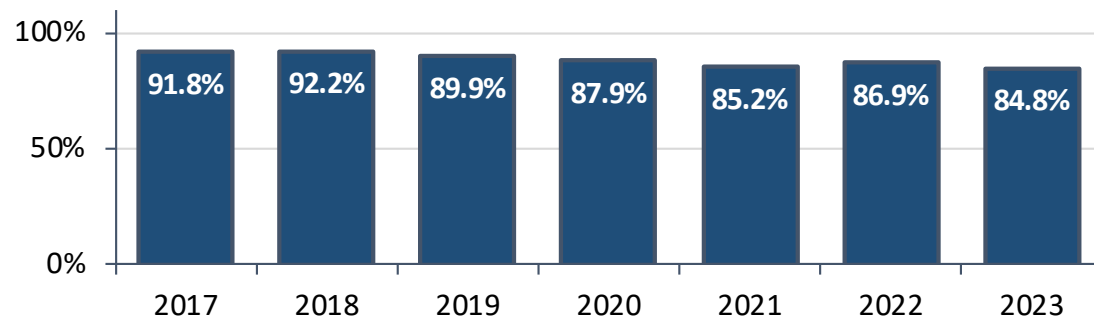


Figure 21: Proportion who feel very safe or fairly safe living in their area (%), 2017 to 2023



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the number of respondents who feel very safe living in their area and a significant increase in the proportion who reported feeling neither safe nor unsafe or very unsafe. That said, across all years, the overall proportion of those feeling safe has remained consistently high (over four fifths). Across all years, a consistently low number of respondents reported feeling unsafe living in their area.

