

Perceptions of Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland: Summary Findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2017 to 2025

September 2026



Key figures for 2025



Department of
Justice
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Fear and intimidation

25%
agree that
paramilitary
groups create
fear and
intimidation



+9.1%

Law and justice



-14.3%

49% agree people in their area
feel protected by the law and
justice system

Young people

20% felt young people
are being influenced too
much by paramilitary
groups



+2.7%

Area safety

94% feel safe living in
their area



-2.5%

Controlling influence

14% felt
paramilitary
groups have a
controlling
influence in their
area



+0.1%



Significant positive change from baseline



No significant change from baseline



Significant negative change from baseline

Summary Statistics

About the data

The Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT) 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 the Northern Ireland population. Following on from results of the 2017 survey, further questions have been commissioned annually to provide ongoing insight into peoples' perceptions of paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland.

Figure 1:Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2025

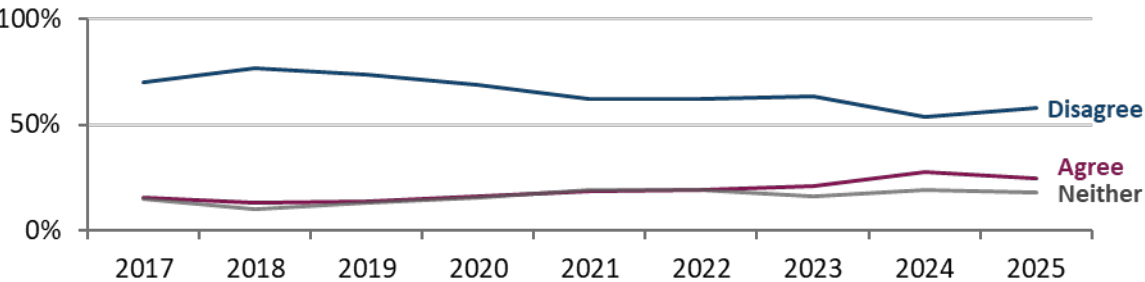


Figure 2: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2025

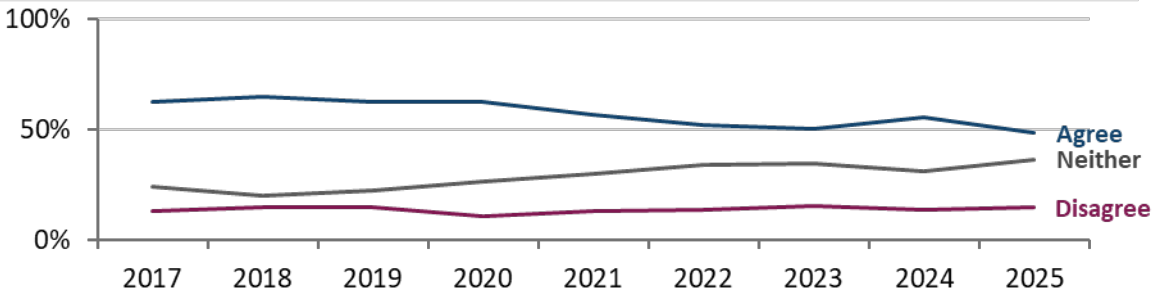


Figure 3: How safe do you feel living in this area? (%), 2017 to 2025

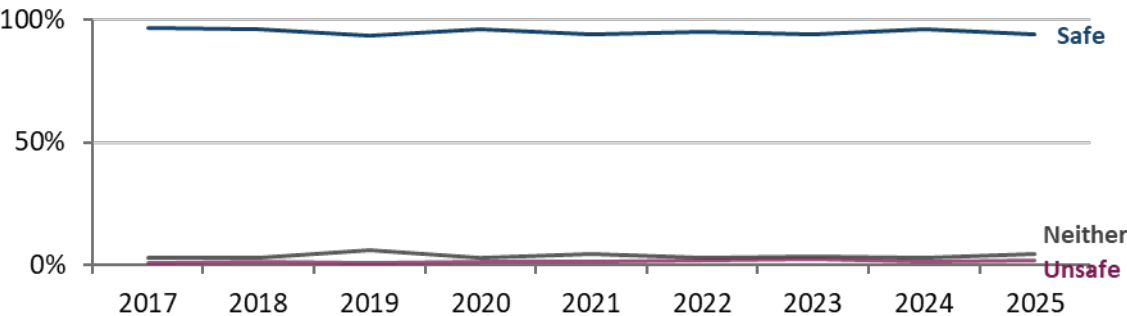


Figure 4: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence (%), 2017 to 2025

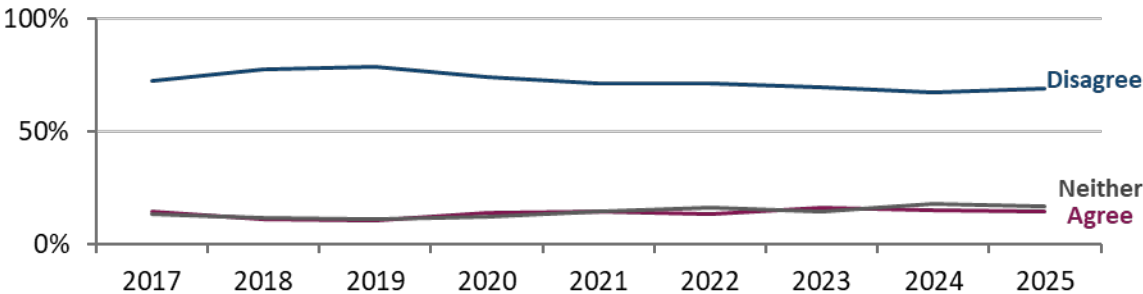
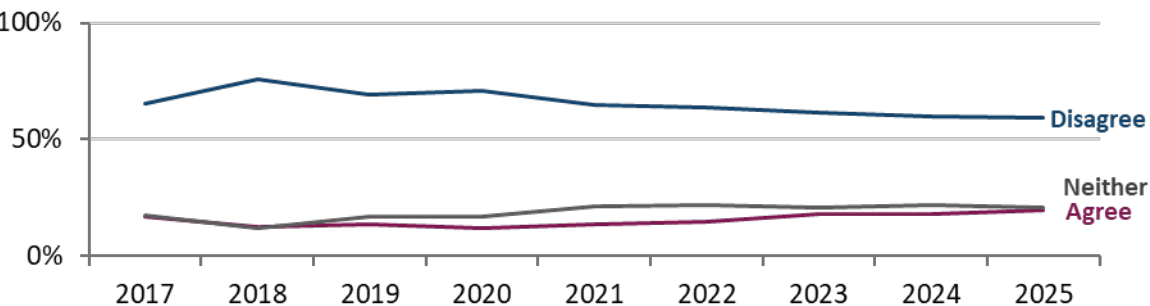


Figure 5: Young people are influenced too much by paramilitaries (%), 2017 to 2025



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The Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT) Survey

The NILT 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 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 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 on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime (EPPOC) 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 shift away from the 38 individual recommendations that existed under the original Executive Action Plan to a public health focused approach to violence reduction with more cohesion and collaboration across a wide range of projects supported by the Programme. Projects supported by the Programme must contribute towards a number of intermediary benefits (programme-level, measurable changes). The programme also works towards five End Benefits. These are population level changes that are measured over the longer term.

To measure the impact of the Programme, the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey was commissioned to provide baseline data on public perceptions of and attitudes towards paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland. These survey questions have been repeated annually since 2017 to monitor changes in attitudes and perceptions as work on the delivery of the Programme progresses. This publication presents key findings from the NILT survey and compares year-on-year responses. The current version highlights trends and findings over a nine-year period, from 2017 to 2025.

Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation

Figure 6: Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2025

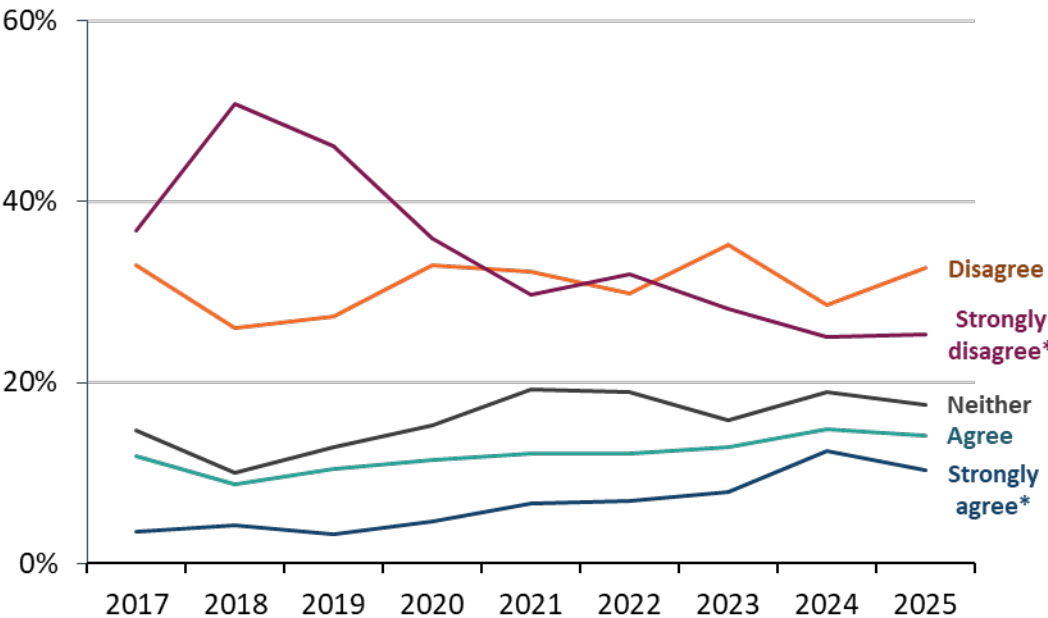
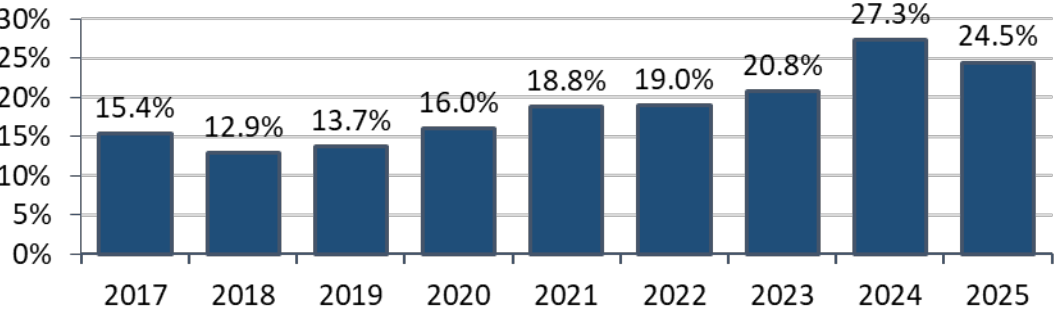


Figure 7: Proportion who strongly agree or agree paramilitaries create fear and intimidation in their area (%), 2017 to 2025



Data Trends

Over the time series, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who strongly agree that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area. Alongside this, there has been a significant decrease in respondents who strongly disagree with this statement. There has been no significant changes in the percentages of those who agree, neither agree nor disagree, and disagree.

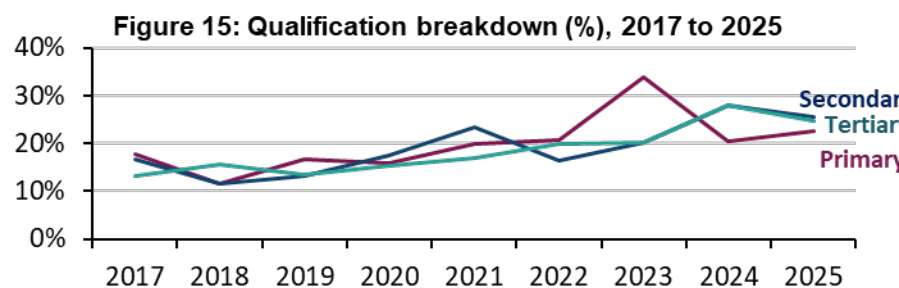
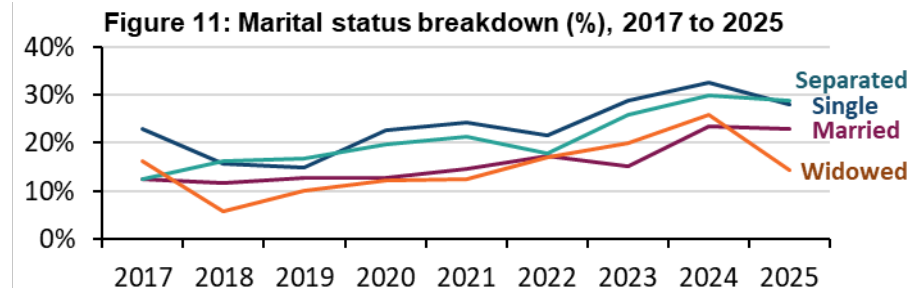
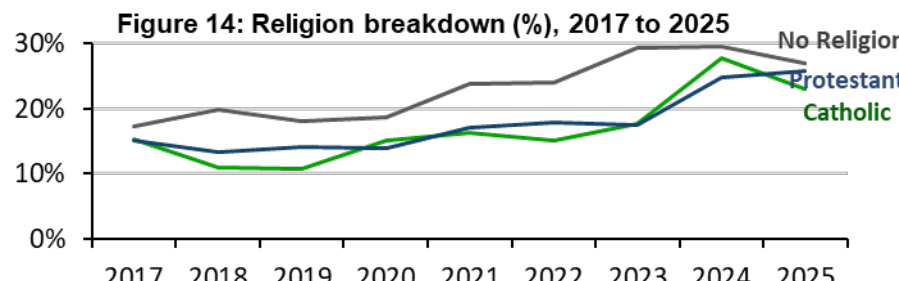
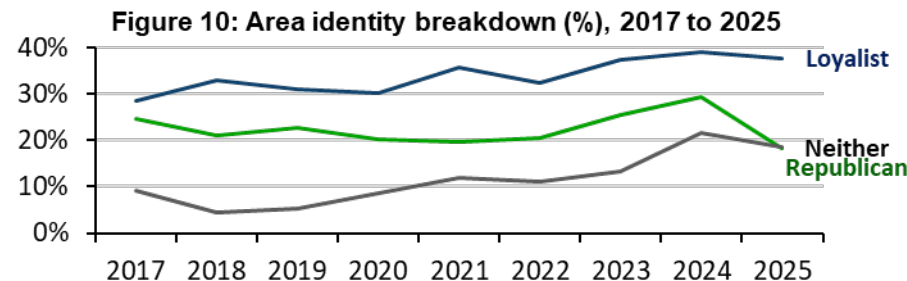
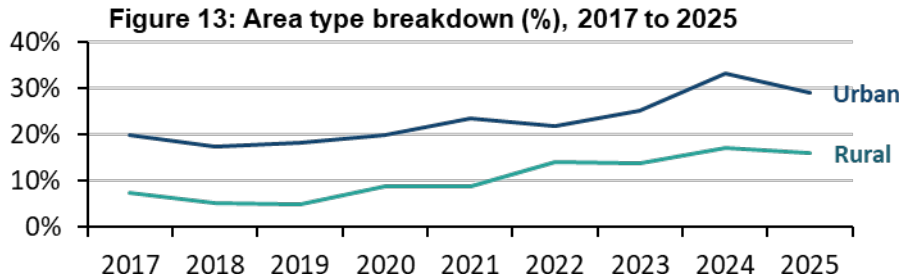
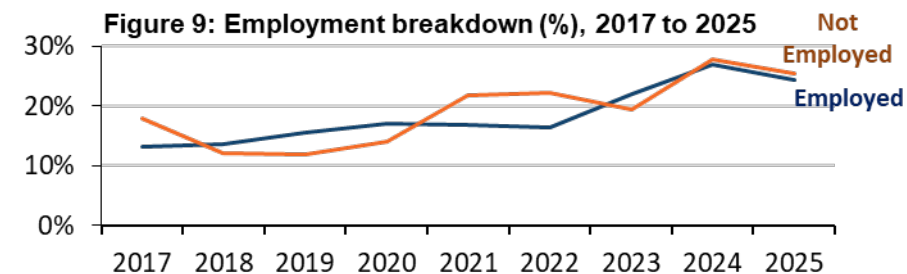
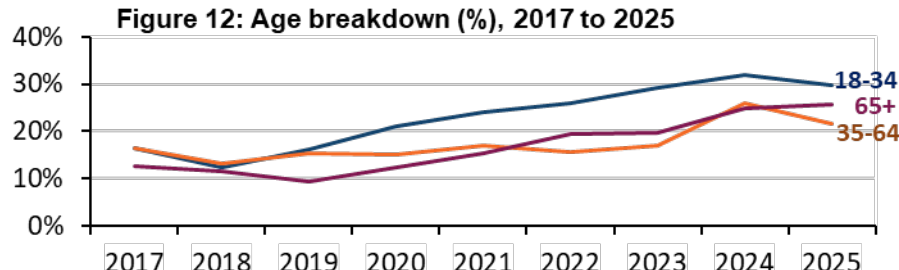
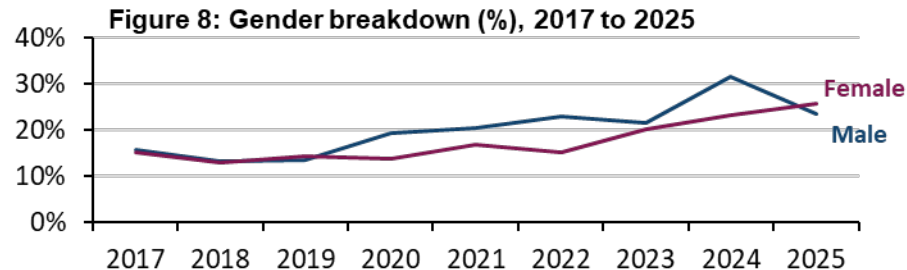
Table 1: Paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation (%), 2017 to 2025

