

Public Awareness of and Confidence in Official Statistics



Northern Ireland 2014 – Further Analysis

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In April 2008 the UK Statistics Authority was set up as a non-Ministerial government department with a remit to improve public confidence and trust in official statistics. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) first collected information on the public's awareness and confidence in official statistics (PCOS) in 2009, and subsequently in 2010, 2012 and 2014. Headline results were published on the 18th of December 2014. This bulletin provides more detailed findings alongside comparative results from GB and elsewhere.

PCOS information is collected via NISRA's [omnibus survey](#). The most recent survey, which took place in September 2014, included PCOS related questions.

Key Points

- Of those that responded to the survey, 82% indicated that they had trust in the statistics produced by NISRA.
- The trust in NISRA as an institution is 76%. This is significantly lower than the trust in the statistics produced by NISRA (82%).
- The survey indicated that trust levels in the Civil Service were at the same level as NISRA at 76%.
- Only one third of respondents had heard of NISRA prior to the survey.
- Those with a degree (or higher) level of qualification were more likely to have heard of NISRA.

1. Background

Headline results on Public Awareness of and Confidence in Official Statistics 2014 were published on the 18th of December 2014. The key findings included in the report were:

- Public confidence in the accuracy of Official Statistics in Northern Ireland was 68% in 2014. This was significantly higher than the 2012 findings of 61%;
- Of those that responded to the survey, 82% of respondents indicated that they had trust or a great deal of trust in the statistics produced by NISRA;
- Nine out of ten respondents said they believed that personal information provided to NISRA will be kept confidential;
- 77% of respondents believed that the statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference.

A copy of the headline report is available [here](#).

This report presents further analysis and additional findings from the report, alongside comparison figures from the British Social Attitudes Survey 2014 and international findings, where available.

2. Further analysis

This report presents further details and analysis from the PCOS data collected in the September 2014 Omnibus Survey. Comparisons with figures from the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA)¹ are also included, and with international findings² where available.

2.1 Public awareness of NISRA

Of those responding to the PCOS questions in the Omnibus Survey, one third of respondents indicated they had heard of NISRA. Table 1 examines 4 characteristics of these respondents: highest qualification level; whether economically active; age range; and area they live. Those educated to degree level or higher were more likely to have heard of NISRA as were those who were economically active (these are statistically significant results – see background notes for further details).

Those aged 50+ were significantly less likely to have heard of NISRA than those aged 16-49. When awareness of NISRA is analysed on the basis of area³, there is a significant difference between those answering ‘yes’ in the east of Northern Ireland and those answering ‘yes’ in the west of Northern Ireland – those in the east are more likely to have heard of NISRA.

The 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) asked respondents if they had ‘Ever heard of The Office for National Statistics (ONS) on radio, TV, newspapers, or somewhere else?’ Seventy-one per cent of respondents answered ‘yes’. Part of the explanation for the BSA findings being higher may be because ONS is regularly mentioned in news programmes as the source of key statistical information, for example unemployment figures, inflation rate etc.

¹ The British Social Attitudes Survey is an annual survey which asks around 3,000 people what it is like to live in Britain and what they think about how Britain is run. The 2014 survey ran a module on public confidence in official statistics and its’ findings can be found at http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/833802/public-confidence-in-official-statistics_-final.pdf

² Ibid., p. 78.

³ Area is categorised on the basis of Local Government District. Belfast is Belfast LGD; East is Antrim, Ards, Ballymena, Banbridge, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Craigavon, Down, Larne, Lisburn, Newtownabbey, and North Down; West is Armagh, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Limavady, Derry, Magherafelt, Moyle, Newry and Mourne, Omagh, and Strabane.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents who had heard of NISRA

<i>All persons aged 16 and over</i>	Yes	No
<i>Highest qualification level</i>		
Degree or higher	59%	41%
Higher education	36%	64%
A level	38%	62%
GCSE (A-C)	35%	65%
GCSE (D-G)	22%	78%
No qualifications	12%	88%
<i>Economically active</i>		
Yes	41%	59%
No	23%	77%
<i>Age group</i>		
16-24	25%	75%
25-34	39%	61%
35-49	41%	59%
50-64	36%	64%
65 and over	20%	80%
<i>Area</i>		
Belfast	36%	64%
East	38%	62%
West	28%	72%
Total	33%	66%

2.2 Confidence in statistical accuracy

A key measure of statistical quality is the accuracy of the data produced and issued in Official Statistics reports. Of those responding, 68% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that official statistics in Northern Ireland are generally accurate (see table 2). Respondents to the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) on public attitudes to ONS and official statistics were also asked if they believe 'Official statistics are generally accurate'. It is not possible to make direct comparisons with NI results because the BSA survey did not include a 'neutral' response, unlike the Omnibus Survey carried out for NISRA, where 24% indicated neutrality.

