

Use of Stop and Search Powers by the Police in Northern Ireland

1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

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Key Statistics

During the 12 months between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021:

- 26,590 persons were stopped and searched/questioned, 4% more than the previous year. This increase follows 4 consecutive annual decreases however, 2020/21 saw the second lowest number of stops since 2007/08.
- 72% of stops were conducted under the Misuse of Drugs Act* (arrest rate 5%) and 13% of stops were conducted under PACE* (arrest rate 15%).
- 14% of stops were conducted under the Justice and Security Act Section 24* (arrest rate 1%) and 2% under the Justice and Security Act Section 21* (arrest rate less than 1%).
- the number of stop and searches increased under the Misuse of Drugs Act* (by 16%) and PACE* (by 4%) compared to the previous year. Conversely, the number of stops decreased under the Justice and Security Act Section 24* (by 22%) and Section 21* (by 54%).
- counter terrorism powers accounted for 16% of all stops and were at their lowest levels in 13 years.
- 6% of stops resulted in an arrest. An additional 14% resulted in another form of outcome, e.g. Community Resolution Notice.
- 11% (2,996) of those stopped were aged 17 and under. Of these, 2 out of every 3 (66%) were stopped and searched under the Misuse of Drugs Act*.
- 87% of those stopped were male, while 47% were aged 18 to 25.

** alone, or in combination with other powers.*



Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency

Keeping People Safe



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1. Things you need to know about this release

Coverage

Stop and search statistics for Northern Ireland are collated and produced by statisticians seconded to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) from the Northern Ireland and Statistics Research Agency (NISRA).

Stop and Search is an operational tool used to prevent, detect and investigate crime as well as to bring offenders to justice. Police officers have a legal power to stop and search members of the public in certain circumstances, from dealing with incidents of anti-social behaviour, to suspecting an individual is carrying drugs, a weapon or stolen property through to countering terrorism. There are a range of legislative powers available to an officer to carry out this task, including the Police and Criminal Evidence Order (PACE), the Misuse of Drugs Act, the Terrorism Act and the Justice and Security (NI) Act. In most circumstances a police officer will need grounds to search an individual. Some stop and search powers (those under the Justice and Security Act) allow individuals to be searched without grounds, for example, to counter terrorism. Further advice and information regarding stop and search can be found [here](#).

Officers are required to make a record of the details of a stop and search at the time of encounter as outlined in the [PACE code of practice](#). This data is downloaded from a stop and search database, validated and published on a quarterly basis. Statistics are presented on a rolling 12 month basis and this quarterly bulletin presents stop and search statistics for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. An [accompanying spreadsheet](#) is available on our website which outlines the data in this bulletin and historic trends.

Details of how these statistics are collated, reported and used is included in the [Stop and Search User Guide](#). Further information about this publication, including the legislation reported on, can be found in the Background Notes section at the end of the report. The next quarterly update will be published on 25 August 2021.

Users and uses of the statistics

Uses of the statistics, based on user engagement, information requests and satisfaction survey feedback include policy making and policy monitoring, performance monitoring and public interest, by a range of users including PSNI, the Policing Board, media and academics. Full details can be found in the [Stop and Search User Guide](#).

PSNI Statistics Branch welcomes any user feedback on these statistics, which can be provided via the email address on the cover page.

Official Statistics

This bulletin is an Official Statistics publication meaning it complies with the Code of [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#). More information on [Official Statistics](#) is available on the PSNI Statistics website.

2. Summary statistics

Table 1: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned under all legislative powers during April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous 12 months

April 2019 – March 2020		April 2020 – March 2021		Percentage change in number of persons stopped
Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate	
25,450	7%	26,590	6%	+ 4%

More than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person. For this reason the total number of powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned. For example, an individual stopped under PACE and Misuse of Drugs Act will be counted as one person in Table 1 but will have a count of 1 in both the PACE and Misuse of Drugs categories in Table 2, and other subsequent tables displaying the use of each power.

Table 2: Number of times each power was used for a stop and search/question during April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous 12 months⁽¹⁾

