



Public Awareness of the Police Complaints System in Northern Ireland

Annual Survey
2023

Published June 2024

Introduction.....	2
The Life and Times Survey.....	2
About this Report.....	3
Key Findings.....	5
Survey Findings	6
Awareness of the Police Ombudsman	6
Independence of the Police Ombudsman.....	7
Impartiality of investigation.....	8
Fairness of treatment.....	9
Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing.....	10
Appendix 1: Tables of Results.....	11
Appendix 2: Technical Notes.....	15

Introduction

This statistical report presents the findings from the Police Ombudsman's module in the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey, 2023. 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, and including 2017, this was measured through a module in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) Omnibus survey. Since 2018 it has been measured by a survey module in the NILT survey which is jointly conducted by Queen's University and 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 Queen's University and Ulster University 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 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 a more theoretical academic and public debate.

The NILT survey is a constituent resource of ARK which is a research, policy and impact hub, based jointly in Queen'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 2023 NILT survey. Interviewing was conducted between 7th September 2023 and 14th January 2024. In 2020, the survey was transitioned to a push-to-web methodology as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and this approach was retained in subsequent years. A large scale Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed and this was supplemented with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) (see Appendix 2: Technical notes, page 15 for more details).

The Police Ombudsman's module has five questions and the results for each question have been presented by gender, age group and religion.

Also included in this report is a comparison for the five questions asked in the 2023 survey with the five previous years (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022). Comparisons have not been made for age group, gender or religion with the previous years, however tables of data are included in this report (Appendix 1, Page 11) and in the accompanying excel spreadsheet (Accompanying excel spreadsheet 2018 to 2023) 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 five previous years, have been published in an excel spreadsheet (Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet 2018 to 2023) 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, details of which are provided 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 15).

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 or see our alternative contact details on the back page of this report.

Key Findings

The results from the survey are used by the Office to monitor public awareness and confidence in it.

Q1. Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?

- 90% of respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman's Office.

Q2. Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is part of the police or Independent of the police?

- 88% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman's Office were aware that it is independent from the police.

Q3. How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland deals with complaints against the police in an impartial way?

- 64% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman's Office were confident that complaints were dealt with in an impartial way.

Q4. If you were to make a complaint against a police officer to the Police Ombudsman, do you think you would be treated fairly?

- 73% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman's Office felt they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint.

Q5. Do you think that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland will help ensure that the police do a good job?

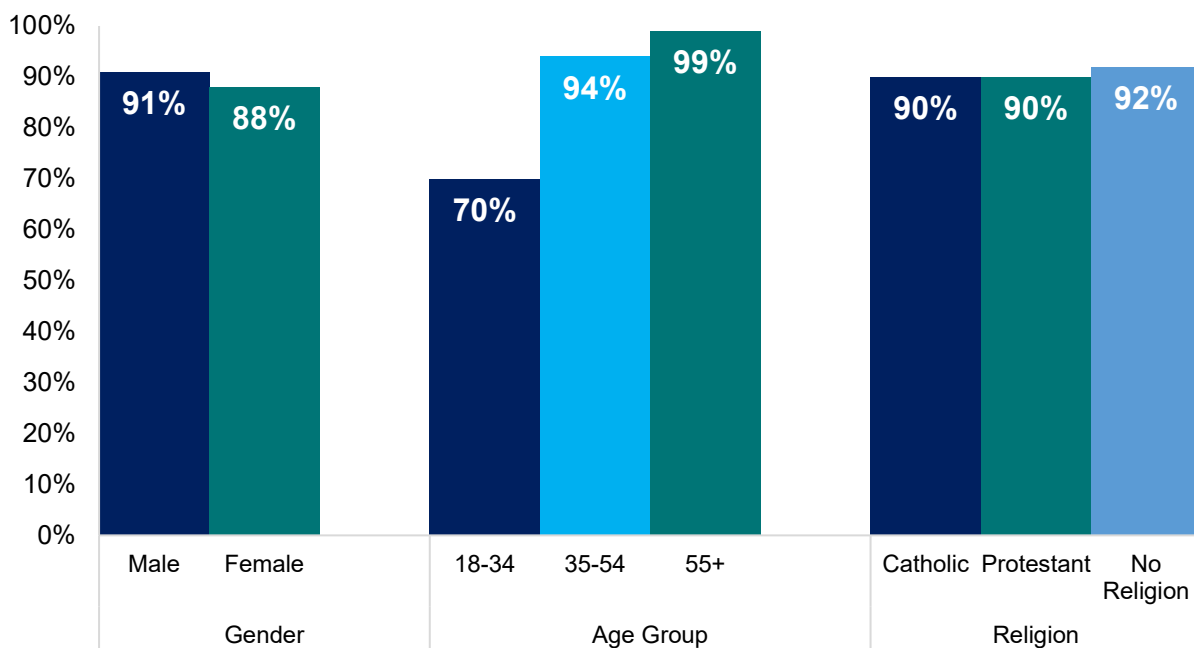
- 72% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman's Office felt the Office would help ensure the police do a good job.

