



Northern
Ireland
Office

Statistics and Research Branch

Public attitudes
towards crime and
recovery of assets
by the Assets
Recovery Agency in
Northern Ireland:
Findings from the
January 2006
Northern Ireland
Omnibus Survey

Research and Statistical Bulletin 6/2006

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KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ Four fifths (80%) of those surveyed had heard/read something about ARA.
- ◆ Of those who had heard/read something about ARA, television was the main method of communication (83%).
- ◆ Approximately three quarters (71%) of those surveyed believed that ARA has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community.
- ◆ Nearly nine tenths (89%) of those surveyed agreed that there are 'many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'.
- ◆ Over one in seven (15%) of those surveyed suspected that someone in their own neighbourhood had obtained a large part of their wealth from crime, while almost two fifths (38%) of people believed that there were people living in their local community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime.
- ◆ Almost nine tenths (87%) of respondents would react with some anger and concern if someone whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime, moved into their immediate neighbourhood.
- ◆ More than four fifths (86%) of those surveyed agreed that 'many criminals who go to jail manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'.
- ◆ More than four fifths (82%) of those surveyed said that wealth confiscation and a prison sentence are equally important objectives in dealing with criminals.
- ◆ Almost three quarters of those surveyed thought that both armed robbery (73%) and drug dealing (72%) financed serious or organised crime.
- ◆ The majority (89%) of respondents supported ARA's power to act through civil courts to recover assets resulting from crime even if the person has not been convicted in the criminal courts. One third of those surveyed (33%) expressed concern that these powers could be abused.
- ◆ Around one quarter (24%) of respondents were concerned that people they knew could be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers.
- ◆ Over half of those surveyed (56%) thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community.

INTRODUCTION

The Assets Recovery Agency (ARA) was established under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to co-ordinate activity across the UK in recovering unlawfully obtained assets from those with no civil right to hold them. ARA became operational in February 2003. It is an independent Government department. The Agency's Director, Jane Earl, reports to the Home Secretary but is operationally independent. The Agency will take on cases only on the basis of referral from the Police, Customs and law enforcement authorities according to agreed criteria.

Northern Ireland is a separate jurisdiction within the UK with unique challenges, which include a history of paramilitary involvement in crime. The Government therefore committed itself to setting up a branch of the new ARA in Northern Ireland, headed by an Assistant Director who reports to the Director.

In order to assess public attitudes to crime and the recovery of assets from criminals in Northern Ireland the Northern Ireland Office Statistics and Research Branch, on behalf of ARA commissioned a number of questions in the July 2005 and January 2006 Northern Ireland Omnibus Surveys. A comparison of these two surveys can be found in Annex 1 of this bulletin. A similar on-line survey was carried out in GB by YouGov Ltd in January 2006 and this survey is compared to the results of the January 2006 Omnibus Survey.

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is conducted several times each year by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of people in Northern Ireland.

The survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients.

The sample to be surveyed was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up to date listing of private households in Northern Ireland. At each address one person aged 16 or over was selected to participate. From an eligible sample of 1,984 individuals, 1,122 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 57%. The sample is designed to be representative of the population of Northern Ireland. Further information relating to the sample can be found in the Technical Notes section.

Analysis by religion is based only on those respondents who said that they were either Catholic or Protestant. Respondents who refused to answer the religion question or those who said they were a religion other than Catholic or Protestant were excluded from the analysis.

Analysis by area is based on three areas in Northern Ireland: Belfast; East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland. These areas are formed using the 26 District Councils in Northern Ireland. Further information relating to area breakdown can be found in the Technical Notes section.

SURVEY FINDINGS

1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime?

Over one in seven (15%) respondents suspected that at least one person/family in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime. A smaller proportion of those aged 65 and over (8%) thought that this was the case compared to other age categories.

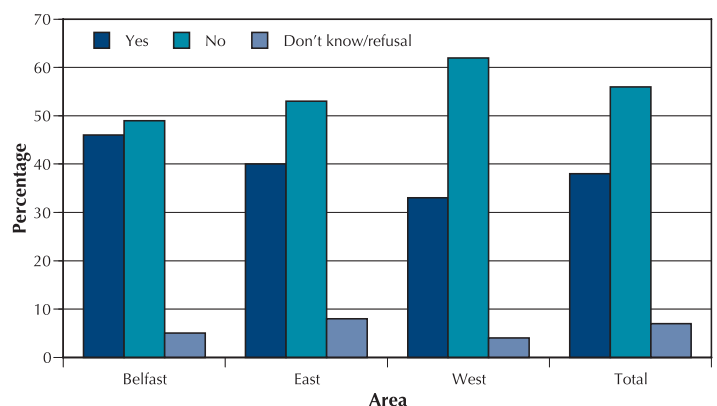
Male respondents (17%) were more likely to know at least one person/family in their neighbourhood who had obtained a large part of their wealth from crime, compared to female respondents (13%).