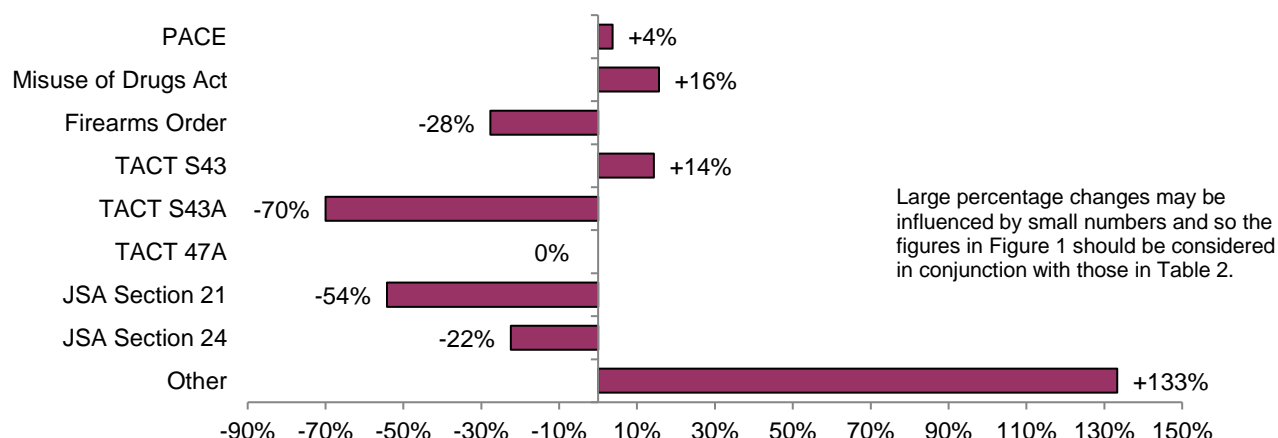
Legislation	April 2019 – March 2020		April 2020 – March 2021	
	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate ⁽²⁾	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate ⁽²⁾
PACE	3,300	20%	3,422	15%
Misuse of Drugs Act	16,495	6%	19,074	5%
Firearms Order	47	26%	34	24%
TACT S43	28	14%	32	6%
TACT S43A	10	0%	3	0%
TACT 47A	0	.	0	.
JSA Section 21	997	1%	456	<1%
JSA Section 24	4,818	1%	3,739	1%
Other ⁽³⁾	21	14%	49	8%

(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned.

(2) For those persons stopped under a combination of legislative powers (1% of stops) and subsequently arrested, the arrest will be counted under each power. Reason for arrest may not be linked to the initial reason of the stop and search.

(3) 'Other' legislative powers are listed in Section 10.2

Figure 1: Percentage change in the number of stop and searches/questions by power during April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous 12 months



3. Levels of stop and search over the longer term (by financial year)

Figure 2: Ten year trend in the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned

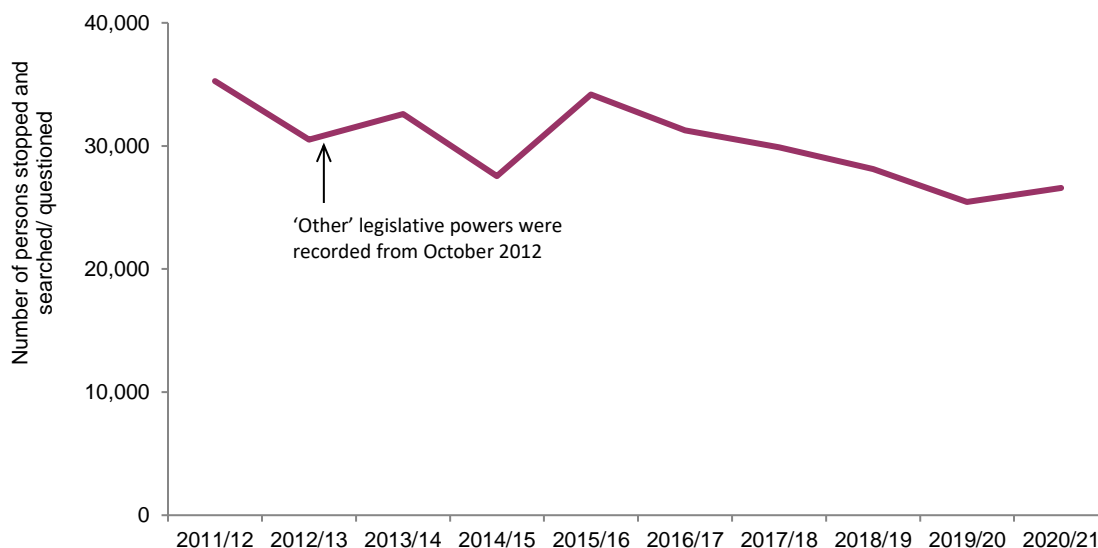


Table 3: Ten year trend in the use of stop and search/question powers

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
PACE / Misuse of Drugs / Firearms	20,746	20,910	24,428	22,189	25,151	21,876	22,628	21,062	19,842	22,530
- Section 43/43A	254	186	173	192	344	265	118	74	38	35
- Section 47A ⁽³⁾	0	0	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA - Section 21	3,511	2,803	2,350	1,922	2,812	2,200	1,505	1,283	997	456
- Section 24	12,699	7,687	6,239	3,906	6,980	7,935	6,245	6,035	4,818	3,739
Other legislative powers	-	294	417	190	97	140	32	79	21	49
Total uses of each legislative power ^(2,4)	37,210	31,880	33,677	28,399	35,384	32,416	30,528	28,553	25,716	26,809
<i>Total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned ^(2,4)</i>	<i>35,268</i>	<i>30,502</i>	<i>32,590</i>	<i>27,539</i>	<i>34,171</i>	<i>31,274</i>	<i>29,882</i>	<i>28,116</i>	<i>25,450</i>	<i>26,590</i>

