



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

1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

Date of Publication:

14 February 2024

Frequency:

Quarterly

Issued by:

PSNI Statistics Branch
Lisnasharragh
42 Montgomery Road
Belfast
BT6 9LD
[PSNI Statistics](#)

☎ 02890 650222 Ext. 24135

✉ statistics@psni.police.uk

Key Statistics

During the 12 months between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023:

- 25,535 persons were stopped and searched/questioned, 17% more than the previous 12 months.
- 68% of stops were conducted under the Misuse of Drugs Act* (arrest rate 5%) and 10% of stops were conducted under the Police and Criminal Evidence Order* (arrest rate 21%).
- 17% of stops were conducted under the Justice and Security Act Section 24* (arrest rate 1%) and 4% under the Justice and Security Act Section 21* (arrest rate 1%).
- all powers, except for the Firearms Order, were used more than during the previous 12 months. Notably, the use of the Justice and Security Act * increased by 77% (from 3,005 to 5,321) and the use of the Misuse of Drugs Act* by 7% (from 16,283 to 17,386). Comparatively, the use of the Police and Criminal Evidence Order and other less frequently used powers increased by a smaller number.
- counter-terrorism powers accounted for 22% of all powers used, compared to 14% during the previous 12 months.
- 6% of stops resulted in an arrest. An additional 16% resulted in another form of outcome, e.g. Community Resolution Notice.
- 8 of the 11 police districts carried out more stops than the previous 12 months, the largest increase being in Ards and North Down (121%).
- 9% (2,291) of those stopped were aged 17 and under. Of these, approximately 2 out of every 3 (68%) were stopped and searched under the Misuse of Drugs Act*.
- 85% of those stopped were male, while 38% were aged 18 to 25.
- there were 13 persons stopped for every 1,000 people in Northern Ireland.

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

	Page
1. Things you need to know about this release	2
2. Summary statistics	3
3. Levels of stop and search over the longer term (by financial year)	4
4. Persons stopped and searched during the past 12 months	5
4.1 <i>By policing district</i>	5
4.2 <i>By age, gender and ethnicity</i>	6
4.3 <i>Outcomes of stop and searches</i>	7
5. Frequency of use of powers	8
6. Reason for search under PACE	10
7. Vehicles stopped and searched during the past 12 months	10
8. Comparisons with England and Wales by financial year	11
9. Background notes	13

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 (TACT) and the Justice and Security (NI) Act (JSA). 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 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. 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 in May 2024.

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 Practice for Official Statistics](#) as follows:

- Trustworthiness: the statistics are impartial, independent and released in an open and transparent manner in accordance with a pre-announced publication schedule
- Quality: the statistics are produced using robust and relevant data sources which undergo continuous quality improvement and assurance checks
- Value: the statistics strive to meet user needs informed by ongoing feedback, providing sufficient detail which is widely accessible.

2. Summary Statistics

Table 1: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned under all legislative powers during January 2023 to December 2023 compared to the previous 12 months

January 2022 - December 2022		January 2023 - December 2023		Percentage change in number of persons stopped
Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate	
21,910	6%	25,535	6%	17%

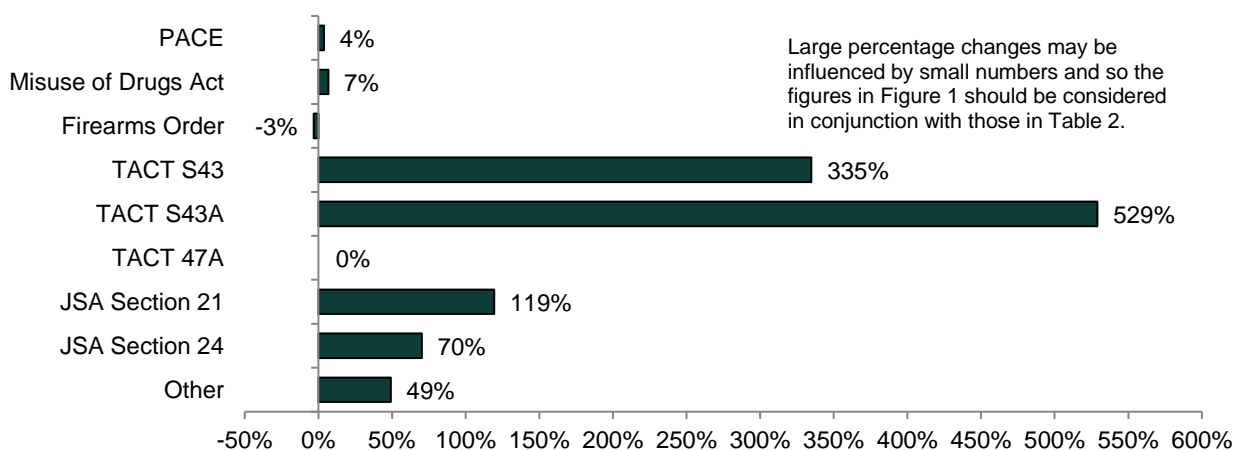
More than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person. For this reason the total number of powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned. For example, an individual stopped under PACE and Misuse of Drugs Act will be counted as 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 January 2023 to December 2023 compared to the previous 12 months⁽¹⁾

