



Northern
Ireland
Office

Statistics and Research Branch

Public attitudes
towards crime and
recovery of assets
by the Assets
Recovery Agency:
Findings from the
January 2007
Northern Ireland
Omnibus Survey

Research and Statistical Bulletin 10/2007

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KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ 82% of those surveyed had heard/read something about ARA. Of this proportion television was the main method of communication (80%).
- ◆ 71% of respondents believed that ARA has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community.
- ◆ 84% of those surveyed agreed that there are many people in Northern Ireland who are living off the proceeds of crime.
- ◆ 17% of those surveyed suspected that someone in their own neighbourhood had obtained a large part of their wealth from crime. Irrespective of whether they suspected any specific individual or family, 34% of respondents believed that there were people living in their local community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime.
- ◆ 85% of respondents would react with at least some anger and concern if someone whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime, moved into their immediate neighbourhood.
- ◆ 83% 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’.
- ◆ 78% agreed that wealth confiscation and a prison sentence are equally important objectives in dealing with criminals.
- ◆ 75% of those surveyed thought that drug dealing financed serious or organised crime, while 66% thought that armed robbery did.
- ◆ The majority (88%) 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; 36% expressed concern that these powers might be abused.
- ◆ 27% of respondents were concerned that people they knew might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers.
- ◆ 52% 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 is an independent Government department that became operational in February 2003. The Agency takes on cases only on the basis of referral from the Police, Customs and law enforcement authorities according to agreed criteria. In January 2007, it was announced that ARA will merge with the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA).

Northern Ireland is a separate jurisdiction within the UK with unique challenges, which include a history of paramilitary involvement in crime. The merger with SOCA will not reduce the level of effort on asset recovery in Northern Ireland and SOCA will continue to dedicate at least the same level of resources that is currently spent by ARA.

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 January 2006 and January 2007 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 2007 and these results are compared with the results of the January 2007 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. Further information can be found in the Technical Notes Section.

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 (see Annex 1).

SURVEY FINDINGS

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

17% of respondents suspected that at least one (i.e. specific) person/family in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime. A smaller proportion of those aged 65 and over (11%) thought that this was the case compared with other age categories.

A slightly higher proportion of those living in Belfast (21%) were likely to suspect at least one person/family in their neighbourhood compared with those living in the East (14%) or West (18%) of Northern Ireland.

2. Do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?

Irrespective of whether they suspected any specific individual/family, 34% of those surveyed believed there were people in their immediate community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime. A smaller proportion of those aged 65 and over (21%) thought that this was the case than all other age categories.

Those in paid employment (38%) were likely to believe that people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime, compared with the 28% of those who were 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?

85% said they thought they would react with some anger and concern if someone with wealth derived from crime moved into their immediate neighbourhood. Proportionately, more Protestants (88%) than Catholics (81%) were of this opinion.

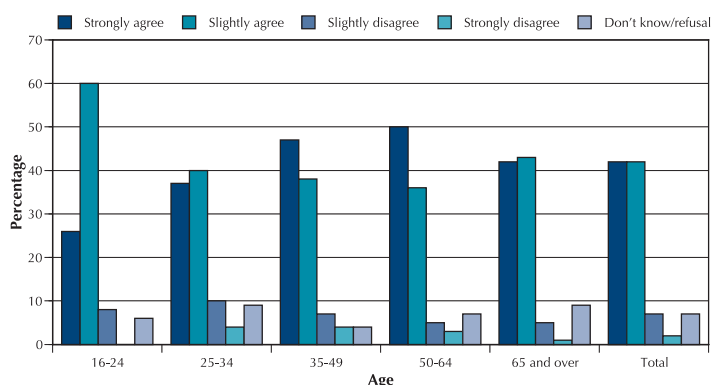
People living in the East of Northern Ireland (88%) were more likely to react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood, compared with those living in the West of Northern Ireland (83%) or Belfast (79%).

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'?

84% of respondents believed that many people in Northern Ireland are living off the proceeds of crime - 88% of Protestants and 81% of Catholics.

There were several differences in relation to age groupings (Figure 1). A lower proportion of respondents aged 16-24 years (26%) strongly agreed with this statement compared with all other age groups. 50% of those aged 50-64 years strongly agreed with this statement.