Table 2: Levels of agreement in the accuracy of official statistics in Northern Ireland

<i>All persons aged 16 and over</i>	NISRA
Strongly agree	10%
Agree	58%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know	3%
Total	1,081

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

2.3 Trust in NISRA's statistical output

Participants in the survey were asked 'Personally, how much trust do you have in statistics produced by NISRA? For example, on unemployment, economic growth, or life expectancy.' Table 3 shows that the level of trust in NISRA statistics was higher than the level of trust in statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Comparisons with other statistical institutions are also made and figure 1 gives international comparisons with Australia, Sweden and Denmark⁴, all of which score higher on levels of trust.

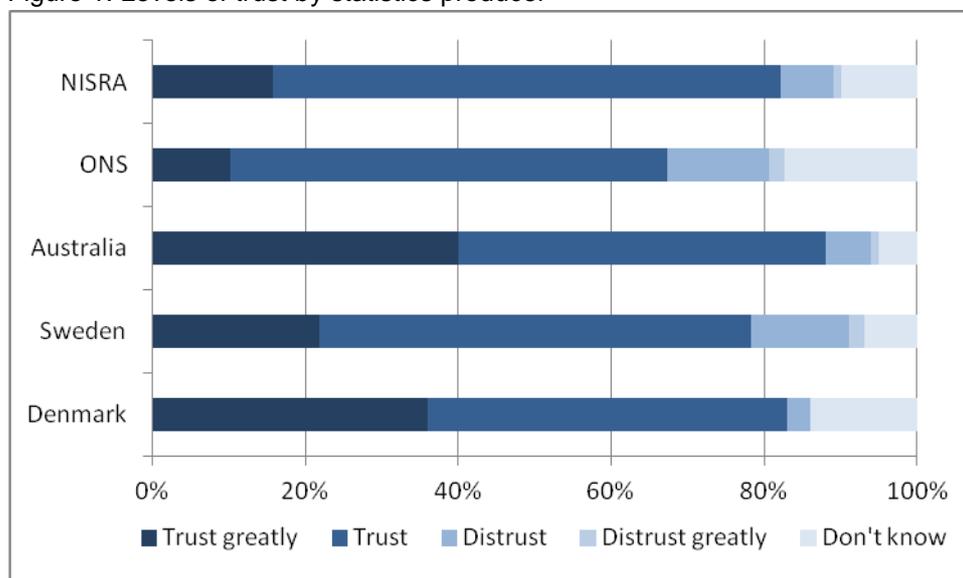
Table 3: Levels of trust by statistics producer

All persons aged 16 and over [*]	NISRA	ONS	Australia	Sweden	Denmark
Trust them greatly	16%	10%	40%	22%	36%
Tend to trust them	67%	56%	48%	57%	47%
Tend not to trust them	7%	13%	6%	13%	3%
Distrust them greatly	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%
Don't know	10%	17%	5%	7%	14%
Total	1,081	1,907	2,242	1,500	882

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

^{*}Less than 1% of respondents refused to answer this question.

Figure 1: Levels of trust by statistics producer



⁴ Please see background notes for further details.

2.4 Trust in NISRA: comparisons with other institutions

As previously detailed, the level of trust in NISRA statistics is 82%. This is higher than the level of trust in NISRA as an institution (76%). The 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey found the reverse to be the case for ONS.

Table 4: Trust in NISRA statistics and trust in NISRA as an institution

<i>All persons aged 16 and over</i>	NISRA statistics	NISRA institution
Trust them greatly	16%	15%
Tend to trust them	67%	61%
Tend not to trust them	7%	6%
Distrust them greatly	1%	1%
Don't know/refusal	10%	17%
Total	1,081	1,081

The number of refusals was less than 5.

Looking at NISRA as an institution compared with other institutions, trust in The Police scored highest with 77% of respondents indicating that they 'trust a great deal' or 'tend to trust' the police. This was closely followed by trust in The Civil Service and trust in NISRA, both with 76%.

Levels of trust were lowest for the Media at 29%, and the NI Assembly at 34%.

Table 5: NI Omnibus findings for proportion of respondents trusting various institutions

<i>All persons aged 16 and over</i>	Trust it a great deal	Tend to trust it	Tend to distrust it	Distrust it greatly	Don't know/refusal
The Civil Service	11%	65%	16%	4%	4%
The NI Assembly*	2%	31%	38%	22%	5%
The Media*	1%	27%	40%	29%	2%
NISRA	15%	61%	6%	1%	17%
The Courts*	12%	57%	18%	7%	5%
The Police	16%	60%	14%	7%	2%
High Street Banks and other such financial institutions*	5%	38%	34%	21%	3%

Base is 1,081 for all rows.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Less than 1% of respondents refused to answer this question.

Respondents to the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey were asked a similar question in relation to trust. In order to compare findings, the top 2 and bottom 2 categories of the NI Omnibus Survey have been combined (table 6).