Survey Findings

Awareness of the Police Ombudsman

In 2023, nine out of ten respondents stated that they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Although this is higher than the awareness levels reported in 2018 and 2019 it is lower than the result reported last year and in 2020. The highest level of respondent awareness over the six year period was reported in 2020 when 95% of respondents were aware of the Police Ombudsman.

Figure 1: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by Gender, Age and Religion, 2023



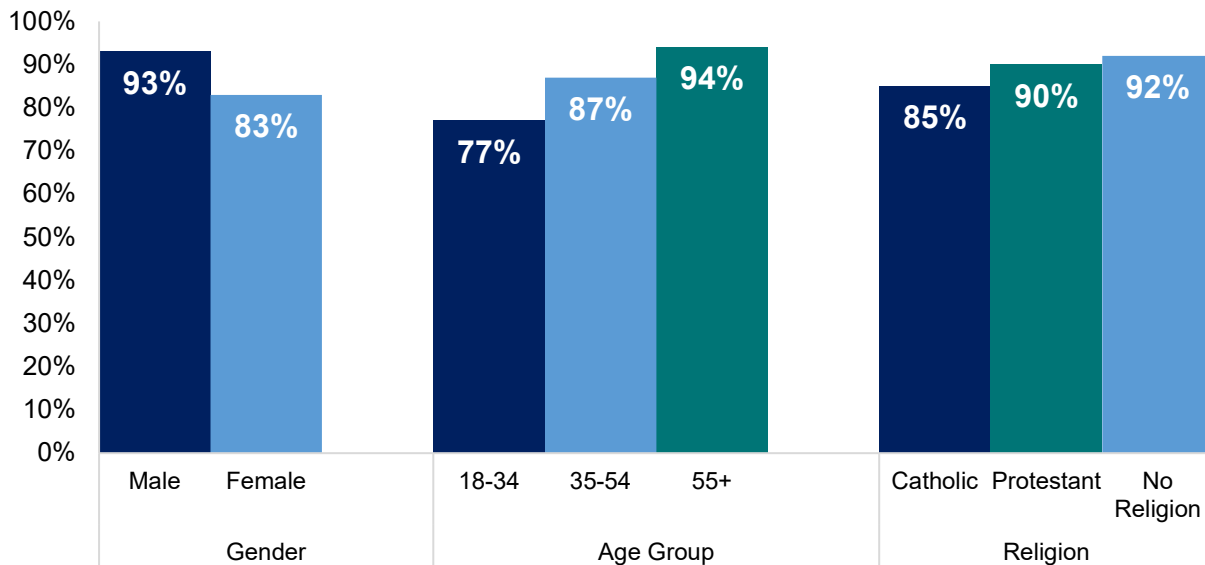
- Male respondents were just as likely to be aware of the Office as female respondents.
- Younger respondents, i.e. those aged 34 and under, were less likely to be aware of the Office than older respondents. Awareness levels were highest amongst those respondents aged 55 and over.
- Awareness of the Office was similar between Catholic respondents, Protestant respondents and those who reported to have No Religion.