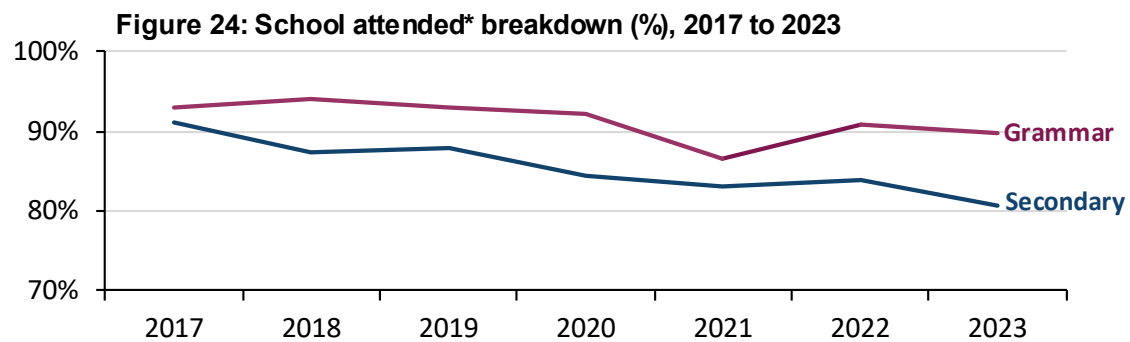
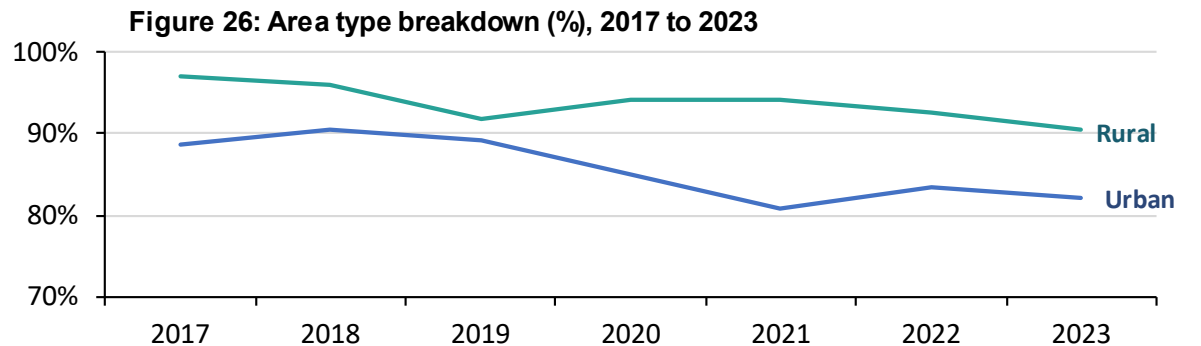
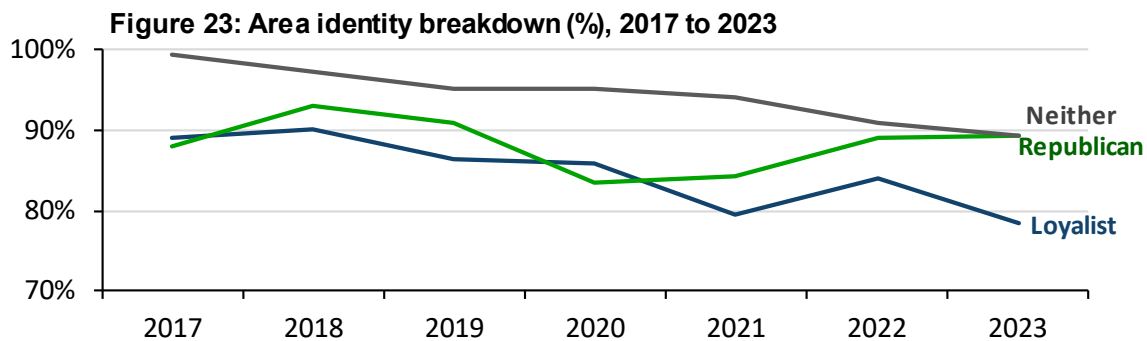
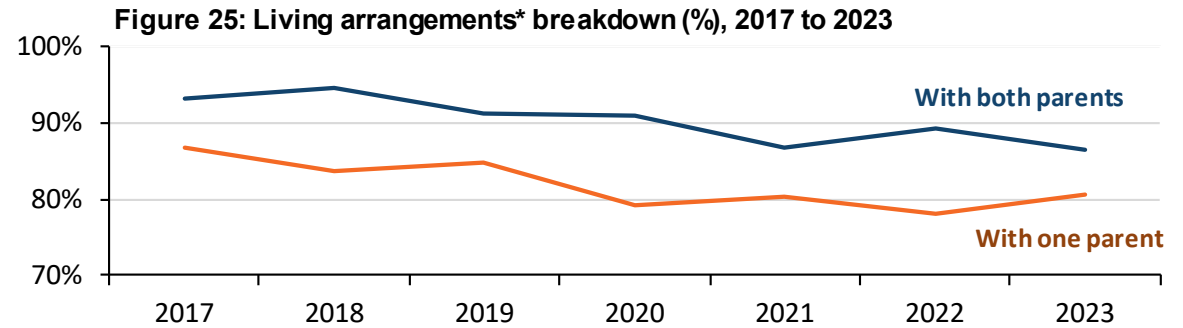
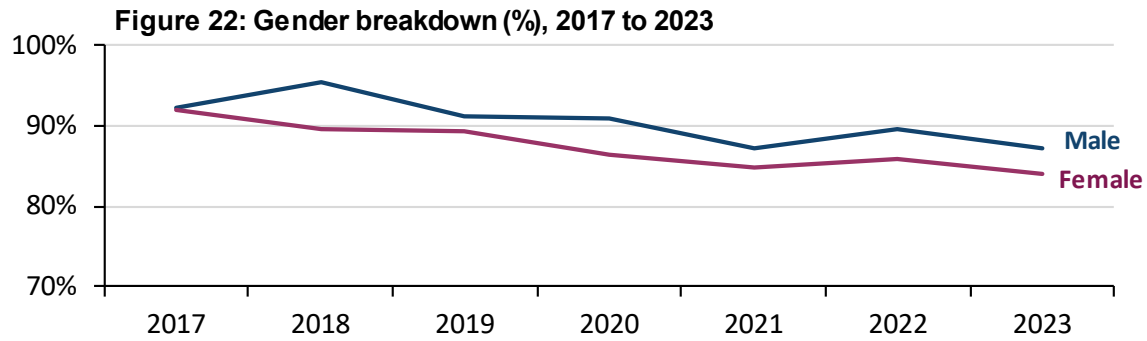
Table 3: People feel safe living in their area (%), 2017 to 2023

Year	Very safe	Fairly safe	Neither safe nor unsafe	Fairly unsafe	Very unsafe
2017	54.0%	37.8%	5.9%	2.1%	0.2%
2018	47.6%	44.6%	5.4%	2.2%	0.2%
2019	51.2%	38.7%	6.6%	3.0%	0.5%
2020	45.9%	42.0%	8.9%	2.6%	0.6%
2021	40.0%	45.2%	10.6%	3.3%	1.0%
2022	45.9%	41.0%	9.3%	3.4%	0.5%
2023	44.0%	40.8%	11.3%	3.1%	0.9%
Change from baseline	-10.0%	+3.0%	+5.4%	+1.0%	+0.7%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart

How safe do you feel living in your area?