2. Whether or not you know anyone in particular whom you suspect of making money from crime, do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?

Almost two fifths (38%) of those surveyed believed people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime. Males (41%) were more likely than females (35%) to believe that this was the case.

People living in Belfast (46%) were more likely to believe that people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime than those living in the East (40%) or West (33%) of the Province (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Respondents' views on whether they believe that there are people living within their immediate community who have acquired a large part of their wealth from crime: by area



Over four tenths of respondents in paid employment (44%) believed people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime, compared to 29% of those not in paid employment.

3. How do you think you would react if you found out that someone had moved into your immediate neighbourhood, lived quietly and caused no trouble but whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime?

Nearly nine out of ten people (87%) would react with some anger and concern if a criminal (i.e. someone with wealth derived from crime) moved into their immediate neighbourhood. Proportionately, more Protestants (92%) than Catholics (81%) were of this opinion.

People living in the East of Northern Ireland (90%) were more likely to react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood, compared to those living in the West of Northern Ireland (86%) and the Belfast area (78%).

4. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'?

Nearly nine tenths (89%) of respondents believed that many people in NI are living off the proceeds of crime. Those in paid employment (92%) were more likely than those not in paid employment (85%) to say that this was the case.

There was a level of variation throughout the Province in relation to this question (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' views on people living off the proceeds of crime ('There are many people in Northern Ireland living off the proceeds of crime'): by area

	Belfast (%)	East (%)	West (%)	Total (%)
Slightly or strongly agree	84	91	87	89
Slightly or strongly disagree	12	6	9	8
Don't know/Refusal	4	3	4	3
Base	174	549	399	1,122

5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many criminals who go to jail but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'?

The vast majority of respondents (86%) believed that many criminals who go to jail, manage to hang onto the proceeds of crime and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over. A higher proportion of Protestants (89%) than Catholics (82%) were of this opinion.

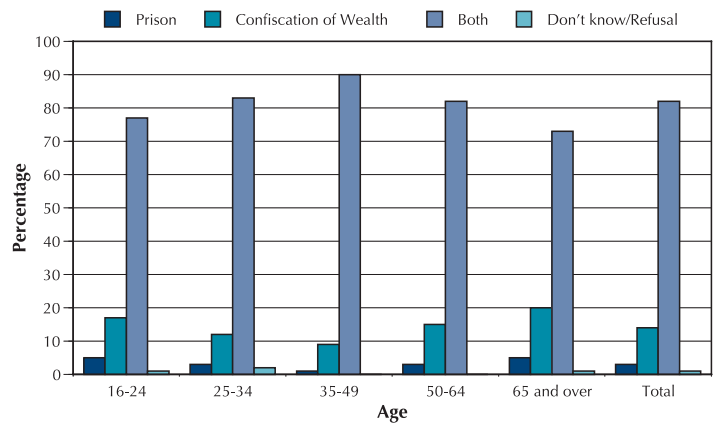
Respondents from the East of Northern Ireland (89%) were more likely to think that this was the case than respondents from the West of Northern Ireland (85%) or Belfast (82%).

6. Still thinking about the people who have grown wealthy from the proceeds of crime, which do you think is more important – to send them to prison, or to confiscate their wealth, or do you regard both as equal objectives'?

A higher proportion of respondents thought that it is more important to confiscate criminals' wealth (14%) than to send them to prison (3%). For the vast majority (82%), wealth confiscation and prison are equally important objectives.

However, this opinion varied according to age group (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Respondents' views on whether people who have grown wealthy from the proceeds of crime should be sent to prison, have their wealth confiscated or both options: by age



7. What type of crime do you think should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime?

Respondents were asked to rank the top five crimes from a comprehensive list according to how important they think it is that they should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime. Table 2 details the results.