Table 4: Percentage of stops carried out under non-counter terrorism powers and counter-terrorism powers

PACE / Misuse of Drugs / Firearms	56%	66%	73%	78%	71%	67%	74%	74%	77%	84%
Counter Terrorism Powers ⁽⁵⁾	44%	33%	26%	21%	29%	32%	26%	26%	23%	16%
Other legislative powers	0%	1%	1%	0.7%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%
All Powers ⁽⁷⁾	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(1) Figures in this section are based on financial year.

(2) The difference between **total uses of each legislative power** and **total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned** will be due to persons stopped under combinations of powers being counted under each legislation used (e.g. someone stopped under PACE and the Misuse of Drugs Act will have a count of one under each of these powers).

(3) TACT Section 47A has been in place since March 2011 although the power has only been authorised for use during one period in May 2013.

(4) Searches under the authority of a warrant and searches that have been carried out after an arrest have been excluded from the 2017/18 figures onwards (impact is an approximate 2.5% reduction in the total number of persons stopped).

(5) TACT S43, S43A and JSA S21, S24.

(6) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

(7) Figures from 2004/05 can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet.

4. Persons stopped and searched during the past 12 months

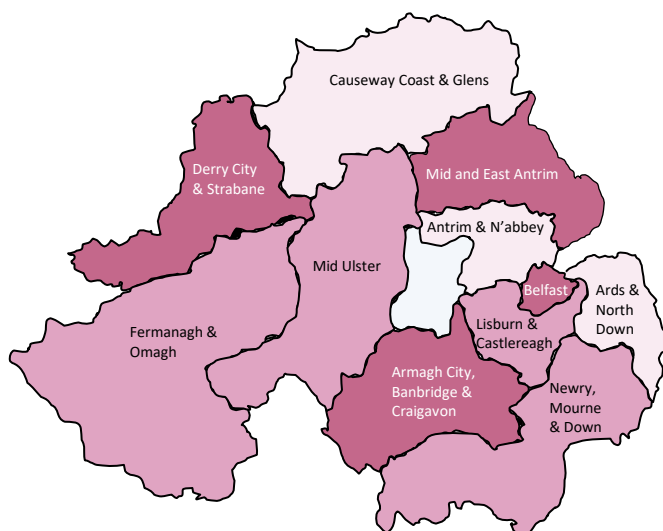
4.1 By policing district

Table 5: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested under all legislative powers during April 2020 to March 2021 by police district

Police District	Total persons stopped	Total persons arrested	Arrest rate ⁽¹⁾
Belfast City	6,473	501	8%
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	1,977	143	7%
Ards & North Down	650	41	6%
Newry, Mourne & Down	1,955	88	5%
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	3,810	168	4%
Mid Ulster	2,293	67	3%
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,432	50	3%
Derry City & Strabane	2,634	181	7%
Causeway Coast & Glens	1,257	59	5%
Mid & East Antrim	2,755	121	4%
Antrim & Newtownabbey	1,354	57	4%
Northern Ireland	26,590	1,476	6%

(1) Although the arrest rate can be used as an indicator of the effectiveness of a stop and search there are a number of other possible outcomes that could indicate a successful search, which are presented in Section 4.3 (Table 11).

Figure 3: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned under all legislative powers per 1,000 population in each police district during April 2020 to March 2021



Police District	Persons stopped per 1,000 population ⁽¹⁾
Belfast City	19
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	14
Ards & North Down	4
Newry, Mourne & Down	11
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	18
Mid Ulster	15
Fermanagh & Omagh	12
Derry City & Strabane	17
Causeway Coast & Glens	9
Mid & East Antrim	20
Antrim & Newtownabbey	9
Northern Ireland	14

(1) Rates per 1,000 are calculated using NISRA's mid-2019 [population estimates](#), the latest available data at police district level.

4.2 By age, gender and ethnicity

Table 6: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested under all legislative powers during April 2020 to March 2021, by age and gender

Persons stopped and searched/questioned					Persons subsequently arrested			
Age Group ^(1,2)	Male	Female	Unknown/Other	Total	Male	Female	Unknown/Other	Total
12 and under	50	2	0	52	0	0	0	0
13 to 17	2,459	484	1	2,944	101	13	0	114
18 to 25	10,541	1,831	3	12,375	426	58	0	484
26 to 35	6,146	707	1	6,854	461	60	0	521
36 to 45	2,386	308	1	2,695	211	34	1	246
46 to 55	1,114	126	1	1,241	73	12	0	85
56 to 65	312	32	0	344	19	4	0	23
Over 65	71	11	0	82	3	0	0	3
Not specified	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Total	23,082	3,501	7	26,590	1,294	181	1	1,476

(1) Age may be officer perceived.