This data shows the percentage of young people who answered 'fairly safe' and 'very safe'. All Y axes ranges are set at 70% to 100%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'); responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50, however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Across all years, a higher proportion of respondents who were male or attended grammar school felt very or fairly safe living in their area. In contrast, a lower proportion of respondents living in urban areas or with one parent reported feeling very or fairly safe. Over the last couple of years similar proportions of respondents identifying as Republican or neither Loyalist nor Republican reported feeling very or fairly safe in their area. This was higher than those identifying as Loyalist. See Worksheet 3 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence

Figure 27: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence (%), 2017 to 2023

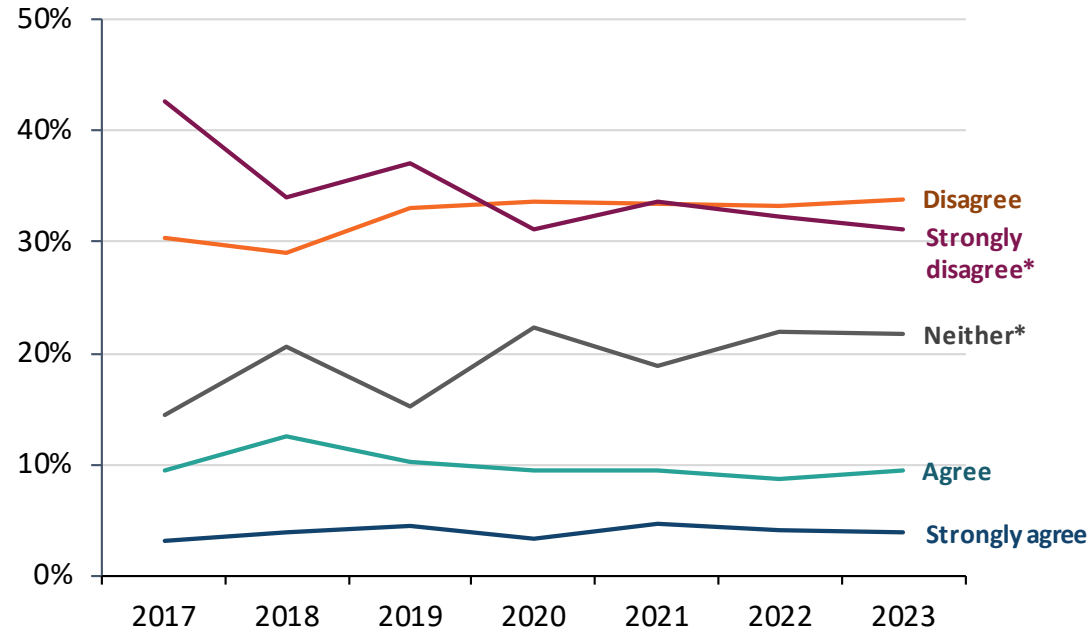
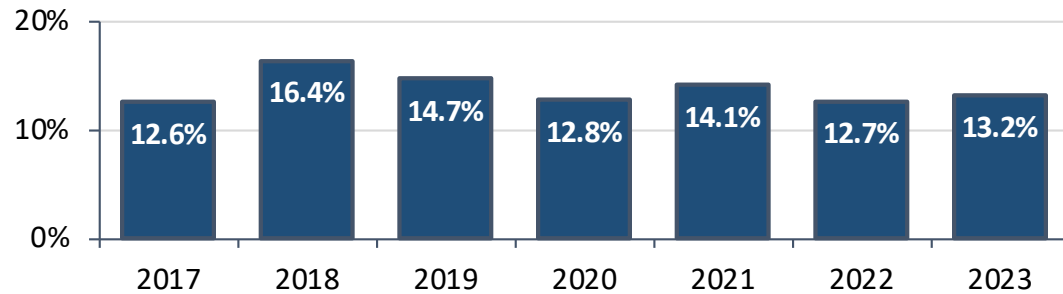


Figure 28: Proportion who strongly agree or agree paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in their area (%), 2017 to 2023



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagree that paramilitary groups have a controlling influence within their area.