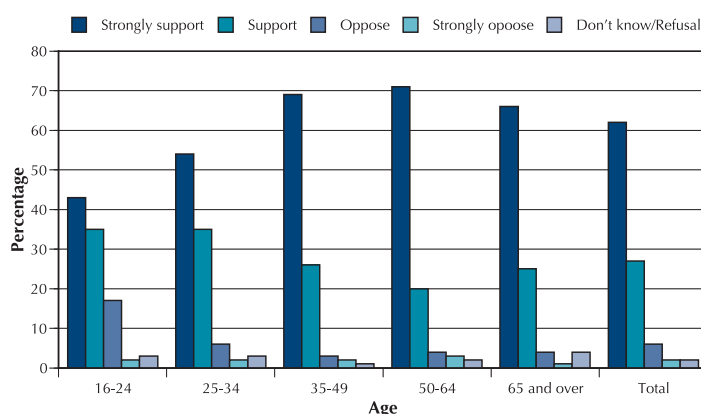
Table 2: Respondents' views on the types of crime that should be tackled to prevent the financing of serious or organised crime

Type of Crime	%
Armed robbery	73
Drug dealing	72
Drug trafficking	59
Drug supply	48
Money laundering	32
Extortion/blackmail	31
Benefit fraud	30
Serious fraud	26
People smuggling	25
Theft	22
Producing counterfeit goods	16
Handling stolen goods	13
Prostitution	13
Selling counterfeit goods	11
Deception eg selling goods and services that don't exist	10
Evading duty on alcohol and/or cigarettes and/or fuel	10
VAT fraud	1
Refusal/Don't know	0

8. Do you support the ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?

Almost nine tenths (89%) of people support ARA's powers to act through the civil courts to recover assets resulting from crime even if the person has not been convicted in the criminal courts. Only 8% oppose such powers and opposition is greatest among 16-24 year olds where 19% oppose or strongly oppose the agency having these powers (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Respondents' views on the ARA having the power to act through the civil courts: by age



A higher proportion of respondents living in the East of Northern Ireland (93%) supported ARA being able to apply to the civil courts for to recover assets than those living in Belfast (87%) or the West of Northern Ireland (86%).

Catholics (12%) were twice as likely as Protestants (6%) to oppose ARA having such powers.

9. How concerned are you that the Assets Recovery Agency might abuse its powers?

One third (33%) of people expressed concern that these powers could be abused. The younger age groups were more likely to express concern than the older age groups. Almost one half (46%) of 16-24 year olds expressed concern, compared to 26% of those aged 65 and over.

People living in the West of Northern Ireland (42%) were most likely to express concern over the ARA abusing its powers compared to those living in Belfast (33%) or the East of Northern Ireland (28%).

A greater proportion of Catholics (43%) than Protestants (27%) were concerned that ARA would abuse its powers.

10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by the Assets Recovery Agency because of its powers?

Almost one quarter (24%) of people were concerned that people they know could be unfairly targeted. Over two fifths (42%) of 16-24 year olds said that they were concerned that someone they know might be unfairly targeted by the ARA because of its powers compared to 20% of those aged 65 and over.

Catholics (27%) were more concerned that someone they know will be unfairly targeted compared to Protestants (22%).

People living in the West of Northern Ireland (28%) and Belfast (27%) were more concerned that someone they know will be unfairly targeted compared to people living in the East of Northern Ireland (20%).

11. If the Agency does succeed in reclaiming significant sums of money, what effect, if any, do you think it is likely to have on your community?

Over half (56%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community. A greater proportion of those in paid employment (60%) compared to those not in paid employment (52%) thought that this was the case.

Three quarters (75%) of those living in the East of Northern Ireland thought that the recovery of significant amounts of money would benefit their local community compared to those living in the West of the Province (48%) or Belfast (44%).

Over one third (35%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of criminal money would not have an impact (either positive or negative) on their community.

12. How much have you heard or read about the Assets Recovery Agency?

Four fifths (80%) of respondents had heard/read about ARA. Of this proportion, 86% of respondents were male and 76% were female.

A higher proportion of Protestants (84%) than Catholics (78%) had heard/read about this government organisation.

13. Where have you heard or read about the Assets Recovery Agency?

Of those who had heard/read about ARA, television was the main method of communication (83%) (Table 3).

Table 3: How respondents heard or read about ARA

	%
Television	83
Regional newspapers (eg Belfast Telegraph)	47
Local radio	36
Local newspapers (eg Newtownards Chronicle)	29
National newspapers (eg Times, Express)	22
National radio	12
Word of mouth	10
Website	2
Other	2
Refusal/Don't know	2

14. Do you believe that the ARA has focused too much on assets in Loyalist hands, Republican hands or has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community?

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents were of the opinion that ARA acted in a way which was fair to all sections of the community. Over one tenth (15%) of respondents said they didn't know how fair ARA was.

Similar proportions of Catholics (71%) and Protestants (70%) believed that ARA acted in a way that is fair to all sections of the community. On the other hand, Protestants (15%) were more likely than Catholics (5%) to believe that ARA acts in a way that is focused too much on assets in Loyalist hands.