(2) Figures are provided in the accompanying spreadsheet by single year of age for the 13 to 17 year group.

Table 7: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested under all legislative powers during April 2020 to March 2021, by ethnicity

	Persons stopped and searched/questioned	Persons subsequently arrested
White	25,340	1,372
Irish Traveller ⁽¹⁾	391	48
Other Ethnic Group	280	21
Black	159	7
Asian ⁽²⁾	148	10
Mixed	100	8
Not specified	172	10
Total	26,590	1,476

(1) Ethnicity may be officer perceived. A degree of undercounting may exist for the Irish Traveller category as some Irish Travellers are likely to be categorised as White.

(2) Asian group now includes people that identify as Chinese. Previously people who identify as Chinese were grouped as 'Chinese or Other'.

Table 8: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested during April 2020 to March 2021, by gender and power ⁽¹⁾

Persons stopped and searched/questioned ⁽¹⁾					Persons subsequently arrested ^(1,2)			
	Male	Female	Unknown / Other	Total	Male	Female	Unknown / Other	Total
PACE	2,994	427	1	3,422	454	75	0	529
Misuse of Drugs	16,379	2,689	6	19,074	797	103	1	901
Firearms	31	3	0	34	8	0	0	8
TACT S43	31	1	0	32	2	0	0	2
TACT S43A	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	392	64	0	456	1	1	0	2
JSA Section 24	3,410	329	0	3,739	46	2	0	48
Other	40	9	0	49	3	1	0	4

(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned. Similarly, the sum of arrests will be greater than the total number of persons arrested. (2) Reason for arrest may not be linked to the initial reason of the stop and search.

Table 9: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned during April 2020 to March 2021, by age and power ⁽¹⁾

	Persons stopped and searched/questioned									Total
	12 and under	13 to 17	18 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56 to 65	Over 65	Not specified	
PACE	38	835	1,154	774	376	175	55	15	0	3,422
Misuse of Drugs Act	13	1,970	9,851	5,004	1,596	539	85	14	2	19,074
Firearms Order	0	8	5	6	7	4	3	1	0	34
TACT S43	0	0	6	10	9	5	2	0	0	32
TACT S43A	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	0	14	154	107	71	68	31	11	0	456
JSA Section 24	1	121	1,260	987	672	473	181	43	1	3,739
Other	0	13	14	15	4	3	0	0	0	49

- (1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned.
(2) Age may be officer perceived.
(3) Figures are provided in the accompanying spreadsheet by single year of age for the 13 to 17 year group.

Table 10: Percentage of persons stopped and searched/questioned in each age group by power during April 2020 to March 2021

	Persons stopped and searched/questioned							
	12 and under	13 to 17	18 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56 to 65	Over 65
PACE	73%	28%	9%	11%	14%	14%	15%	18%
Misuse of Drugs Act	25%	67%	79%	73%	58%	43%	24%	17%
Firearms Order	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
Counter Terrorism ⁽¹⁾	2%	5%	11%	16%	28%	43%	60%	64%
Other	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	0%	0%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (1) TACT S43, S43A and JSA S21 and S24.
(2) Age may be officer perceived.
(3) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

4.3 Outcomes of stop and searches/questions

Table 11: Principal outcome of persons stopped and searched/questioned under all legislative powers during April 2020 to March 2021

Outcome	Number	%
Arrest	1,476	6%
Community Resolution	2,091	8%
Report to PPS	1,696	6%
Penalty Notice for Disorder	35	<1%
No Further Action Disposal	21,292	80%
Total	26,590	100%

- (1) The outcome may not be linked to the initial reason of the stop and search.
(2) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5. Frequency of use of powers

Table 12: Number of times all powers were used during April 2020 to March 2021 by quarter ⁽¹⁾

	April to June	July to September	October to December	January to March	Total
PACE	684	769	1,204	765	3,422
Misuse of Drugs Act	5,209	4,068	4,559	5,238	19,074
Firearms Order	15	4	11	4	34
TACT S43	9	14	3	6	32
TACT S43A	1	1	1	0	3
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	78	136	118	124	456
JSA Section 24	783	1,058	761	1,137	3,739
Other	28	2	9	10	49
Total ⁽¹⁾	6,807	6,052	6,666	7,284	26,809