NOTE: The following results 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 2023, of those respondents who had heard of the Office, just under nine out of ten were aware of its independence from the police. This is similar to the results reported in previous years but lower than 2020 when 92% of respondents were aware of the Office's independence that year.

Figure 2: Perception of independence of the Office by Gender, Age and Religion, 2023

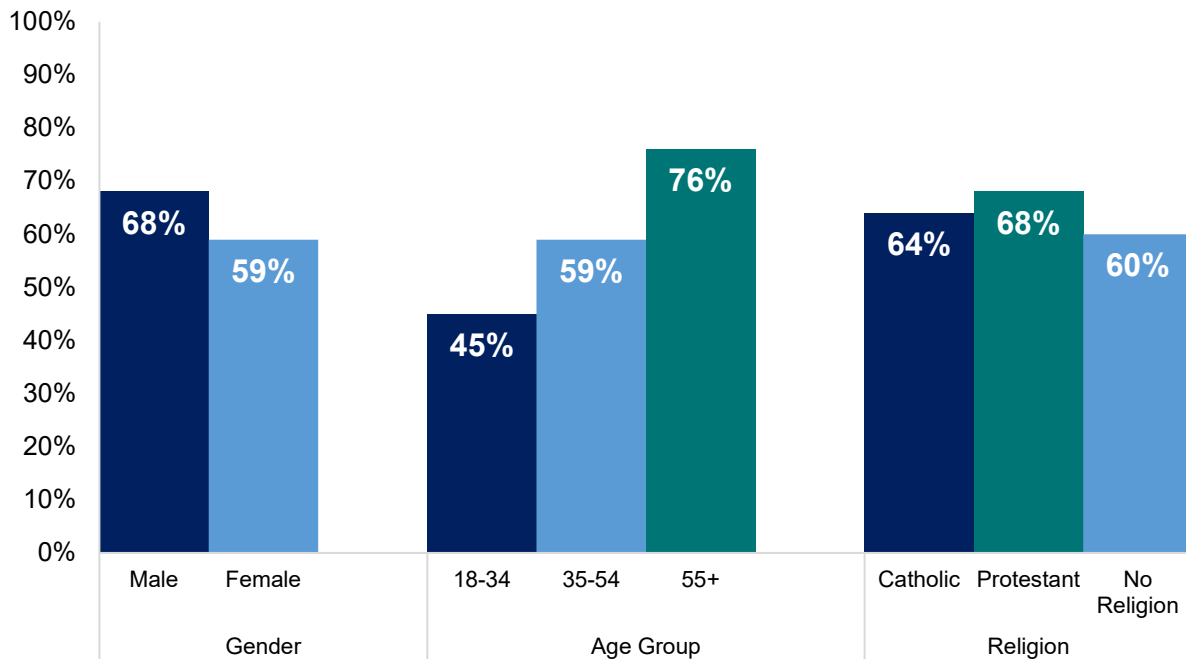


- Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to be aware that the Office is independent from the police.
- Respondents aged 18-34 were least likely to be aware of the Office's independence when compared with respondents in each of the other two age groups. Perception of the Office's independence was highest amongst those respondents aged 55 and over.
- Perception of the Office's independence was lowest amongst Catholic respondents when compared with Protestant respondents and those who had No Religion.

Impartiality of investigation

In 2023, just under two thirds of respondents, who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, were confident that complaints were dealt with impartially. This is lower than the results reported in each of the previous five years. Confidence in the impartiality of the Office, was highest in 2019, when 85% of respondents felt this way.