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	3.5%	11.9%	14.7%	33.0%	36.8%
2018	4.2%	8.7%	10.1%	26.1%	50.8%
2019	3.2%	10.5%	12.8%	27.3%	46.2%
2020	4.6%	11.4%	15.3%	32.9%	35.9%
2021	6.6%	12.2%	19.3%	32.2%	29.7%
2022	6.9%	12.1%	19.0%	29.9%	32.0%
2023	7.9%	12.9%	15.8%	35.2%	28.2%
2024	12.5%	14.8%	19.0%	28.6%	25.0%
2025	10.3%	14.2%	17.6%	32.7%	25.3%
Change from baseline	+6.8%	+2.3%	+2.9%	-0.3%	-11.5%

*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 respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Y axes are set at either 0-30% or 0-40%. Within marital status, 'Separated' includes separated and divorced and 'Married' includes marriages and civil partnerships.



Data Trends

Across all years, a higher proportion of respondents who lived in urban areas agreed or strongly agreed paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area. This pattern was also evident among those residing in mainly Loyalist areas and those with no religious background. Over the last six years, a higher proportion of those aged 18-34 were more likely to agree that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area, and, for the first time since 2019, females were shown to be more likely than males to agree with this statement.

See Worksheet 12 tab in the accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

People feel protected by the law and justice system

Figure 16: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2025

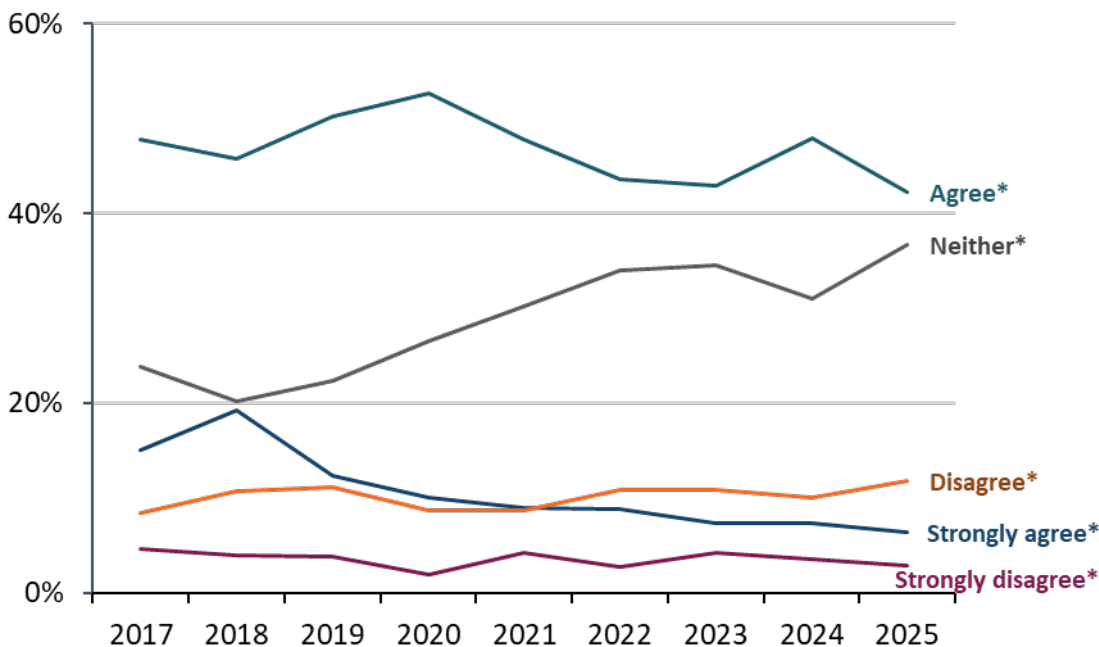
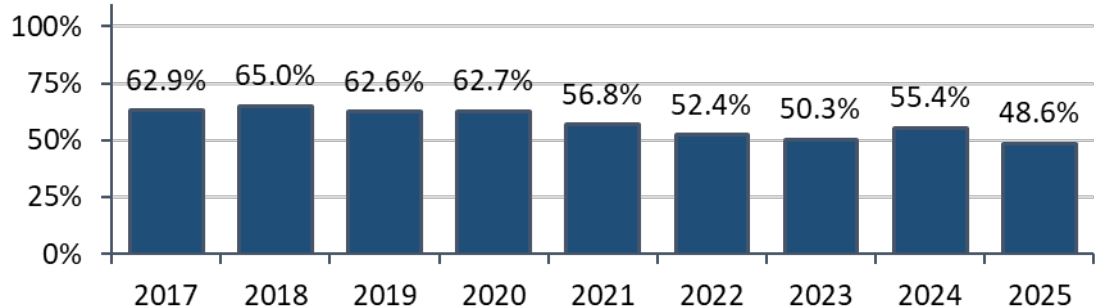


Figure 17: Proportion who strongly agree or agree people feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2025



Data Trends

There have been significant decreases, reaching the lowest levels in the past nine years, in the proportion of respondents who strongly agree or agree that people in their area feel protected by the law and justice system. Contrastingly, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who neither agree nor disagree with this statement as well as the proportion who disagree. However, there has also been a significant decrease in those who strongly disagree.