However, this has been offset by an increase in respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. The proportion of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed or disagreed that paramilitary groups have a controlling influence showed no significant change.

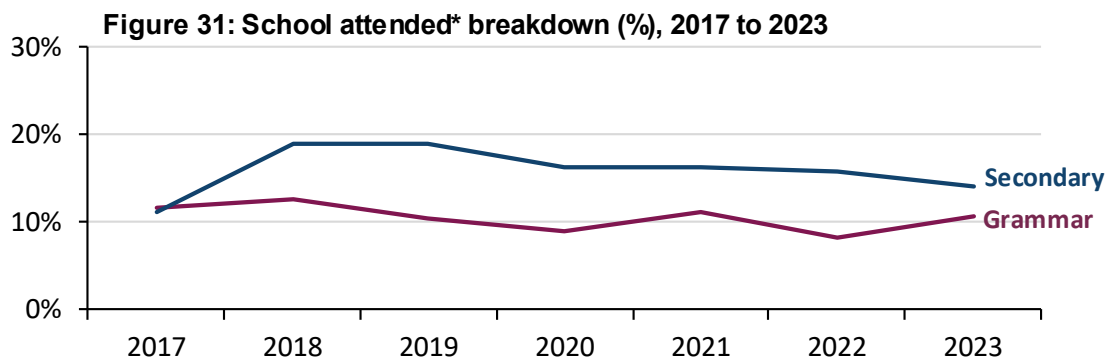
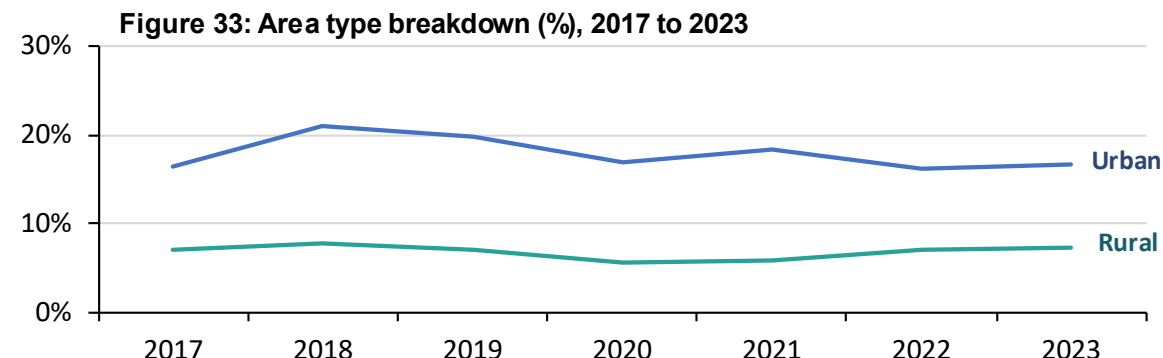
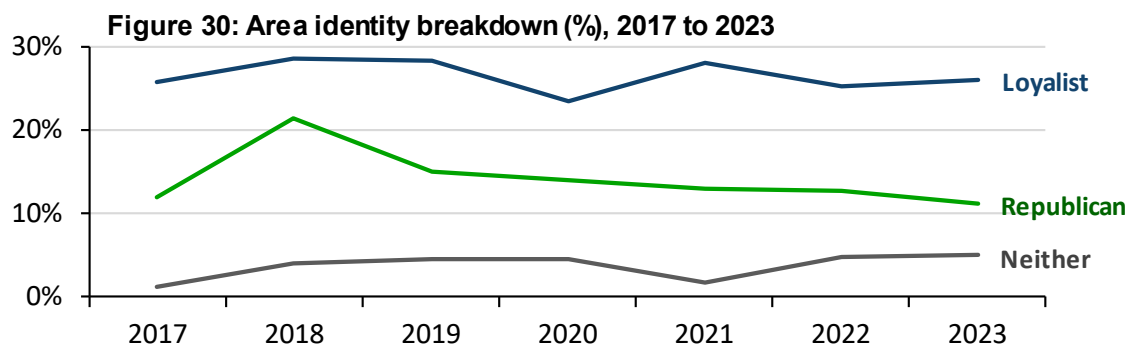
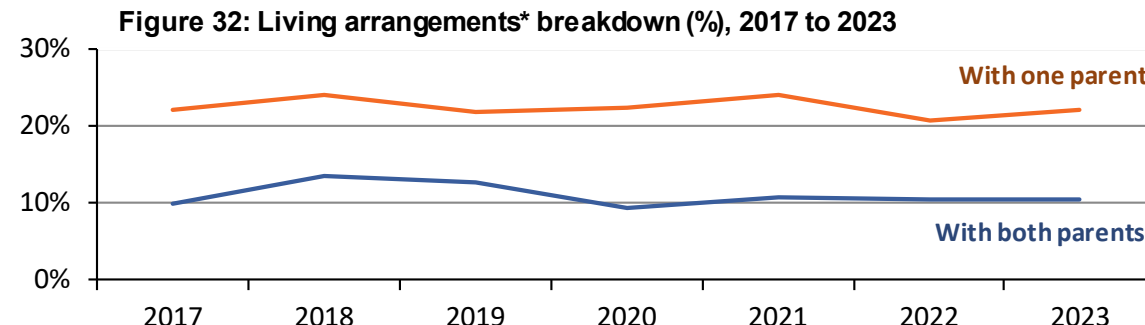
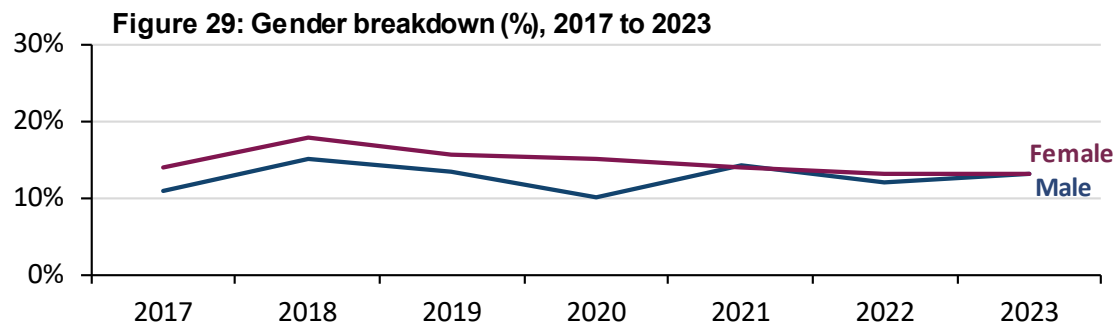
Table 4: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in their area (%), 2017 to 2023