Figure 3: Level of confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way by Gender, Age and Religion, 2023

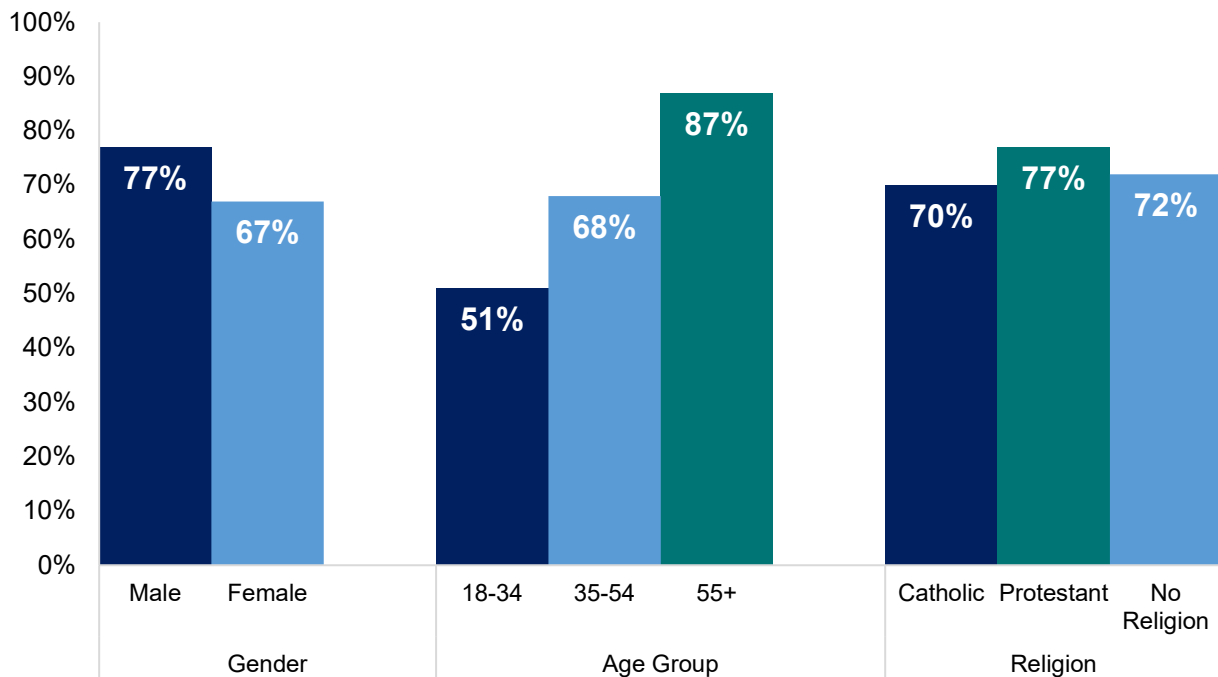


- Male respondents were more confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially than female respondents.
- Younger respondents i.e. those aged less than 35, were less confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially when compared with older respondents. Respondents in the 55+ age group were the most confident to feel that complaints were dealt with impartially.
- Catholic respondents were just as confident as those with No Religion to feel the Police Ombudsman deals with complaint impartially. However, respondents who reported to have No Religion were less confident than Protestant respondents to feel that complaints were dealt with impartially by the Office.

Fairness of treatment

In 2023, almost three quarters of respondents thought they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office. Although this is similar to the result reported in 2021, it has decreased when compared with the other four years (i.e. 2018, 2019, 2020 & 2022).