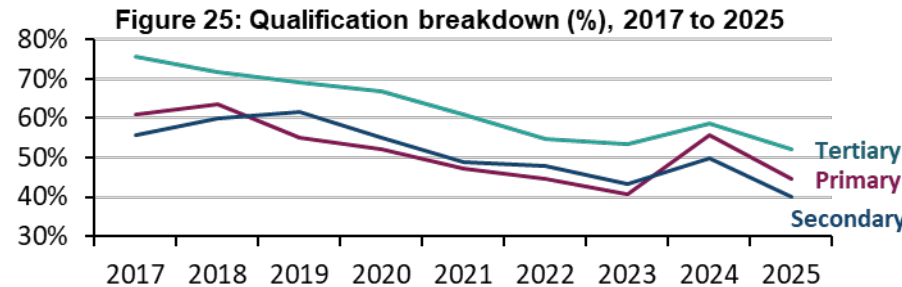
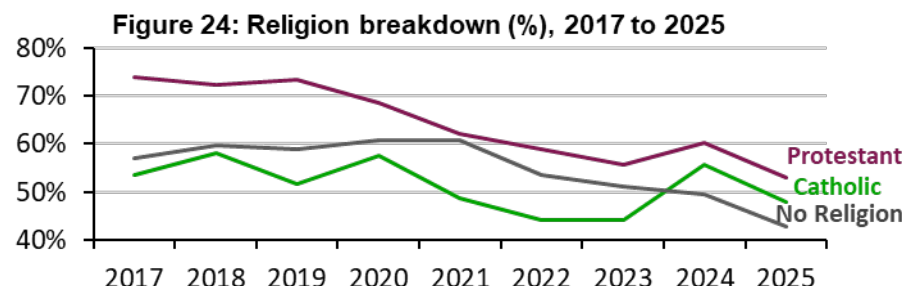
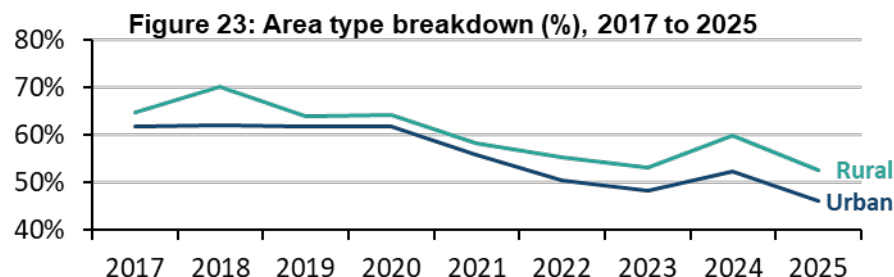
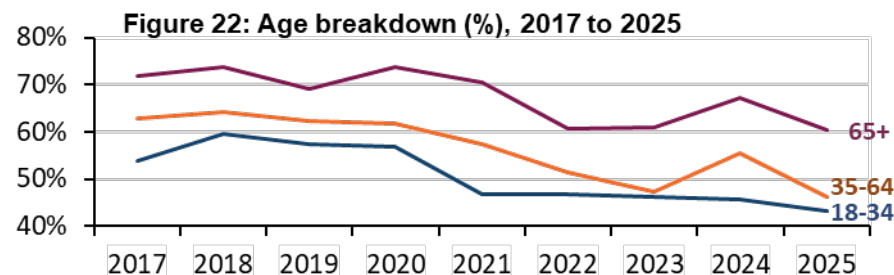
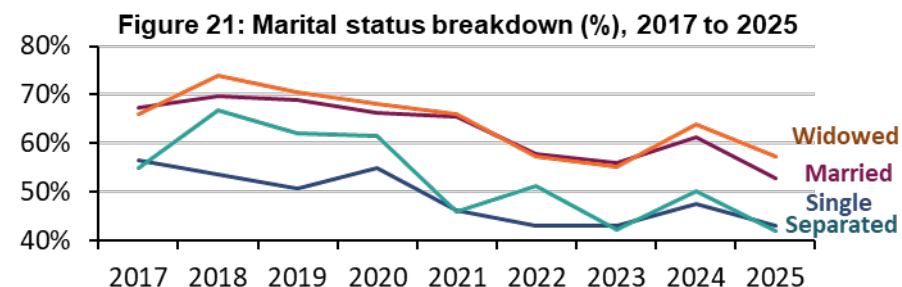
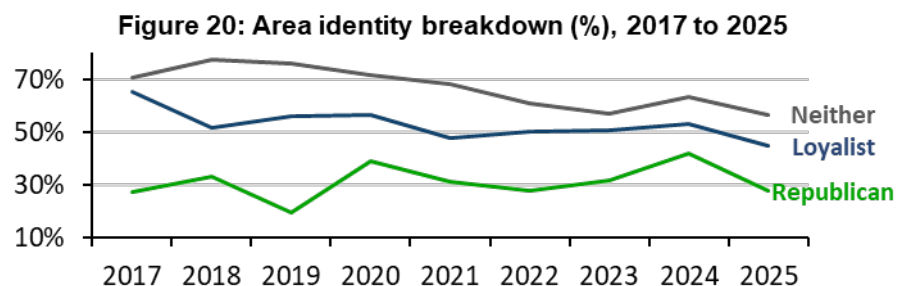
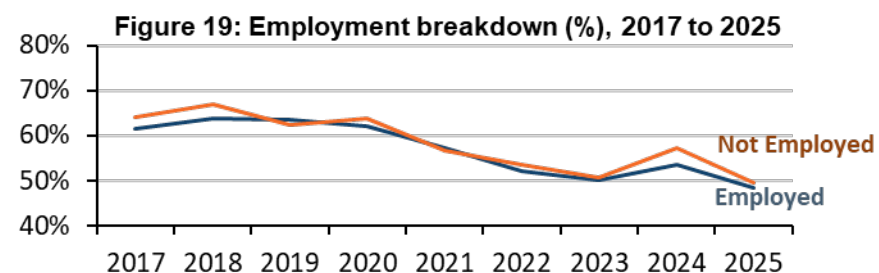
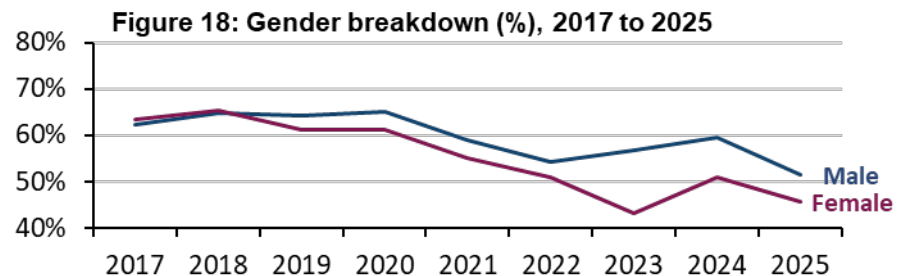
Table 2: People feel protected by the law and justice system (%), 2017 to 2025

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	15.1%	47.8%	23.9%	8.5%	4.6%
2018	19.2%	45.8%	20.2%	10.8%	4.0%
2019	12.3%	50.3%	22.4%	11.1%	3.8%
2020	10.0%	52.7%	26.6%	8.7%	2.0%
2021	9.0%	47.8%	30.2%	8.7%	4.3%
2022	8.8%	43.6%	34.0%	10.9%	2.7%
2023	7.4%	42.9%	34.6%	10.9%	4.3%
2024	7.4%	48.0%	31.0%	10.1%	3.5%
2025	6.4%	42.2%	36.7%	11.8%	2.9%
Change from baseline	-8.7%	-5.6%	+12.8%	+3.3%	-1.7%

*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 respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Y axes are set at 40-80%, with the exception of Level of Qualification at 30-80% and Area Identity at 10-70%. Within marital status, 'Separated' includes separated and divorced and 'Married' includes marriages and civil partnerships.



Data Trends

Across all years, a lower proportion of respondents aged 18-34, or those living in urban or mainly Republican areas felt that they were protected by the law and justice system. In contrast, a higher proportion of respondents aged 65 and over, those educated to tertiary level, Protestants, and those living in rural or neither Loyalist nor Republican areas agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Over the last six years, fewer females have felt protected by the law and justice system in comparison with males.

See Worksheet 7 in accompanying spreadsheet for a full breakdown of figures.

Figure 26: People feel safe living in their area (%), 2017 to 2025

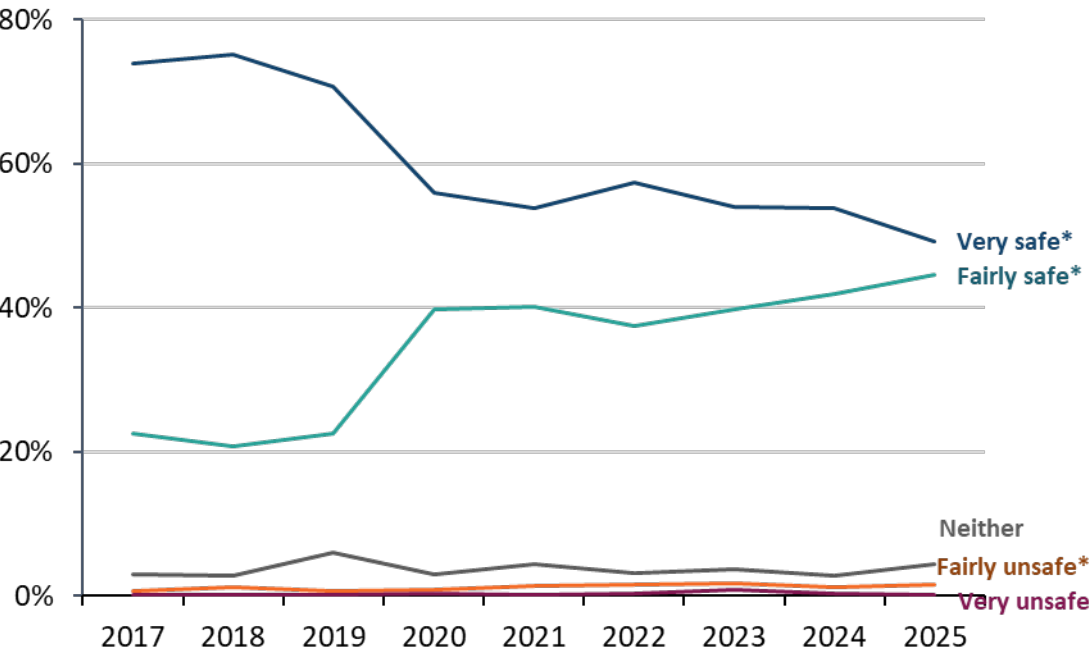
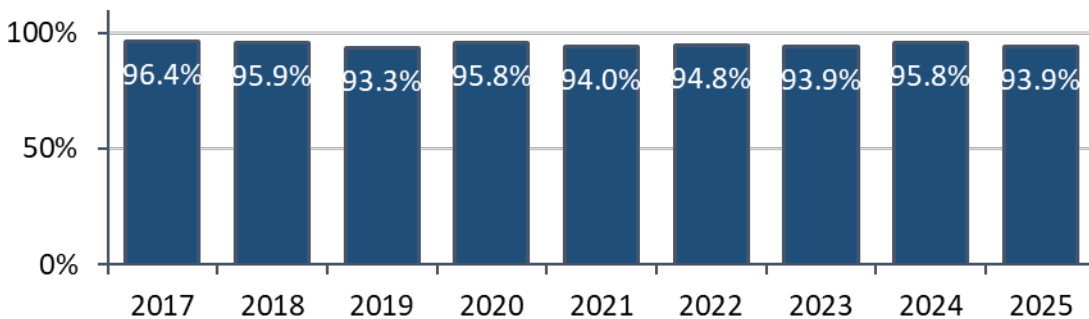