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	3.2%	9.4%	14.5%	30.3%	42.6%
2018	3.9%	12.5%	20.5%	29.1%	34.0%
2019	4.4%	10.3%	15.2%	33.0%	37.0%
2020	3.4%	9.4%	22.3%	33.7%	31.1%
2021	4.7%	9.4%	18.8%	33.4%	33.7%
2022	4.1%	8.6%	21.9%	33.2%	32.2%
2023	3.8%	9.4%	21.7%	33.9%	31.2%
Change from baseline	+0.6%	=0.0%	+7.2%	+3.6%	-11.4%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart

Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in this area

This data shows the percentage of young people who answered 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 0% to 30%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'); responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50, however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Across all years, a lower proportion of respondents living in rural areas agreed paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in their area. In contrast, a higher proportion of those living with one parent, attending a secondary school or who described their area as Loyalist agreed with this statement. There was no difference in level of agreement between genders. See Worksheet 10 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Paramilitary Influence on Young People

Figure 34: Young people are being influenced by paramilitary groups (%), 2017 to 2023

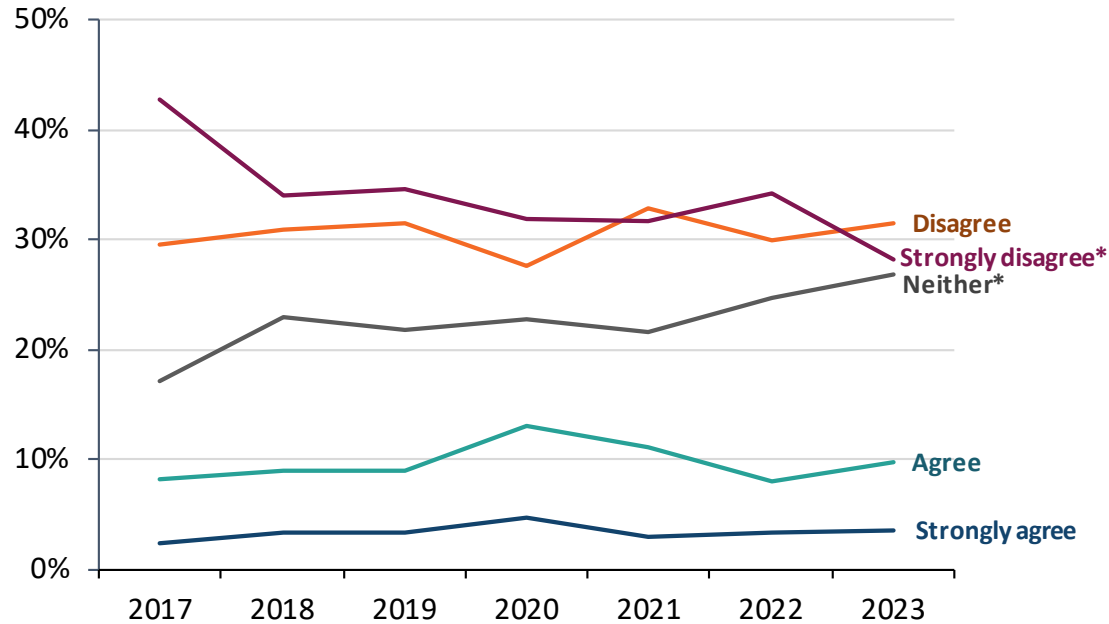
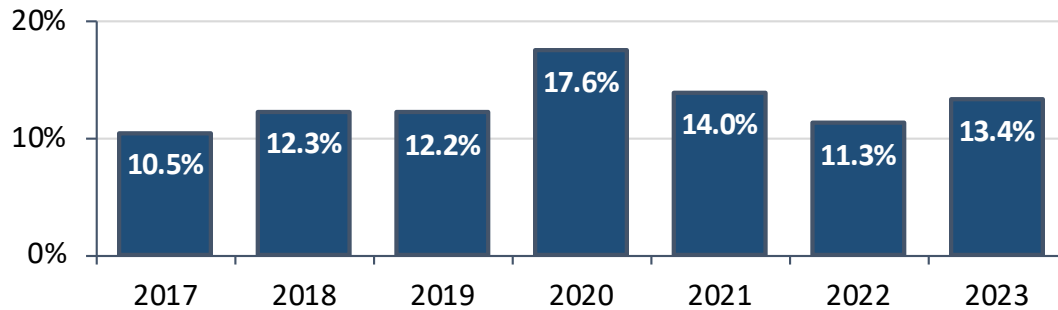


Figure 35: Proportion who strongly agree or agree young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area (%), 2017 to 2023



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who strongly disagree that young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area. In contrast, there was a significant increase in the proportion who neither agree nor disagree. The proportions of respondents who strongly agree, agree or disagree with the statement has shown little change since 2017.