Figure 1: Respondents’ views on whether there are many people in Northern Ireland who are living off the proceeds of crime



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’?

83% believed 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. A higher proportion of Protestants (87%) than Catholics (78%) were of this opinion.

25% of those aged 16-24 strongly agreed with this statement compared with 50% of those aged 50-64.

6. Still thinking about 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 (17%) than to send them to prison (3%). For the vast majority (78%), wealth confiscation and prison are equally important objectives.

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 prepared list to determine the types of crime that should be tackled to prevent the financing of serious or organised crime. Table 1 details the results.

Table 1: Respondents’ views on the types of crime that should be tackled to prevent the financing of serious or organised crime

Type of Crime	%
Drug dealing	75
Armed robbery	66
Drug trafficking	56
Drug supply	48
Benefit fraud	35
Money laundering	27
Extortion/blackmail	24
Serious fraud	23
People smuggling	22
Theft	21
Handling stolen goods	15
Producing counterfeit goods	14
Deception eg selling goods and services that don't exist	13
Prostitution	12
Evading duty on alcohol and/or cigarettes and/or fuel	11
Selling counterfeit goods	10
VAT fraud	2
Refusal/Don't know	1

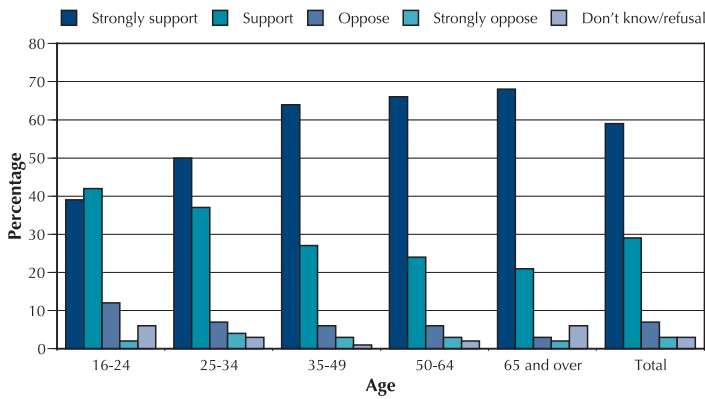
8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?

59% of people strongly supported and a further 29% supported 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 10% oppose such powers.

48% of Catholics compared with 68% of Protestants strongly supported ARA having such powers.

There are variations in relation to age and the extent to which people support or oppose the agency having these powers (Figure 2). In the main, older respondents tended to strongly support ARA acting through the civil courts to recover assets.

Figure 2: Respondents' views on ARA having the power to act through the civil courts by age



91% of respondents living in the East of Northern Ireland supported ARA being able to apply to the civil courts to recover assets. The corresponding figures for those living in Belfast and the West of Northern Ireland were 86% and 84% respectively.

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

Over one third (36%) of people expressed concern that ARA's powers might be abused.

People living in the West of Northern Ireland (43%) were most likely to express concern over the ARA abusing its powers compared with those living in Belfast (35%) or the East of Northern Ireland (31%).

A greater proportion of Catholics (44%) than Protestants (31%) were concerned that ARA might 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?

27% of respondents were concerned that people they know could be unfairly targeted. 39% 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 with 23% of those aged 65 and over.

Catholics (37%) were more concerned that someone they know might be unfairly targeted compared with Protestants (21%).

A higher proportion of people living in the West of Northern Ireland (37%) were concerned that someone they know might be unfairly targeted compared with those living in Belfast (23%) or the East of Northern Ireland (22%).

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?

Approximately half (52%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community.