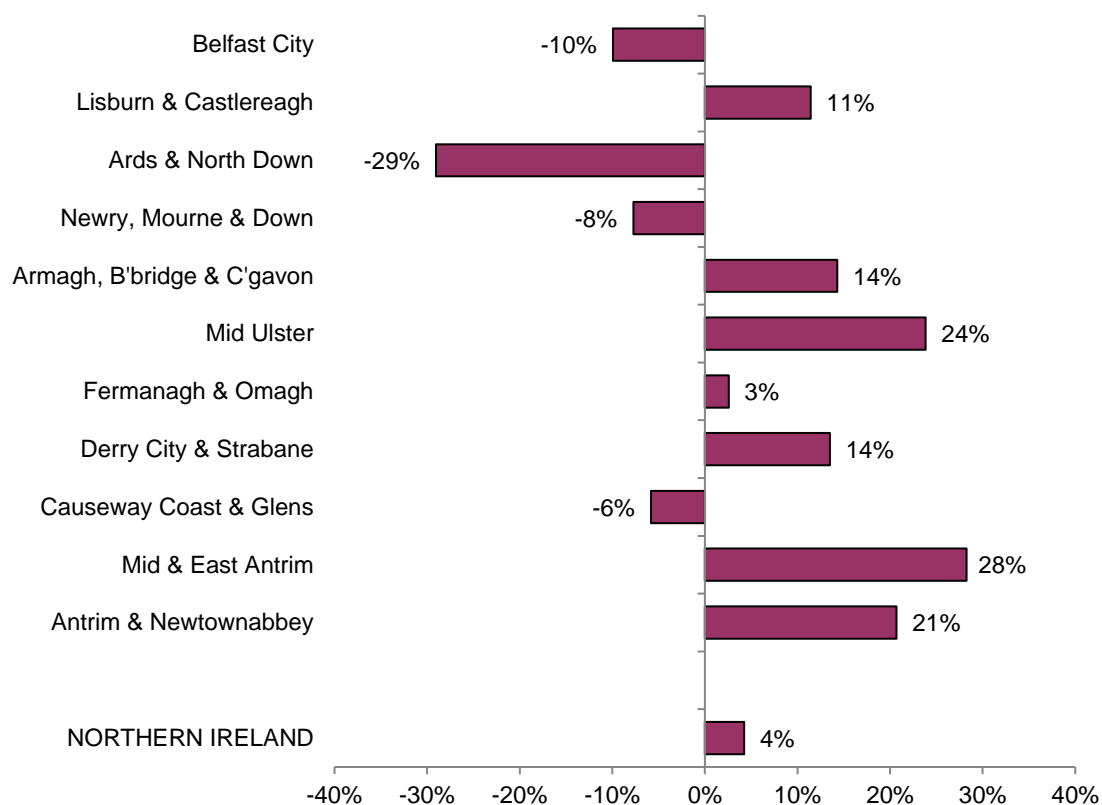
(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned.

Table 13: Number of times all powers were used during April 2020 to March 2021 by police district ⁽¹⁾

Police District	PACE	Misuse of Drugs	Firearms Order	TACT S43	TACT S43A	TACT 47A	JSA S21	JSA S24	Other
Belfast City	1,091	4,575	12	16	3	0	133	708	8
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	229	1,549	1	0	0	0	41	189	0
Ards & North Down	127	365	1	0	0	0	72	90	0
Newry, Mourne & Down	248	1,522	8	1	0	0	18	173	0
Armagh City, B'bridge & C'gavon	426	2,824	2	3	0	0	48	530	9
Mid Ulster	314	1,747	1	0	0	0	24	217	3
Fermanagh & Omagh	112	1,207	2	2	0	0	5	101	6
Derry City & Strabane	275	1,629	4	10	0	0	13	717	0
Causeway Coast & Glens	142	803	2	0	0	0	26	289	1
Mid & East Antrim	289	2,008	1	0	0	0	18	432	22
Antrim & Newtownabbey	169	845	0	0	0	0	58	293	0
Northern Ireland	3,422	19,074	34	32	3	0	456	3,739	49

(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned.