Figure 4: Perception of fair treatment when making a complaint by Gender, Age and Religion, 2023

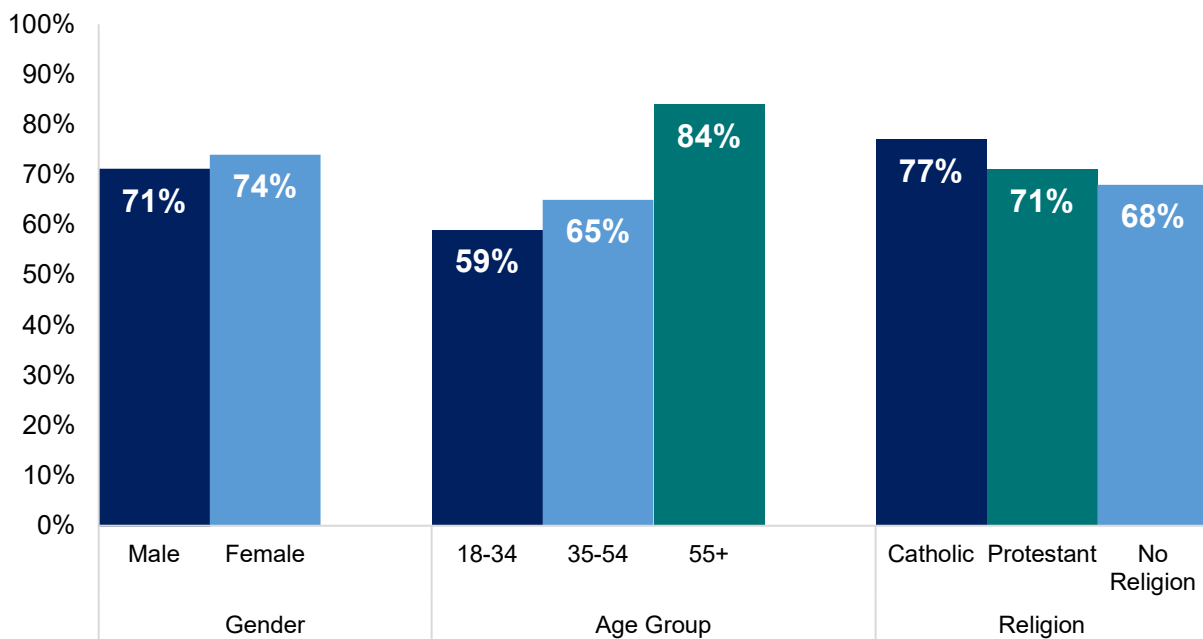


- Male respondents were more likely to think they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office than female respondents.
- Younger respondents were less likely to think that they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office when compared with respondents in the two older age groups. Those aged 55 and over were the most likely to think they'd be treated fairly by the Office.
- Respondents from all religions were equally likely to think they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint to the Office.

Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing

In 2023, less than three quarters of respondents thought that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police in Northern Ireland do a good job. Although this is similar to the result reported in 2021, it has decreased when compared with the other four years of the survey.

Figure 5: Perception that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure that the police do a good job by Gender, Age and Religion, 2023



- Similar proportions of male and female respondents were likely to think that the Police 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 54 and under.
- Catholic and Protestant respondents were equally likely to think the Police Ombudsman would help ensure the police do a good job. Respondents who reported to have No Religion were less likely than Catholic respondents to think this.

Appendix 1: Tables of Results¹

Table 1: Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2023?

	% weighted
Aware	89.6%
Not aware	10.4%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,181

Table 2: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by gender, 2023.

	% weighted
Male	91.2%
Female	88.0%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,178

Table 3: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by age group, 2023.

	% weighted
18-34	70.1%
35-54	93.7%
55+	99.2%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,179

Table 4: Awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland by religion, 2023.

	% weighted
Catholic	90.0%
Protestant	89.9%
No Religion	92.1%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,142

Table 5: Do you think the Police Ombudsman is part of the police or independent, 2023?

	% weighted
Independent of the police	88.2%
Part of the police	11.8%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,002

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 6: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by gender, 2023.

	% weighted
Male	93.0%
Female	82.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,001

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

¹ More detailed tables of results, along with results from 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022 are available in an excel spreadsheet (accompanying excel spreadsheet 2018 to 2023) on the Police Ombudsman's website.