Figure 27: Proportion who feel very safe or fairly safe living in their area (%), 2017 to 2025



Data Trends

There has been a significant decrease in the number of respondents who feel very safe living in their area, whilst an increasing proportion have instead reported feeling fairly safe. Nonetheless, across all years, the overall proportion of those feeling safe has remained consistently high (approximately 95%). 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 2025

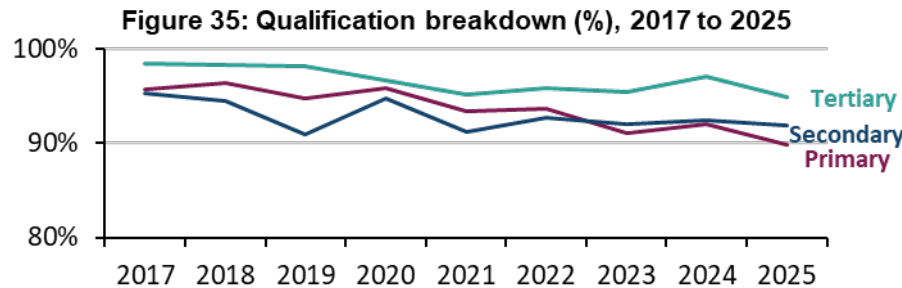
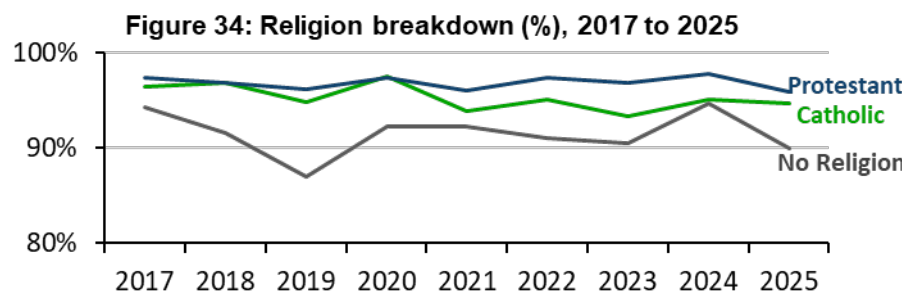
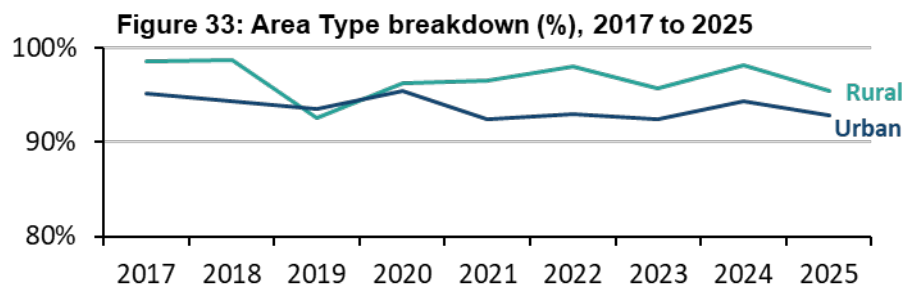
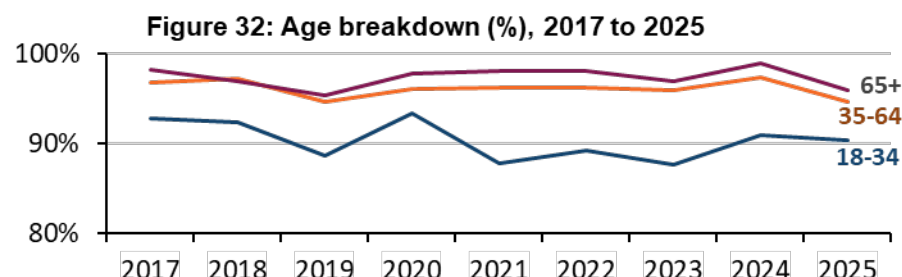
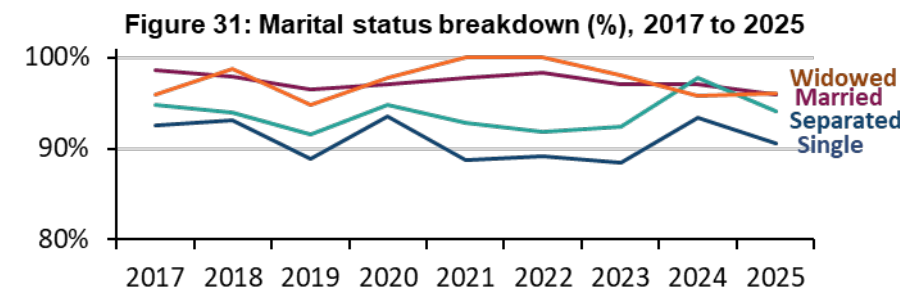
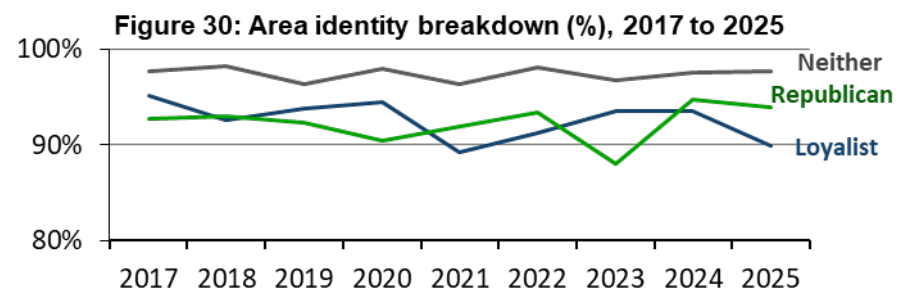
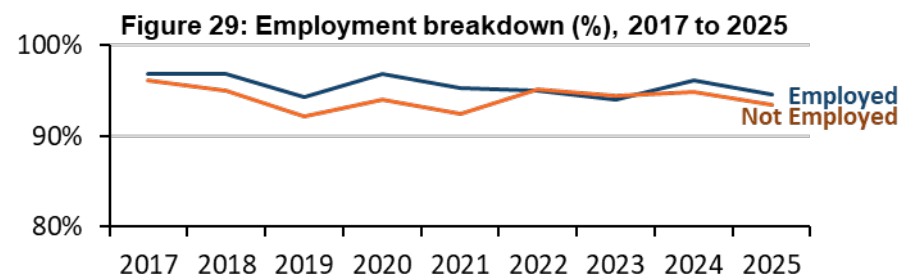
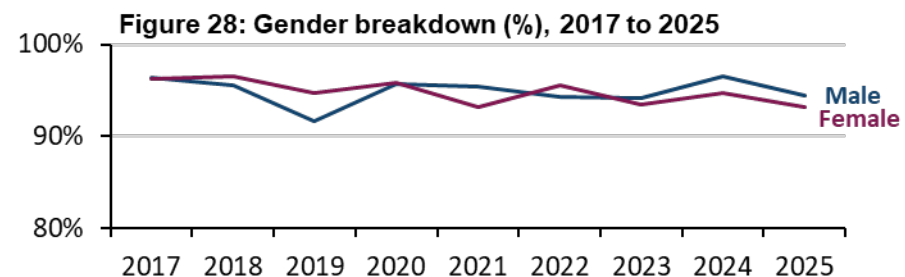
Year	Very safe	Fairly safe	Neither safe nor unsafe	Fairly unsafe	Very unsafe
2017	73.9%	22.5%	2.9%	0.6%	0.2%
2018	75.1%	20.8%	2.8%	1.1%	0.1%
2019	70.8%	22.5%	5.9%	0.6%	0.1%
2020	56.0%	39.8%	2.9%	0.9%	0.3%
2021	53.9%	40.1%	4.4%	1.4%	0.1%
2022	57.4%	37.4%	3.2%	1.6%	0.3%
2023	54.1%	39.8%	3.6%	1.7%	0.8%
2024	53.9%	41.9%	2.8%	1.1%	0.3%
2025	49.3%	44.6%	4.3%	1.6%	0.2%
Change from baseline	-24.6%	+22.1%	+1.4%	+1.0%	0.0%

*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 respondents who felt 'very safe' or 'fairly safe'. Y axes are set at 80% - 100%.

Within Marital Status, 'Separated' includes separated and divorced and 'Married' includes marriages and civil partnerships.