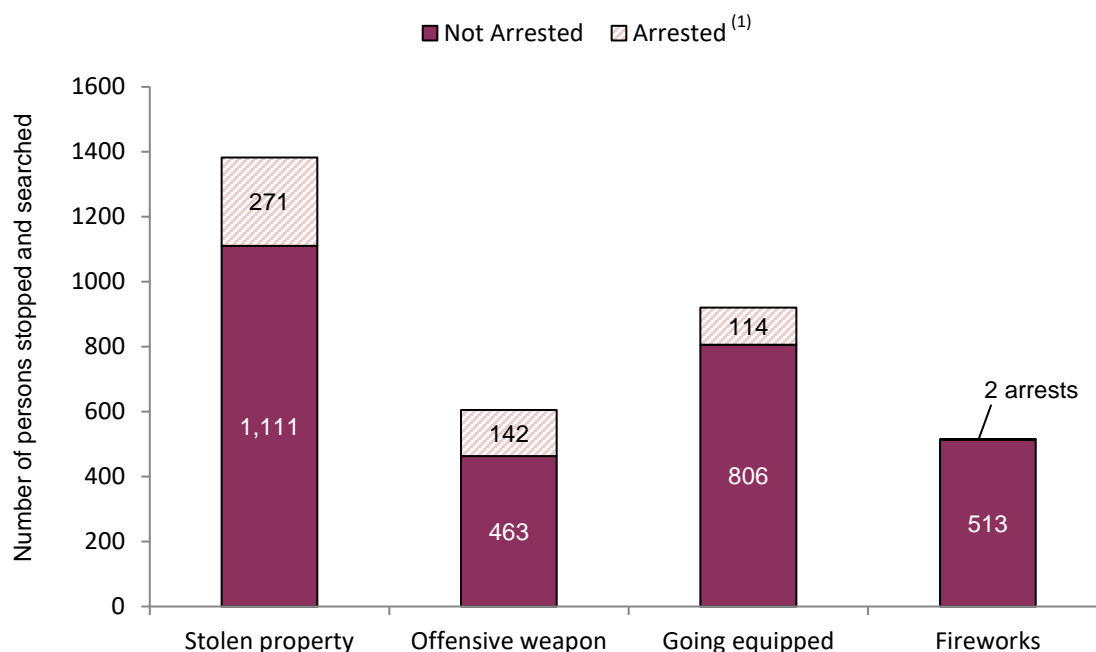
Figure 4: Percentage change in the use of all legislative powers by policing district during April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous 12 months



(1) The percentage change in the use of individual powers by policing district can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6. Reason for search under PACE

Figure 5: Number of persons stopped and searched under PACE during April 2020 to March 2021 by reason for search



(1) The reason for arrest may not be linked to the initial reason of the search.

7. Vehicles stopped and searched during the past 12 months

Vehicle searches include vehicle-only searches as well as those in which a vehicle was searched together with any persons in it. **Therefore figures in Table 14 should not be added to other figures in this report to get the total number of stop and searches** as this would result in the double counting of an occupant of a vehicle searched.

Table 14: Number of times each power was used to stop and search a vehicle during April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous 12 months⁽¹⁾

Legislation ⁽²⁾	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021	Percentage change
	Number of vehicles stopped	Number of vehicles stopped	
PACE	722	783	8%
Misuse of Drugs Act	5,271	7,095	35%
Firearms Order	22	17	-23%
TACT S43	19	19	0%
TACT S43A	11	5	-55%
TACT 47A	0	0	-
JSA Section 24	10,428	4,366	-58%
Other	12	25	108%

(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search a vehicle, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of vehicles stopped and searched.

(2) JSA S21 is excluded from this table as it is a stop and question power.

8. Comparisons with England and Wales 2019/20⁽¹⁾

Figure 6: Number of stops per 1,000 population during 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 by police force^(1,2,3)

