

Police Service of Northern Ireland

User Guide to

Security Situation Statistics Northern Ireland

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This document is intended as a User Guide to provide users of the statistics with a fuller understanding of the PSNI's security related statistics by explaining the background to their collation and also the methodologies adopted.

Section 1

Introduction

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has collated statistics on the security situation since the start of the Troubles in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the early years these statistics were based on paper records and manual collation systems and it was only in the early 1990s that a computerised system was introduced for capturing this information. As the security situation was unique to Northern Ireland, the statistics are not directly comparable to any other region or police force in the UK.

Purpose and main uses of the statistics

The statistics have developed over time to reflect changes in the ongoing security situation and changes in the different approaches adopted by Republican and Loyalist groups. The numbers of incidents peaked in 1972 when 470 security related deaths were recorded along with 1,853 bombing devices used and 10,631 shooting incidents. The statistics continue to provide useful information on the security situation following the Good Friday agreement and subsequent ceasefires, albeit that the numbers of such incidents are much reduced in comparison to the pre-ceasefire years.

Security statistics are used by a variety of organisations and individuals in the public and private sector as well as by the wider general public in order to monitor current trends in the security situation and also to conduct research into historical trends over the period of the Troubles. Within the PSNI, the security statistics are used along with a variety of other sources of information to inform senior management of ongoing trends and comparisons with the numbers of incidents during the current year compared with previous years.

Strengths and Limitations of the data

a) Strengths

Police recorded statistics relating to the security situation in Northern Ireland are the main source of official information on trends and statistics relating to the security situation throughout the Troubles and up to the present day. They were initially established by the police to provide much needed facts and figures on widespread disruption during the late 1960s and early 1970s and then were developed further through the 1980s and 1990s with computerisation. They are a key source of information on the security situation in Northern Ireland since 1969 and are used widely within PSNI and also by colleagues in government departments as well as by the media, academics and members of the public.

b) Limitations

As the security situation figures relate to those incidents that took place within Northern Ireland, they do not include any security related incidents that may have happened either in the Republic of Ireland or in Great Britain.

These statistics only include those incidents that are brought to the attention of the police and some such incidents may not have been reported. Therefore a level of under-reporting may exist and users of the statistics should exercise caution when examining trends based on these police statistics. The PSNI's Security Statistics are collated and reported by a small number of experienced staff who manually trawl through PSNI systems on a daily basis to identify all such security related incidents. The reliance on these key individuals means that an element of human error could be involved and that small proportion of incidents could be missed or incorrectly classified as a result.

However, various internal checks and validation processes are in place to ensure that this is kept to a minimum.

Detailed descriptions of the main security statistics collated

Security statistics generally relate to terrorist and public order type incidents that occur within Northern Ireland and which are recorded on the PSNI's IT systems. The main security related statistics that are collated and reported are as follows:

a) Security related deaths

Each security related death is checked with the investigating officer to ensure that the circumstances fit in with the standard definition adopted by the PSNI's Statistics Branch guidelines i.e. 'those which are considered at the time of the incident to be directly attributed to terrorism, where the cause has a direct or proximate link to subversive/ sectarian strife or where the death is attributable to security force activity'. At the end of each year, all security related deaths for that period are checked with the PSNI's Crime Operations Department to ensure that the list is complete and accurate before the finalised figures are published. Furthermore, not all security related deaths involve offences of murder as they also include deaths resulting from the use of force by the security forces or could involve persons being killed while planting a bomb which detonated prematurely.

b) Casualties resulting from security situation

In addition to those killed as a result of the security situation, details of those injured are also recorded. These casualties could be sustained as a result of gunshot, explosion, assault, armed robbery, rioting or plastic baton rounds etc.

c) Bombings incidents

These include all incidents where a bombing device explodes or is defused. A bombing incident can also relate to more than one device - for example a mortar attack with four devices would be recorded as one bombing incident with four devices. When a device partially explodes (i.e. usually only the detonator or fuse) it is recorded as an explosion. However, if a device is found that is not complete or armed, then it is recorded as a 'find' and not as a bombing.

d) Shooting incidents

These include any shooting incident relating to the security situation and include shots fired by terrorists, shots fired by the security forces, paramilitary style attacks involving shootings and shots heard (and later confirmed by other sources). They exclude the firing of blank rounds.

e) Paramilitary style shooting casualties

Any such paramilitary style shooting incident can have one or more casualties (i.e. two or more persons could be shot in the same incident). The injured party is usually shot in the knees, elbows, feet, ankles or thighs and the motive is supposedly to punish the person for anti-social activities. These paramilitary style shootings are generally conducted by Loyalist or Republican paramilitary groups on members of their own community. The attribution of such shootings is generally recorded as 'Loyalist' or 'Republican' depending on the investigating officer's view on which groups had conducted the shooting. Paramilitary style shootings that result in death are counted as security related deaths and are not reflected in the paramilitary style shooting figures.

f) Paramilitary style assaults

As with the paramilitary style shootings, these assaults are usually carried out by Loyalist or Republican groups on members of their own community as a punishment. The assault will involve major or minor physical injury to the injured party typically involving a group of assailants armed with, for example, iron bars or baseball bats. Multiple casualties may result from a single incident. Confirmation of the paramilitary style assault is generally sought from the investigating officer.

g) Finds of ammunition or explosives

These refer to the seizure or recovery of all illegal firearms, ammunition, explosives, rocket/mortar launchers, detonators and bomb making material/equipment. Replica/blank firing firearms, petrol bombs and petrol bomb making materials, grenades and munitions from World War 1 or World War 2 found on the beach or in attics etc. are not recorded as finds.

h) Incendiaries

These are different from bombings in that they are used to start fires and not to cause an explosion. They normally consist of a cassette, timer battery and material to cause fire (i.e. petrol, gas or other accelerant) and are usually targeted at commercial property.

i) Persons arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act who are subsequently charged.