Data Trends

Across all years, a lower proportion of respondents aged 18-34, those who were single and those with no religious background felt safe living in their area. A higher proportion of people who lived in neither a Loyalist or Republican community felt that their area was safe or fairly safe, as did a higher proportion of those who were separated/divorced, married/in a civil partnership, or widowed compared to those who were single. Those who received a tertiary education were also more likely to feel safer than those educated to primary or secondary level.

See Worksheet 3 in accompanying spreadsheet for full breakdown.

Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence

Figure 36: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence (%), 2017 to 2025

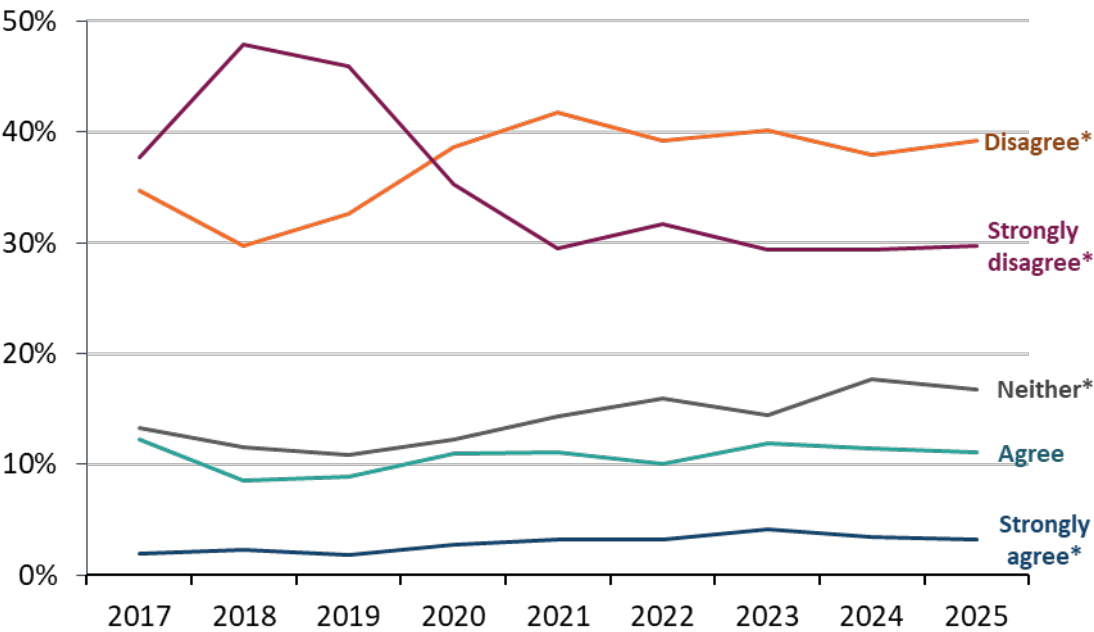
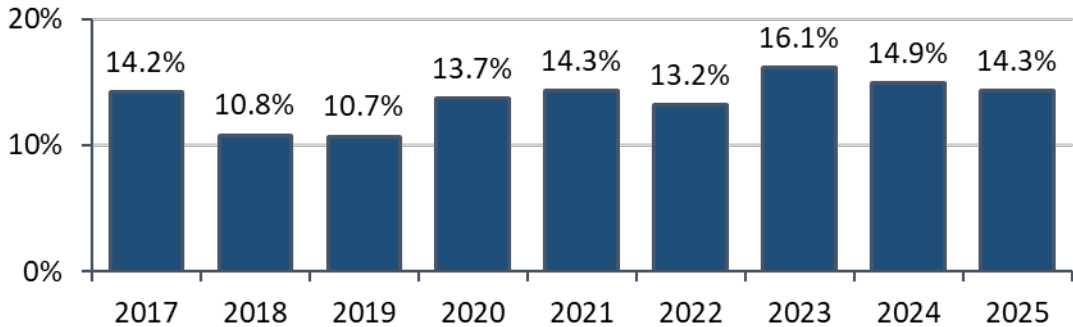


Figure 37: Proportion who strongly agree or agree paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in their area (%), 2017 to 2025



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. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree, neither agree nor disagree, and disagree that paramilitary groups have a controlling influence has also significantly increased, while the proportions who agree have shown no significant change.

Table 4: Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence (%), 2017 to 2025

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	1.9%	12.3%	13.3%	34.7%	37.7%
2018	2.3%	8.5%	11.6%	29.7%	47.9%
2019	1.8%	8.9%	10.8%	32.6%	45.9%
2020	2.7%	11.0%	12.3%	38.7%	35.3%
2021	3.2%	11.1%	14.3%	41.8%	29.5%
2022	3.2%	10.0%	15.9%	39.2%	31.7%
2023	4.2%	11.9%	14.4%	40.1%	29.4%
2024	3.5%	11.4%	17.7%	38.0%	29.4%
2025	3.2%	11.1%	16.8%	39.2%	29.7%
Change from baseline	+1.3%	-1.2%	+3.5%	+4.5%	-8.0%

*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 respondents who 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. All Y axes are set at 0-30%, with the exception of Area Identity at 0-40% and Gender and Employment at 0-20%. Within Marital Status, 'Separated' includes separated and divorced and 'Married' includes marriages and civil partnerships.

Figure 38: Gender breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

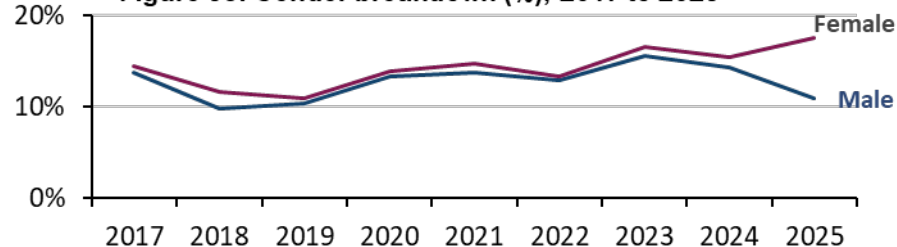


Figure 39: Employment breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

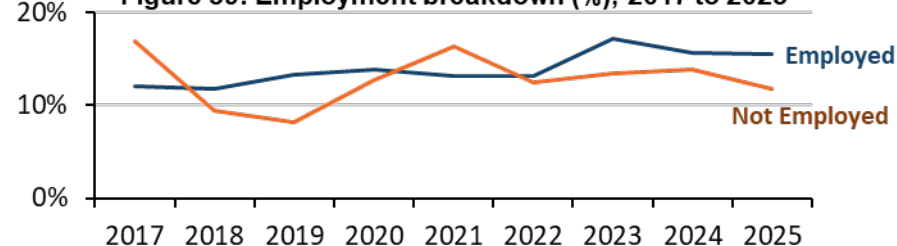


Figure 40: Area identity breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

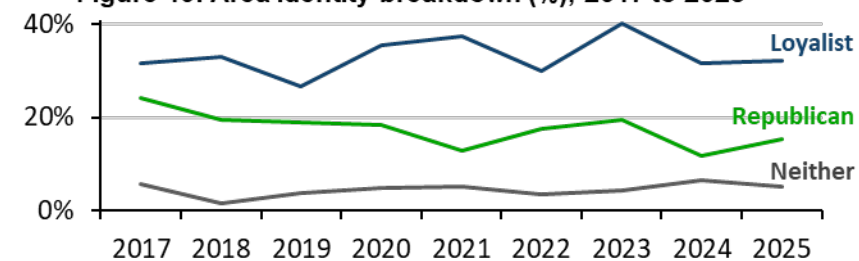


Figure 41: Marital status breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