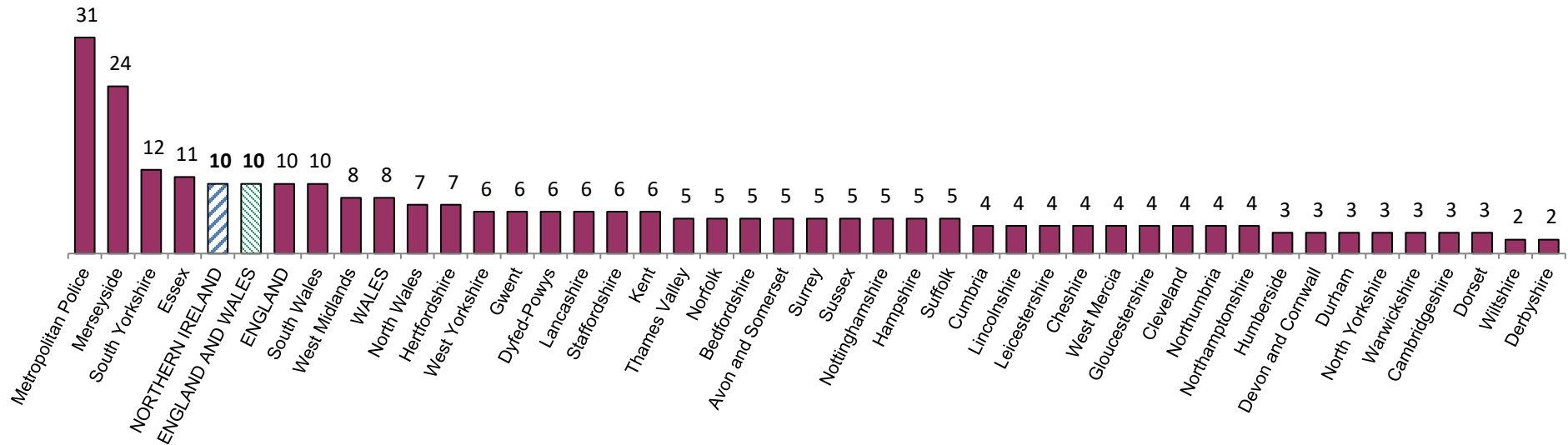
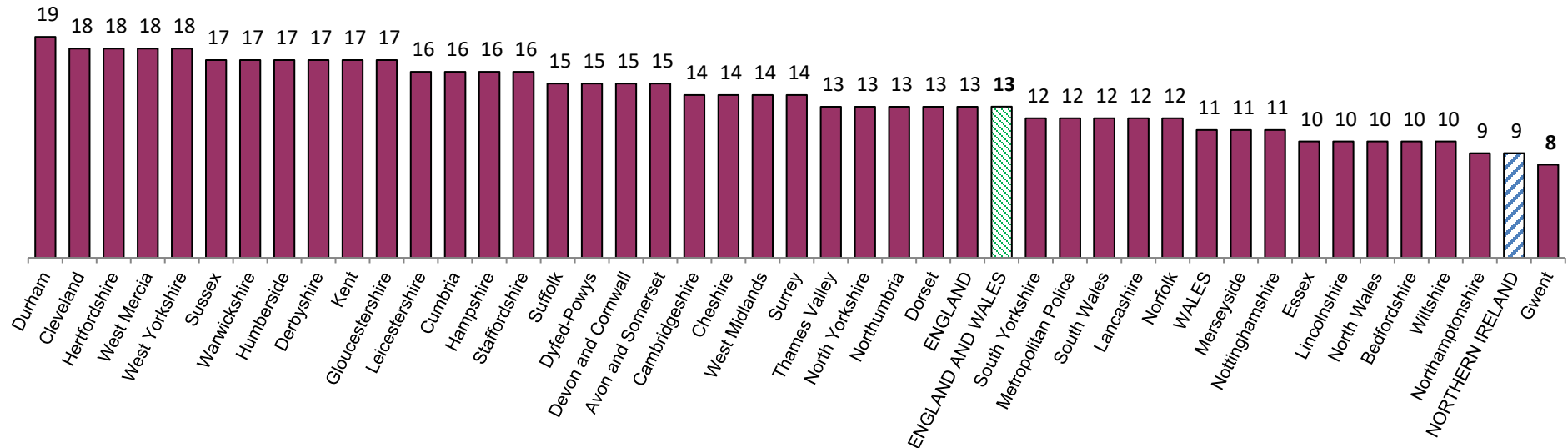


Figure 7: Percentage of stops resulting in an arrest during 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 by police force^(1,2)