15. Comparison of results from the Northern Ireland and Great Britain survey

A larger proportion of NI respondents than GB respondents have heard/read about ARA (80% compared with 46%). Similar proportions of NI (15%) and GB residents (14%) thought that someone in their own neighbourhood had obtained a large part of their wealth through crime.

A larger proportion of those living in GB (40%) than those living in NI (33%) thought that the Assets Recovery Agency could abuse its powers.

In both areas the vast majority support ARA having the powers to apply for civil recovery (89% in NI and 85% in GB). Further comparisons are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparison of results from the Northern Ireland and Great Britain surveys

	NI % Agree	GB % Agree
I have heard/read about ARA	80	46
I suspect that someone in my neighbourhood has got a large part of their wealth from crime	15	14
I would be angry and concerned if I found out that someone has moved into my immediate neighbourhood and had wealth that had largely come from the proceeds of crime	87	90
There are many people who are living off in the proceeds of crime	89	74
There are many criminals who go to prison but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a very wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over	86	81
I support ARA having the powers to apply for civil recovery	89	85
I am concerned that ARA might abuse its powers	33	40
I am concerned that people I know might be unfairly targeted by ARA	24	25
If ARA is successful in recovering significant sums of money, this will have a positive effect on my community	56	48

TECHNICAL NOTES

The sample of those surveyed in the January 2006 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up to date list of private households in Northern Ireland. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions – Belfast, East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland, and a random sample drawn from each stratum.

At each address the interviewer lists all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample, that is, all persons aged 16 or over. The interviewer's computer then randomly selects one person from each household to complete the interview. From an eligible sample of 1,984 individuals, 1,122 interviews were achieved giving a response rate of 57%.

Selecting only one individual for interview at each sampled address means that individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in small households. The data presented in this bulletin has been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households.

To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the current Census of Population. Table 5 shows a comparison between the January 2006 Omnibus Survey sample and the Northern Ireland population aged 16 and over from the 2001 Census of Population.

Table 5: Sample profile of the 2001 Census of Population and January 2006 Omnibus Survey

		2001 Census of Population (Adults) %	January 2006 Omnibus Survey Selected Respondent %
Gender	Male	48	47
	Female	52	53
Age Group	16-24	16	15
	25-34	19	17
	35-49	27	28
	50-64	20	23
	65 and over	17	17
Base	1,292,169	1,122	

The area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 6. The 26 District Councils listed in this table were used to form each of the three areas (Belfast, East of Northern Ireland, West of Northern Ireland) described in this bulletin.

Table 6: Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council Area

Area	District Councils
Belfast	Belfast
East of Northern Ireland	Antrim, Ards, Ballymena, Banbridge, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Craigavon, Down, Larne, Lisburn, Newtownabbey, North Down
West of Northern Ireland	Armagh, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Limavady, Derry, Magherafelt, Moyle, Newry & Mourne, Omagh, Strabane.

Percentages denoted in both tables and figures do not always sum to 100%. In some instances this is because respondents had the opportunity to offer more than one answer to the question. In other cases it is a consequence of rounding.

Annex 1: Comparison of July 2005 and January 2006 Omnibus Surveys

Question	Main Findings	July 2005 (%)	January 2006 (%)
1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime?	Suspected at least person/family	21	15
2. Whether or not you know anyone in particular whom you suspect of making money from crime, do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?	Believed that there were people in their community	41	38
3. How do you think you would react if you found out that someone had moved into your immediate neighbourhood, lived quietly and caused no trouble but whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime?	Would react with some anger and concern	89	87
4. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'?	Agree/strongly agree	87	89
5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many criminals who go to jail but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'?	Agree/strongly agree	86	86
6. Still thinking about the people who have grown wealthy from the proceeds of crime, which do you think is more important – to send them to prison, or to confiscate their wealth, or do you regard both as equal objectives?	Wealth confiscation and prison are equally important	83	82
7. What type of crime do you think should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime?	Drug dealing Armed robbery Drug trafficking	72 67 56	72 73 59
8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?	Support/strongly support	91	89
9. How concerned are you that ARA might abuse its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	36	33
10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	26	24
11. If the Agency does succeed in reclaiming significant sums of money, what effect, if any, do you think it is likely to have on your community?	Positive/very positive effect	60	56
12. How much have you heard or read about ARA?	Had heard/read at least a little	80	80
13. Where have you heard or read about ARA?	Television Regional newspapers Local radio	80 43 32	83 47 36
14. Do you believe that ARA has focused too much on assets in Loyalist hands, Republican hands or has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community?	Fair to all sections of the community	64	71

NOTES

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