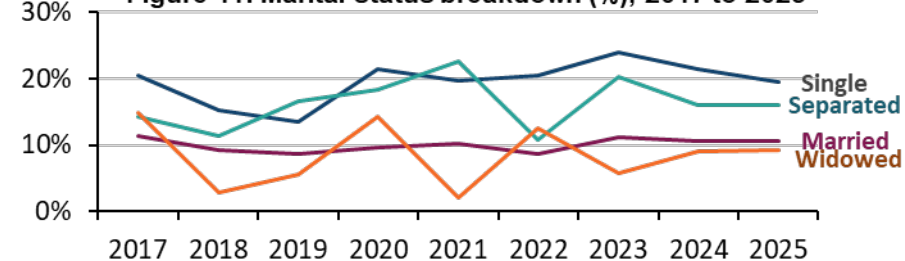


Figure 42: Age breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

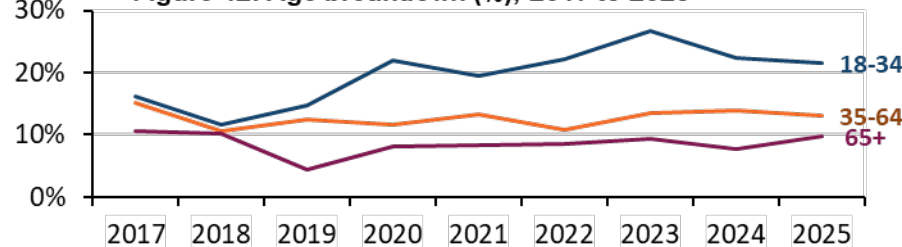


Figure 43: Area type breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

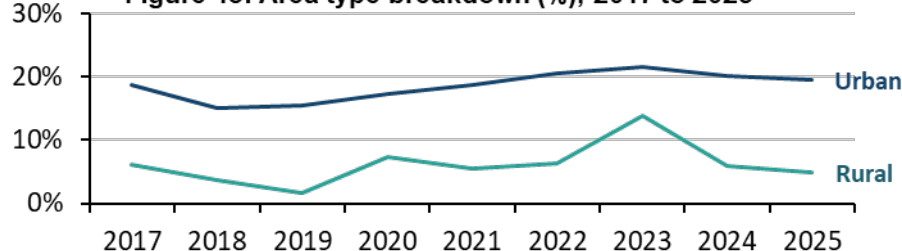


Figure 44: Religion breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025

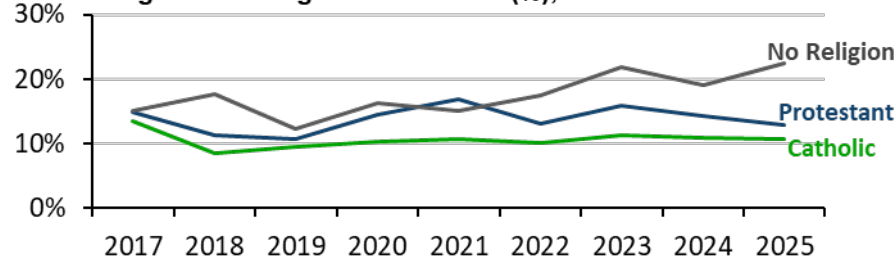
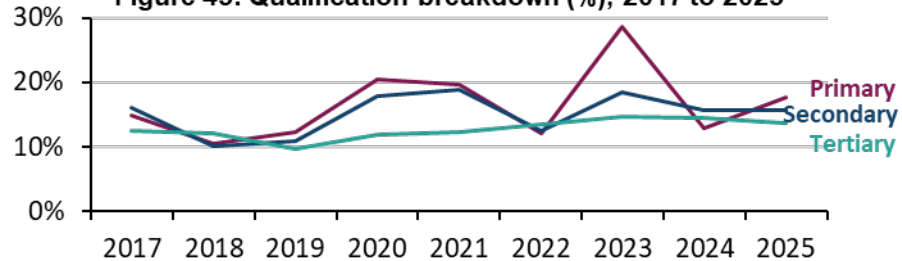


Figure 45: Qualification breakdown (%), 2017 to 2025



Data Trends

Across all years, a higher proportion of respondents in urban areas or mainly Loyalist communities felt paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in their area. Those aged 18 to 34 were also more likely to agree, as were single respondents when compared with those who were married or widowed. For the most recent cohort, there was a drop in male respondents who agreed with this statement. Those who identify as Catholic have consistently been less likely than Protestants or those with no religion to agree that paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in their areas

See Worksheet 10 in accompanying spreadsheet for full breakdown.

Paramilitary Influence on Young People

Figure 46: Young people are being influenced by paramilitary groups (%), 2017 to 2025

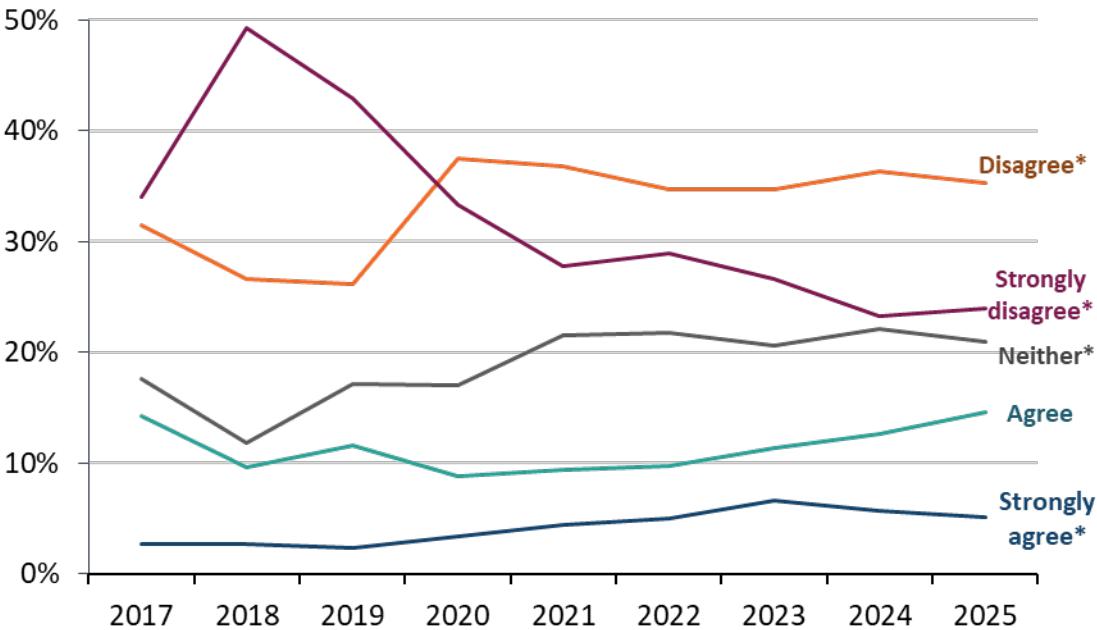
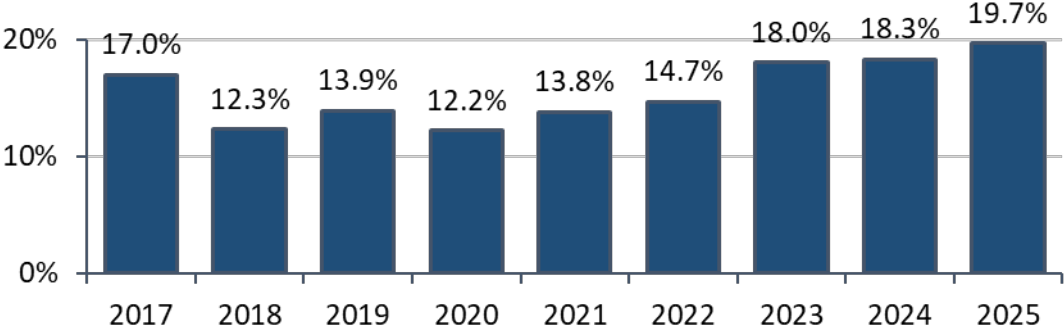


Figure 47: Proportion who strongly agree or agree young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area (%), 2017 to 2025



Data Trends

There has been a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who strongly agree that young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups, as well as significant increases in the number who neither agree nor disagree or disagree. There has also been a significant decrease in the proportion who strongly disagree with this. There was no significant change from the baseline in the proportion who agree.