Table 7: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by age group, 2023.

	% weighted
18-34	77.3%
35-54	87.0%
55+	94.1%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	1,001

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 8: Independence of the Police Ombudsman by religion, 2023.

	% weighted
Catholic	84.9%
Protestant	89.9%
No Religion	91.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	981

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 9: How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially, 2023?

	% weighted
Very confident	11.6%
Confident	52.2%
Total confident	63.8%
Not very confident	24.5%
Not at all confident	11.7%
Total not confident	36.2%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	924

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 10: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by gender, 2023.

	% weighted
Male	67.8%
Female	58.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	923

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 11: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by age group, 2023.

	% weighted
18-34	44.6%
35-54	59.2%
55+	75.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	923

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 12: Confidence the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially by religion, 2023.

	% weighted
Catholic	63.7%
Protestant	68.4%
No religion	59.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	903

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, 2023?

	% weighted
Yes	72.9%
No	27.1%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	659

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 14: Perception of fair treatment by gender, 2023.

	% weighted
Male	76.8%
Female	67.4%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	659

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 15: Perception of fair treatment by age group, 2023.

	% weighted
18-34	50.9%
35-54	68.4%
55+	87.5%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	658

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 16: Perception of fair treatment by religion, 2023.

	% weighted
Catholic	70.3%
Protestant	77.0%
No religion	71.9%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	647

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, 2023?

	% weighted
Yes	71.8%
No	29.2%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	712

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 18: Police Ombudsman will help police do a good job by gender, 2023.

	% weighted
Male	70.6%
Female	73.7%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	712

Asked to those who were aware of the Police Ombudsman

Table 19: Police Ombudsman will help police do a good job by age group, 2023.

	% weighted
18-34	59.1%
35-54	64.7%
55+	83.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	711

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, 2023.

	% weighted
Catholic	77.0%
Protestant	70.5%
No Religion	67.6%
Total survey respondents (unweighted)	697

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 2023 survey.

The survey involved 1,200 interviews with adults aged 18 years or over. A large scale Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed and this was supplemented with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). This ensured the survey was as inclusive as possible and presented participants with a range of ways in which they could complete the survey.

All interviews whether online or via the telephone were conducted by Ipsos UK interviewers. The fieldwork was split into two phases; a pilot phase followed by the mainstage fieldwork.

The sample for the 2023 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 listing of addresses which is maintained by Royal Mail. Business addresses were removed from the database prior to the sample selection.

All of the 8,000 addresses drawn from the PAF were included in the scope of research. 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 (of all persons living at the address who were aged 18 or over). A total of 1,200 persons co-operated fully representing a response rate of 15%.

Table 21 (page 16) 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 $\pm 2.8\%$

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

		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence limits
Age	18 to 24	4.7	1.2	3.5 to 5.9
	25 to 34	14.1	2.0	12.1 to 16.1
	35 to 44	16.0	2.0	14.0 to 18.0
	45 to 54	18.6	2.2	16.4 to 20.8
	55 to 64	20.1	2.3	17.8 to 22.4
	65 & over	26.5	2.5	24.0 to 29.0
Sex	Male	43.4	2.8	40.6 to 46.2
	Female	56.5	2.8	53.8 to 59.4
Religion	Catholic	33.5	2.7	30.8 to 36.2
	Protestant	38.2	2.7	35.5 to 40.9
	None	25.2	2.5	22.7 to 27.7
	Other	2.1	0.8	1.3 to 2.9
	Refused/Don't Know	1.0	0.6	0.4 to 1.6

The data has been weighted in order to allow for the disproportionate household size. The 'no 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 14 May 2024. 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>.

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

**Information and Communications Unit
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG**

**Telephone: 028 9082 8634
Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880
Email: info@policeombudsman.org**

These publications and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:

Website: www.policeombudsman.org