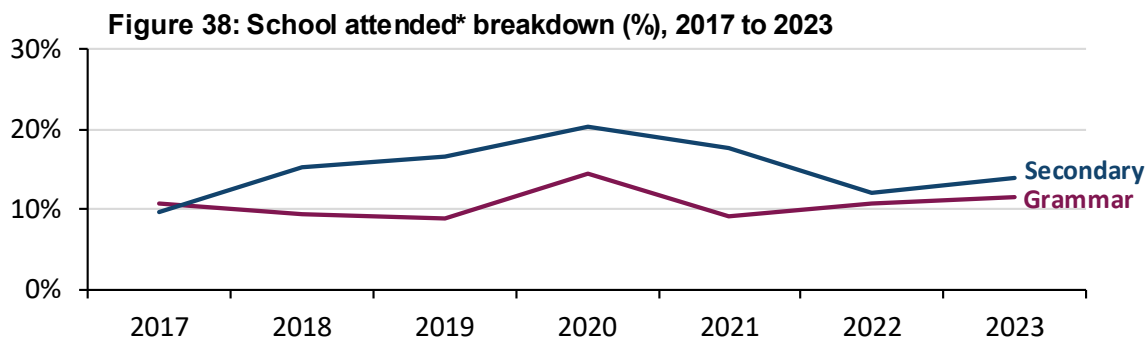
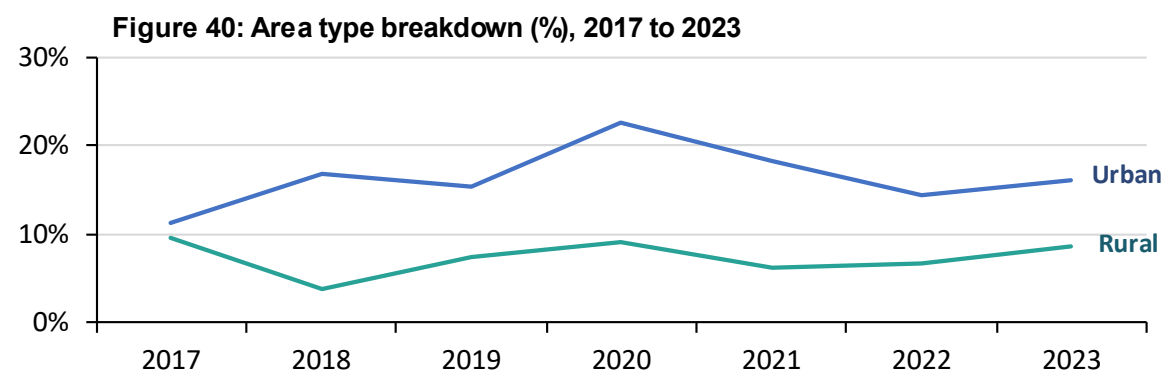
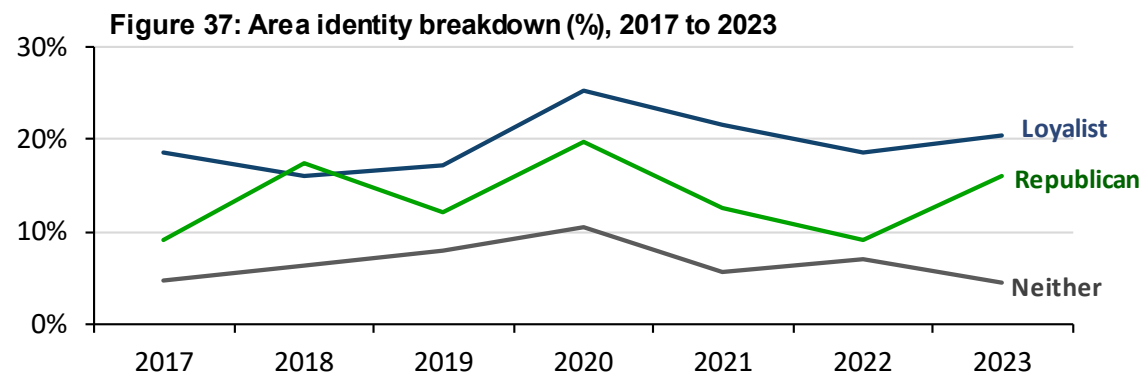
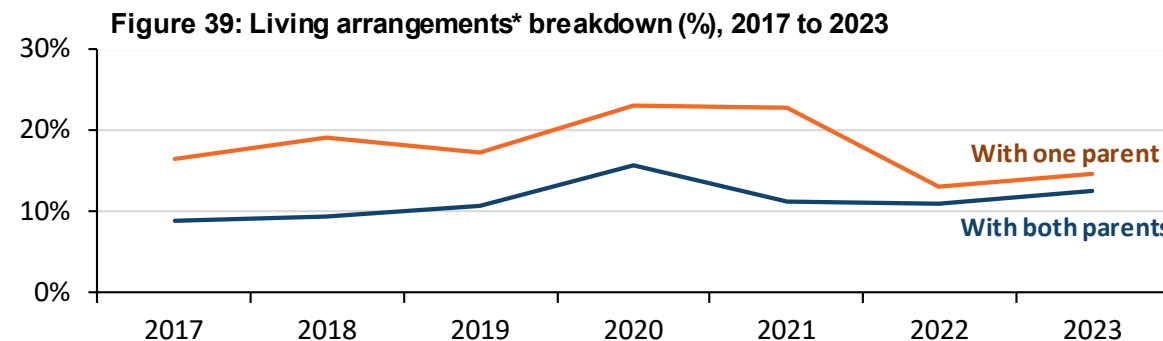
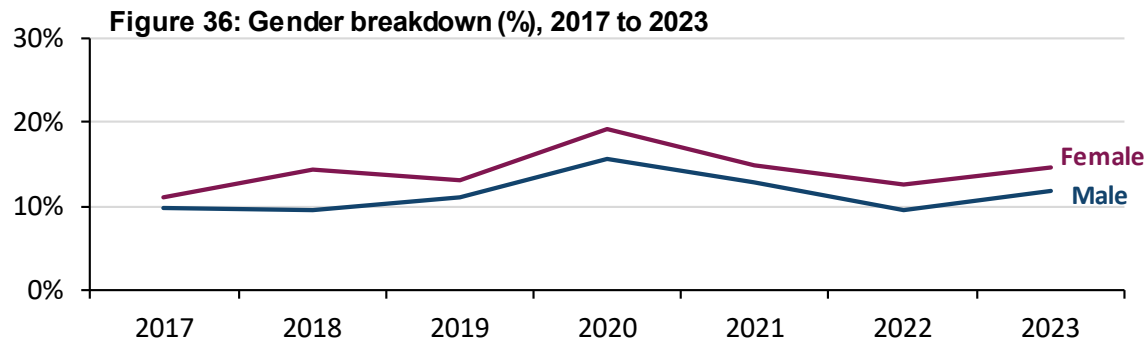
Table 5: Young people are being influenced by paramilitary groups (%), 2017 to 2023