Table 6: Trust in various institutions, NI Omnibus and BSA findings

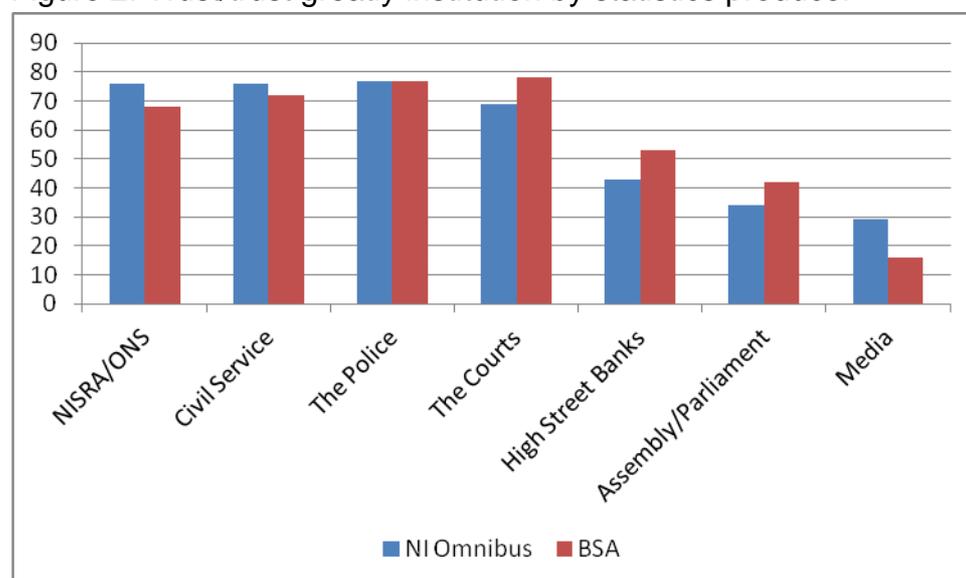
All persons aged 16 and over	Trust it a great deal/tend to trust		Tend to distrust it/distrust greatly		Don't know/refusal	
	NI Omnibus	BSA	NI Omnibus	BSA	NI Omnibus	BSA
The Civil Service	76%	72%	20%	20%	4%	8%
The NI Assembly/UK Parliament*	34%	42%	61%	53%	6%	5%
The Media*	29%	16%	69%	81%	2%	4%
NISRA/ONS	76%	68%	7%	9%	17%	23%
The Courts*	69%	78%	25%	16%	5%	5%
The Police	77%	77%	21%	20%	2%	3%
High Street Banks and other such financial institutions*	43%	53%	55%	43%	3%	4%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Less than 1% of respondents refused to answer this question.

Figure 2 provides a comparison of the proportion of respondents who either trusted or trusted greatly that particular institution. Trust levels were broadly similar across the institutions, with trust in NISRA being significantly higher than ONS.

Figure 2: Trust/trust greatly institution by statistics producer



2.5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I believe that the statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference.'

Table 7: Levels of agreement on whether the statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference

All persons aged 16 and over	NISRA Omnibus	BSA
Strongly agree	21%	8%
Tend to agree	55%	43%
Tend to disagree	13%	21%
Strongly disagree	2%	5%
Don't know	9%	23%
Total	1,081	1,907

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Just over half (51%) of respondents to the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) agree that 'statistics produced by ONS are free from political interference'. Findings from the NI Omnibus Survey are considerably higher, with over three quarters (76%) agreeing that the statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference.

Danes appear more likely to agree that their statistics produced by Statistics Denmark are free from political interference (90%).

Background Notes

This bulletin is based on questions relating to Public Confidence and Awareness in Official Statistics that were included in the September 2014 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. The omnibus survey is administered by NISRA's [Central Survey Unit](#).

The omnibus survey consists of modules of different themes and is conducted at various times throughout the year. It is based on a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Land and Property Services Agency list of private addresses. In September 2014 a total of 2,200 addresses were selected for interview and, at each address sampled, a person aged 16 or over was randomly selected to complete the face to face interview. The results were weighted to take into account the fact that households are sampled rather than individuals, and individuals in a household with a larger number of respondents have a smaller chance of being selected than households with a smaller number of respondents. The percentages in the tables are based on weighted data but the total number of respondents is unweighted. There were 1,081 respondents to the [PCOS](#) module.

Significance testing was carried out on a number of the statistics to test for differences. Any reported statistically significant differences are at the 95% level ($p < 0.05$). Further information is available on request.

British Social Attitudes Survey

The British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) is conducted by the National Centre for Social Research. It explores levels of awareness, use of, and trust in official statistics in Britain. The model of questions on public confidence in official statistics was asked of a random two-thirds of the sample (1,907 respondents).

International Comparisons

The focus of international comparisons in this report has been on Australia (2010), Denmark (2012) and Sweden (2014) as these are the only countries for which nationally representative surveys of the general population are available. Further details are available in appendix E of the Public Confidence in Official Statistics – Appendices to report (see http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/833803/public-confidence-in-official-statistics_appendices_final.pdf)

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