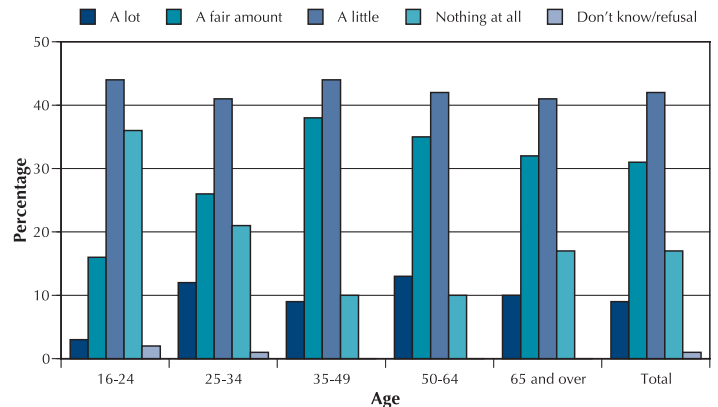
37% of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of criminal money would not have an impact (either positive or negative) on their community.

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

Four fifths (82%) of respondents had heard/read about ARA - 86% male and 79% female.

63% of those aged 16-24 years old had heard/read about this government organisation compared with 91% of those aged 35-49 years old (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Respondents' knowledge of ARA by age



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 how they had heard about ARA (80%) (Table 2).

Table 2: How respondents heard or read about ARA

	%
Television	80
Regional newspapers (eg Belfast Telegraph)	39
Local radio	33
National newspapers (eg Times, Express)	27
Local newspapers (eg Newtownards Chronicle)	22
Word of mouth	12
National radio	10
Website	3
Other	1
Refusal/Don't know	0

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?

71% of respondents were of the opinion that ARA acted in a way which was fair to all sections of the community, while 16% of respondents were unsure how fair ARA was.

The same proportion (72%) of Catholics and Protestants believed that ARA was fair to all sections of the community. Protestants (14%) were more likely than Catholics (2%) to believe that ARA acts in a way that focused too much on assets in loyalist hands. In contrast 8% of Catholics compared with 1% of Protestants thought that ARA has focused too much on assets in republican hands.

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

A larger proportion of Northern Ireland respondents than GB respondents had heard/read about ARA (82% compared with 46%).

Identical proportions of respondents (83%) in both Northern Ireland and GB thought that criminals hold on to their wealth, even having completed a prison sentence.

A larger proportion of those living in GB (42%) than those living in Northern Ireland (36%) thought that the ARA might abuse its powers. A higher proportion of those living in Northern Ireland are of the opinion that there are many people living off the proceeds of crime (84% compared with 76%).

Further comparisons are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of results from the Northern Ireland and Great Britain Surveys

	NI % Agree	GB % Agree
I have heard/read about ARA	82	46
I suspect that someone in my neighbourhood has got a large part of their wealth from crime	17	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	85	90
There are many people who are living off the proceeds of crime	84	76
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	83	83
I support ARA having the powers to apply for civil recovery	88	85
I am concerned that ARA might abuse its powers	36	42
I am concerned that people I know might be unfairly targeted by ARA	27	28
If ARA is successful in recovering significant sums of money, this will have a positive effect on my community	52	42

Technical Notes

The sample of those surveyed in the January 2007 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 a sample of 2,200 addresses, 1,993 were eligible and 1,211 interviews were achieved giving a response rate of 61%.

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 4 shows a comparison between the January 2007 Omnibus Survey sample and the Northern Ireland population aged 16 and over from the 2001 Census of Population.

Table 4: Sample profile of the 2001 Census of Population and January 2007 Omnibus Survey

		2001 Census of Population (Adults) %	January 2007 Omnibus Survey Selected Respondent %
Gender	Male	48	44
	Female	52	56
Age Group	16-24	16	16
	25-34	19	16
	35-49	27	28
	50-64	20	21
	65 and over	17	19
Base		1,292,169	1,211

The area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 5. 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 5: 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.

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.

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 January 2006 and January 2007 Northern Ireland Omnibus Surveys

Question	Main Findings	January 2006 (%)	January 2007 (%)
1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime?	Suspected at least one person/family	15	17
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	38	34
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	87	85
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	89	84
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	83
6. Still thinking about 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	82	78
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 73 59	75 66 56
8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?	Support/strongly support	89	88
9. How concerned are you that ARA might abuse its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	33	36
10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	24	27
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	56	52
12. How much have you heard or read about ARA?	Had heard/read at least a little	80	82
13. Where have you heard or read about ARA?	Television Regional newspapers Local radio	83 47 36	80 39 33
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	71	71

NOTES

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