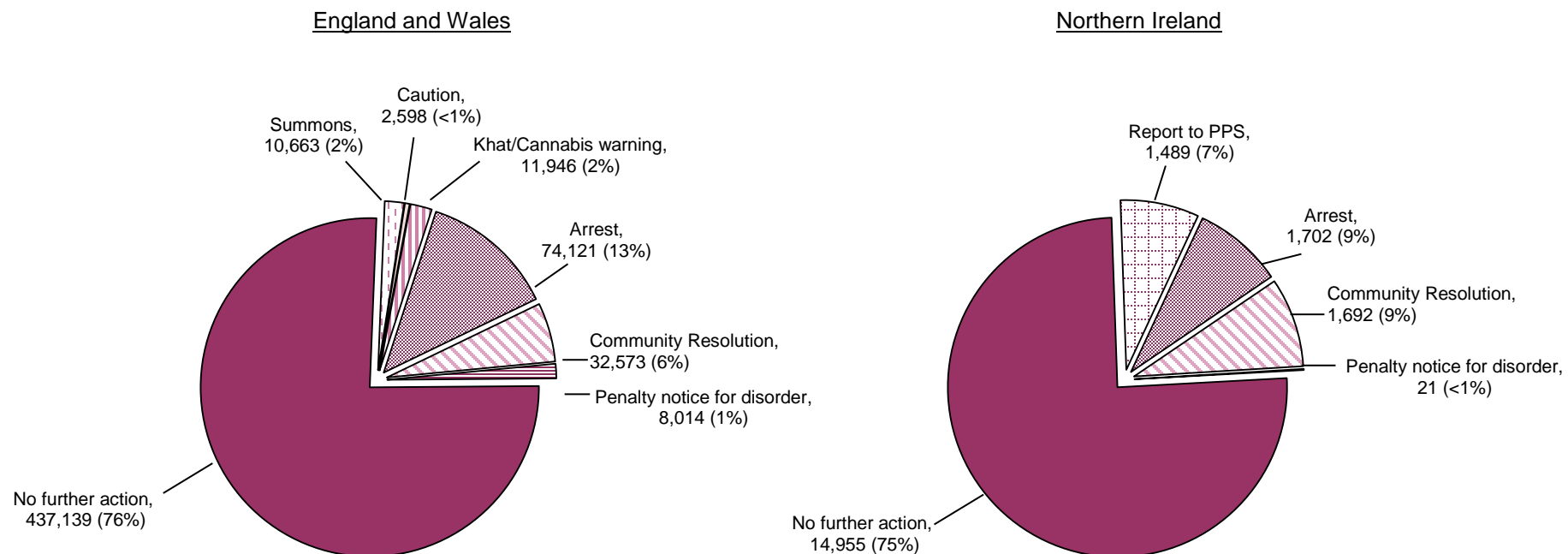


(1) The latest data available for England and Wales is 2019/20 (*Police powers and procedures, England and Wales, year ending March 2020*). For comparability, the 2019/20 NI figures are also shown. England and Wales figures exclude Greater Manchester Police, who were unable to provide complete data for 2019/20.

(2) In the interest of comparability, the NI figure excludes stops under JSA Section 21 and 24.

(3) Rates per 1,000 are calculated using NISRA's mid-2019 [population estimates](#).

Figure 8: Principal outcome of stop and search during 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020^(1,2)



24 out of every 100 stops in England and Wales resulted in an outcome

25 out of every 100 stops in Northern Ireland resulted in an outcome

- (1) The latest data available for England and Wales is 2019/20 (*Police powers and procedures, England and Wales, year ending March 2020*). For comparability, the 2019/20 NI figures are also shown. England and Wales figures exclude Greater Manchester Police, who were unable to provide complete data for 2019/20.
- (2) In the interest of comparability, the NI figure excludes stops under JSA Section 21 and 24.
- (3) England and Wales figures include vehicle only searches (2% of all searches). Northern Ireland figures do not.
- (4) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

10. Background notes

Further information on how these statistics are collated, reported and used is included in the Stop and Search User Guide which can be found [here](#).

10.1 Persons, vehicles or both searched

Officers record if each stop and search involved (i) only a person, (ii) only a vehicle or (iii) both.

All of the statistics reported in this publication, except Table 14, are a count of persons stopped and searched, that is, those stops under (i) **plus** those stops under (iii). Table 14 presents the number of vehicles stopped and searched, that is, those stops under (ii) **plus** stops under (iii).

Therefore figures in Table 14 should not be added to other figures in this report to get the total number of stop and searches as this would result in the double counting of an occupant of a vehicle searched.

10.2 Stop and search legislation

The following table summarises the legislative powers available to a PSNI officer to perform a stop and search.

Legislation	What the police can search for
The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, Section 3	Stolen property, going equipped to steal, offensive weapons including a blade or point, fireworks.
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Section 23	Controlled drugs
Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, Section 53	Firearms
Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, Sections 21 and 24	Section 21 gives a police officer the authority to stop and question an individual to establish their identity and movements. Section 24 gives a police officer the authority to search for munitions and wireless apparatus. This can be done if (1) an officer has reasonable suspicion that he will find such items, or (2) he was authorised from an ACC.
Terrorism Act 2000, Section 43 and 43A	Anything which may constitute evidence that the individual is a terrorist, where an officer must have reasonable suspicion of terrorism-related activity. Section 43 gives a police officer the authority to search an individual. Section 43A gives a police officer the authority to search a vehicle as well as any individual he reasonably suspects to be a terrorist.
Terrorism Act 2000, Section 47A	Anything which may constitute evidence that the individual is a terrorist, but an officer may not necessarily have reasonable suspicion of terrorism-related activity but the search must occur within an area authorised made by a senior police officer and where necessary confirmed by the Secretary of State.

The PSNI have a number of other legislative powers that give them the authority to carry out a stop and search. These are:

- Section 139B of the Criminal Justice Act 1988
- Schedule 5 to the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011
- Article 6 Crossbows (Northern Ireland) Order 1988
- Article 25 Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
- Article 23B of The Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987
- The Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.

These are less frequently used powers and are reported collectively under '*Other legislative powers*' in this report.

Further information on these powers can be found at legislation.gov.uk.

10.3 Longer term trend comparability

An internal review was carried out to assess the PSNI's compliance with PACE legislation governing the recording of stop and searches under Articles 3-5. The review found that searches under the authority of a warrant and searches carried out after an arrest had been recorded, and subsequently reported, as searches under Articles 3–5 when in fact they are governed by other articles of PACE. In order to fully comply with PACE legislation and more accurately report the usage of stop and search powers, searches under the authority of a warrant and searches that have been carried out after an arrest have been excluded from the 2017/18 figures onwards. Figures reported for the period pre-2017/18 still contain such searches. The impact is an approximate 2.5% reduction in the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned from 2017/18 onwards.