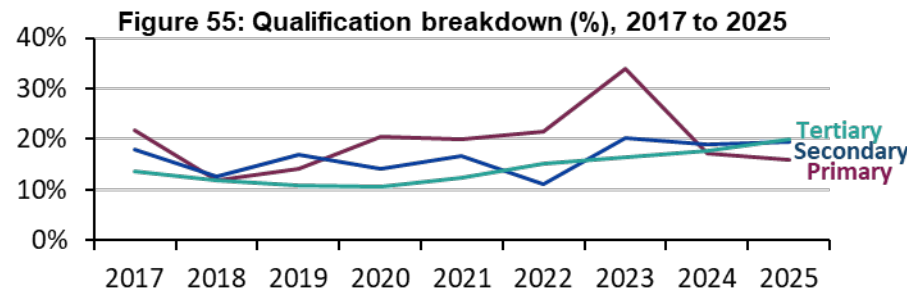
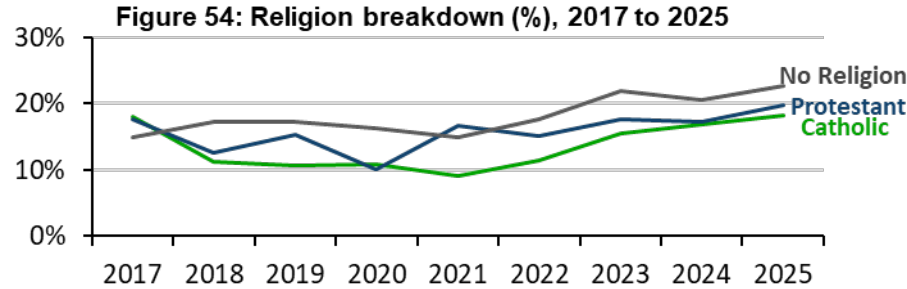
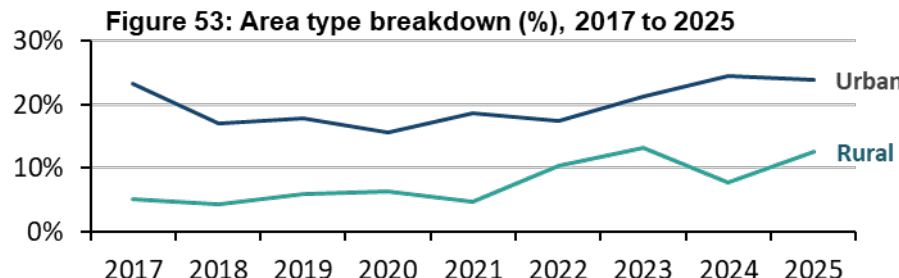
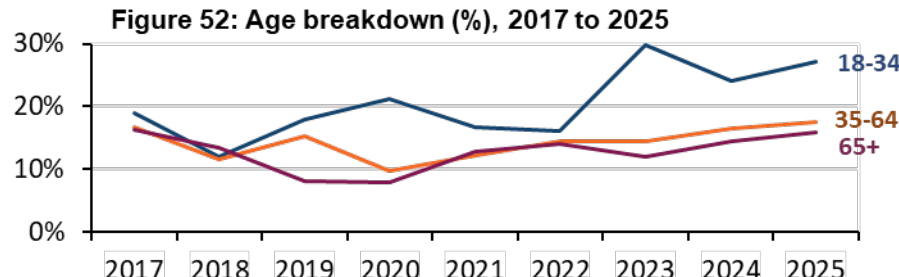
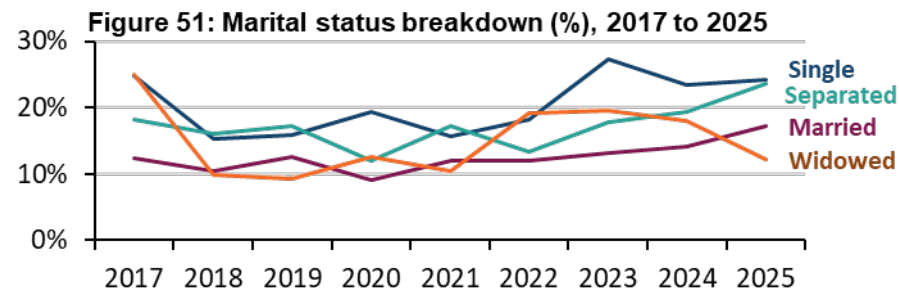
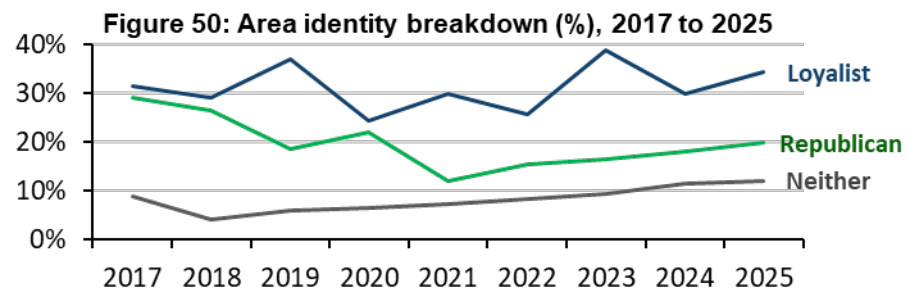
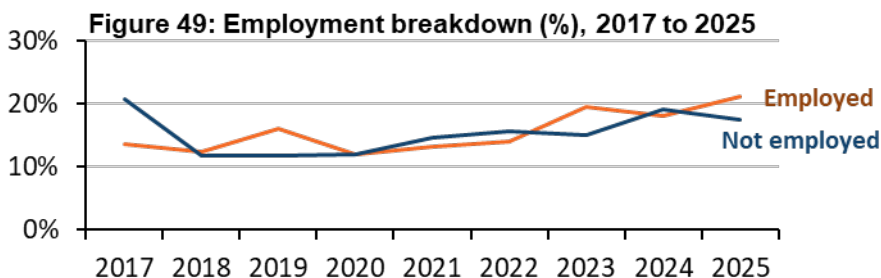
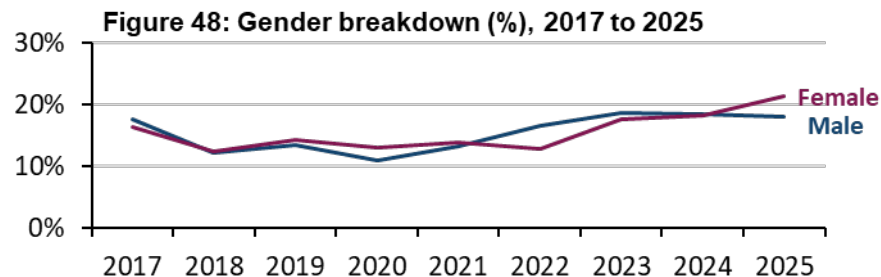
Table 5: Young people are being influenced by paramilitary groups (%), 2017 to 2025

Year	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2017	2.7%	14.3%	17.6%	31.5%	34.0%
2018	2.7%	9.6%	11.8%	26.6%	49.3%
2019	2.3%	11.6%	17.1%	26.2%	42.9%
2020	3.4%	8.8%	17.0%	37.5%	33.3%
2021	4.4%	9.4%	21.5%	36.8%	27.8%
2022	5.0%	9.7%	21.8%	34.7%	28.9%
2023	6.6%	11.4%	20.6%	34.7%	26.6%
2024	5.7%	12.6%	22.1%	36.4%	23.3%
2025	5.1%	14.6%	21.0%	35.3%	24.0%
Change from baseline	+2.4%	+0.3%	+3.4%	+3.8%	-10.0%

*Significant changes from baseline are highlighted within the table and starred within the chart 10

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

This data shows the percentage of respondents who 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Y axes are set at 0-30% with the exception of Area Identity and Level of Qualification which are set at 0-40%. Within Marital Status, 'Separated' includes separated and divorced and 'Married' includes marriages and civil partnerships.



Data Trends

Across all years, respondents from urban areas and those living in mainly Loyalist communities were more likely to feel that young people were being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area. Those who were married or in a civil partnership were less likely than single people to agree with this statement. In the most recent cohort, males, those educated to a primary level, and those who were unemployed were less likely to agree that young people were being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in their area.

See Worksheet 15 in accompanying spreadsheet for full breakdown.

Annex 1 – Technical Information



Sampling and Fieldwork

The sample of those surveyed in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey consists of a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF) database. This is the most up-to-date and complete listing of addresses within the UK and is maintained by Royal Mail. Private business addresses are removed from the database prior to sample selection. From 2020 onwards, to allow for a random sample of Northern Ireland households, the sample has been stratified proportionately by District Council area. In 2020, the survey was transitioned to a push-to-web methodology, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this approach has been retained since. A large-scale Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed. However, the survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible, presenting participants with a range of ways to complete the survey. Thus, participants can also complete the survey via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI).

The person to be interviewed is randomly selected using the ‘next birthday’ rule. The interviewer asks the householder to list the birthdays of all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample: that is, all persons aged 18 or over living at the address. The person with the next birthday, at the time of the call, is the person with whom the interview is to be conducted. Where the selected respondent is not available, an appointment is made to call back to interview them at a more suitable time. The table below shows the breakdown of sample addresses and response rates per year.

Year	Total number of addresses selected	Total number of responses achieved	Response rate (%)
2017	2,350	1,203	51%
2018	2,296	1,201	52%
2019	2,311	1,203	52%
2020	15,000	1,292	9%
2021	10,000	1,397	14%
2022	9,500	1,405	15%
2023	8,000	1,200	15%
2024	8,000	1,199	15%
2025	8,000	1,244	16%

Annex 1 – Technical Information

Weighting

As is common practice for a CAWI survey of this nature, the data are 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, a weighting variable to account for age, gender and location based on Northern Ireland Census data (2011) was added. 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, given that Census data are the most accurate counts 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 differences in the survey population to the general population of Northern Ireland using a pre-calculated algorithm. When applied, the weighting factor (WTFCTOR) will weight the data accordingly to ensure findings are representative of the general population in Northern Ireland.

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 NILTS 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. 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.