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	2.4%	8.1%	17.1%	29.5%	42.8%
2018	3.4%	8.9%	23.0%	30.9%	33.9%
2019	3.3%	8.9%	21.8%	31.5%	34.5%
2020	4.6%	13.0%	22.8%	27.6%	31.9%
2021	3.0%	11.0%	21.6%	32.8%	31.6%
2022	3.3%	8.0%	24.6%	30.0%	34.1%
2023	3.6%	9.8%	26.9%	31.5%	28.2%
Change from baseline	+1.2%	+1.7%	+9.8%	+2.0%	-14.6%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart

Young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in this area

This data shows the percentage of young people who answered 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. All Y axes ranges are set at 0% to 30%. Figures marked with an asterisk (*) include additional categories (e.g. 'Other'); responses for these are not shown here as the denominator is less than 50, however overall figures can be found in the accompanying Excel file.



Data Trends

Overall, across all years, a lower proportion of respondents who lived in rural areas or identified their area as neither Loyalist nor Republican agreed or strongly agreed that young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in this area. Although significantly different in the past, there was nothing to report in 2023 between gender, school attended and living arrangements. See Worksheet 15 tab in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Annex 1 – Technical Information

Sampling and Fieldwork

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the Child Benefit Register contains information on all children for whom Child Benefit is claimed. The sample for each of the surveys was provided by HMRC with the sample for the 2017, 2018 and 2019 surveys including all 16 year olds with January, February and March birthdays. Exceptional circumstances in 2020 and 2021, as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, meant survey fieldwork, originally planned for the last quarter of 2020 had to be postponed until May 2021 which meant that the sample for the 2020 survey included all 16-year olds with April, May or June birthdays. This reverted back to January, February and March birthdays in the 2022 and 2023 surveys.

Due to the high level of interest in the YLT survey, and the respective number of questions included, a split survey has been run for each year with the exception of 2019. For 2023, eligible respondents were randomly split and invited to complete survey version 1 or 2 respectively. Of the overall base sample of 5,627 16-year-olds, 2,065 valid responses were received representing an overall response rate of 36.7%. This varied little between version 1 (35.3%) and version 2 (37.2%). Responses in this report were taken from version 2 of the survey.

Over the lifetime of the survey respondents have had the following options for completing the questionnaire:

- They could complete the questionnaire online – inputting their personal identifier to enter that part of the YLT website.
- They could complete the paper questionnaire and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.
- They could take part by phone, having quoted their identification number and check letter.

In 2023, while postal or phone completion was offered as an alternative method of taking part in YLT there were no requests for either.

Annex 1 – Technical Information

Weighting

No weighting was applied to the dataset.

Rounding, Error and Statistical Significance

Percentages may not always sum to 100 due to the effect of rounding or because respondents could give more than one response. Due to a combination of both sampling and non-sampling error, any sample is unlikely to reflect precisely the characteristics of the population. The number of cases upon which analysis is based is important, as it influences the precision (standard error) of the estimates. Because YLT estimates are subject to sampling error, differences between estimates from successive years of the survey or between population subgroups may occur by chance.

For the purposes of this bulletin, where differences have emerged as being statistically significant, these have been reported in the text and/or tables. Statistical significance is reported at the 5% ($p < 0.005$) level of probability (two-tailed tests). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant, one can be 95% confident this has not happened by chance.