Section 41 of the Terrorism Act enables police officers to arrest persons for the prevention of terrorism. Within the PSNI, weekly returns of all persons arrested under Section 41 are sent to Statistics Branch along with details of any subsequent charges. The charge can relate to any offence (e.g. attempted murder) and does not necessarily need to be an offence listed under the Terrorism Act.

Section 2

Recording Practices

Prior to November 2002, a daily Duty Officer's Report (DOR) was published within the organisation highlighting the main incidents that had occurred in the previous 24 hours. This also acted as a valuable source of information for the security statistics and provided a useful cross reference mechanism to ensure that key incidents were not overlooked.

The Duty Officer's Report was stopped in November 2002 and since then, the security statistics have been generally sourced from the PSNI's internal Command & Control system which is used to log calls for service from the public, to record internal police communications and to prioritise and deploy police resources as appropriate. Each day, staff within Statistics Branch search through incidents that are recorded on the PSNI's Command & Control system looking for any that are security related. With some 1,500 incidents recorded on the Command & Control each day, it can be difficult to readily identify these from the normal policing calls for service. However, by focusing on all 'tagged' incidents on the system (which is a way of flagging up more serious or priority incidents), the vast majority of all such security incidents can usually be readily identified by this method with any others coming to light through later cross referencing validation checks with the 8 policing Districts across Northern Ireland.

As with all administrative systems, statistics are a by-product of the process and are heavily reliant on the information being entered correctly by staff across PSNI. To minimise the risk of error, Statistics Branch has developed a wide range of quality assurance measures and data validation checks to ensure that the statistics are as accurate and meaningful as possible within the given resource and time constraints.

Comparisons with the PSNI's Recorded Crime & Detections Dataset

The PSNI's security statistics are maintained on a separate database from recorded crime. For this reason it is not possible to give a detection rate for security related crimes including shootings, bombings, deaths and/or paramilitary shootings or attacks. In addition, recorded crimes cannot be cross referenced with the security statistics to provide a detection rate for security related crimes or to identify all security related murders. This would involve a manual task where incidents on one database would have to be cross referenced with those on another database and is not readily achievable.

Alternative sources of information on the Security Situation in Northern Ireland

The PSNI and the RUC before it were in a unique position to collate the statistical information on the security situation in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. However, other sources of information are available. These would include;

- The General Registers Office www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro
- The Public Records Office www.proni.gov.uk
- The Ministry of Defence www.mod.uk
- The Belfast Central Library www.ni-libraries.net/libraries

In addition the University of Ulster has a Conflict Archive on the Internet ([CAIN](http://www.cain.ulster.ac.uk)) web service available which contains information and source material on the Troubles in Northern Ireland from 1968 to present.

Information could also be sourced from national and local media through searching back records of newspapers and programmes produced during that time. In addition, a variety of detailed historical and extensively researched publications are available from bookshops which cover the period of the Troubles in depth.

Section 3

Confidentiality

The PSNI's Statistics Branch complies with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in relation to Principle 5: Confidentiality. A [Confidentiality Protection Arrangements](#) document is available on the statistics section of the PSNI website. It outlines the arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of statistical data and covers:

- Physical Security
- Technical Security
- Staff Training
- Statistical Disclosure Control
- Sharing of data with a third party

National Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body established in 2008. It has a statutory role to scrutinise (through monitoring & assessment) all UK official statistics.

Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) are seconded to the PSNI and oversee the collation and reporting of the security statistics.

The UK Statistics Authority has designated the PSNI's Security Situation Statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

More information about the UK Statistics Authority, the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and assessment can be found on their website at www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

Reporting

The PSNI's security statistics are collated and reported by statisticians seconded from the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) who work to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html> .

The PSNI's security statistics for Northern Ireland are published as an annual bulletin providing finalised figures for the latest financial year along with trends and commentary. Monthly updates providing a summary of the latest security statistics are published throughout the year. Any in-year monthly security statistics produced by the PSNI are provisional and subject to change. The complete financial year period statistics (1st April – 31st March) which are published in May each year are final and are not subject to any planned revision. Revisions are carried out in accordance with our Revisions Policy, a copy of which is available in the Official Statistics section of the PSNI Statistics website.

This user guide to the PSNI's security statistics is designed to be a useful reference guide with explanatory notes regarding the issues and classifications which are key to the production and

presentation of these security statistics. The publication date for the annual statistical bulletin is pre-announced and can be found via the UK National Statistics publication hub: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>. The [publication schedule](#) is also available via the PSNI website.

Previously published reports and accompanying excel spreadsheets with historic data are also available from the PSNI website.

Feedback and actions resulting from User Consultations

User consultation is an important aspect of our work. It informs our work schedules and statistical planning process. Our [Customer Service and Engagement Statement](#) is available on our website and highlights our aims and standards for dealing with key users and requests from members of the public.

Following a recent consultation exercise, it was decided that the statistical bulletins and reports would only be available as web documents. Any further planned changes to our publications will be consulted with users before being implemented. Minutes of meetings in the user consultation process will be published on our website in summary form.

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