Legislation	January 2022 - December 2022		January 2023 - December 2023	
	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate ⁽²⁾	Number of persons stopped	Subsequent arrest rate ⁽²⁾
PACE	2,516	21%	2,612	21%
Misuse of Drugs Act	16,283	5%	17,386	5%
Firearms Order	65	22%	63	29%
TACT S43	66	9%	287	<1%
TACT S43A	31	0%	195	0%
TACT 47A	0	.	0	.
JSA Section 21	416	1%	913	1%
JSA Section 24	2,589	1%	4,408	1%
Other ⁽³⁾	59	0%	88	5%

- (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. Arrest rates are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- (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 January 2023 to December 2023 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

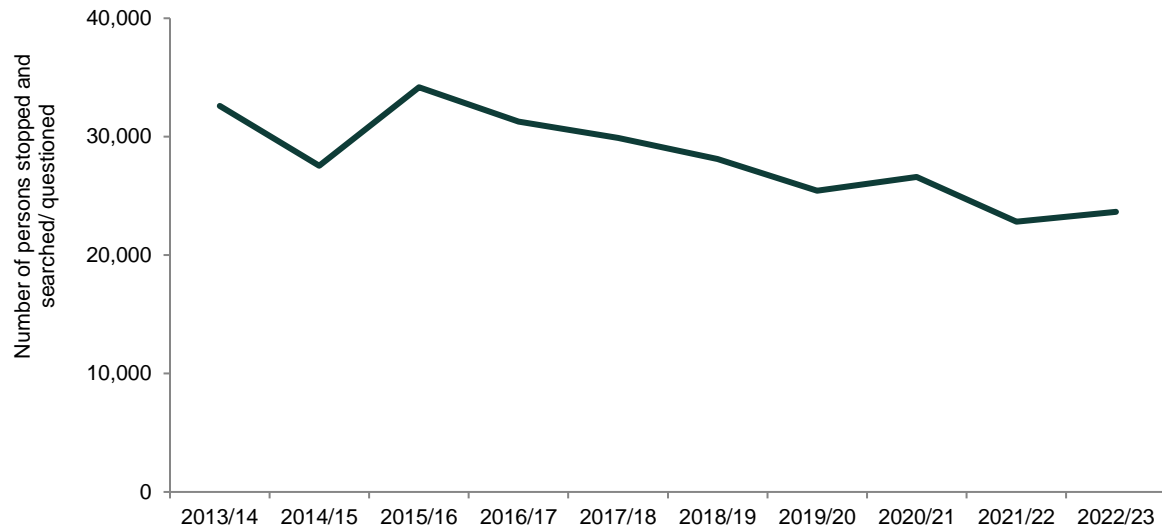


Table 3: Ten year trend in the use of stop and search/question powers

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
PACE / Misuse of Drugs / Firearms	24,428	22,189	25,151	21,876	22,628	21,062	19,842	22,530	19,136	19,977
TACT - Section 43/43A	173	192	344	265	118	74	38	35	57	91
- Section 47A ⁽³⁾	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA - Section 21	2,350	1,922	2,812	2,200	1,505	1,283	997	456	471	616
- Section 24	6,239	3,906	6,980	7,935	6,245	6,035	4,818	3,739	3,195	3,037
Other legislative powers	417	190	97	140	32	79	21	49	93	85
Total uses of each legislative power ^(2,4)	33,677	28,399	35,384	32,416	30,528	28,533	25,716	26,809	22,952	23,806
<i>Total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned ^(2,4)</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>	<i>22,823</i>	<i>23,650</i>

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

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
PACE / Misuse of Drugs / Firearms	73%	78%	71%	67%	74%	74%	77%	84%	83%	84%
Counter Terrorism Powers ⁽⁵⁾	26%	21%	29%	32%	26%	26%	23%	16%	16%	16%
Other legislative powers	1%	0.7%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%
All Powers ^(6,7)	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

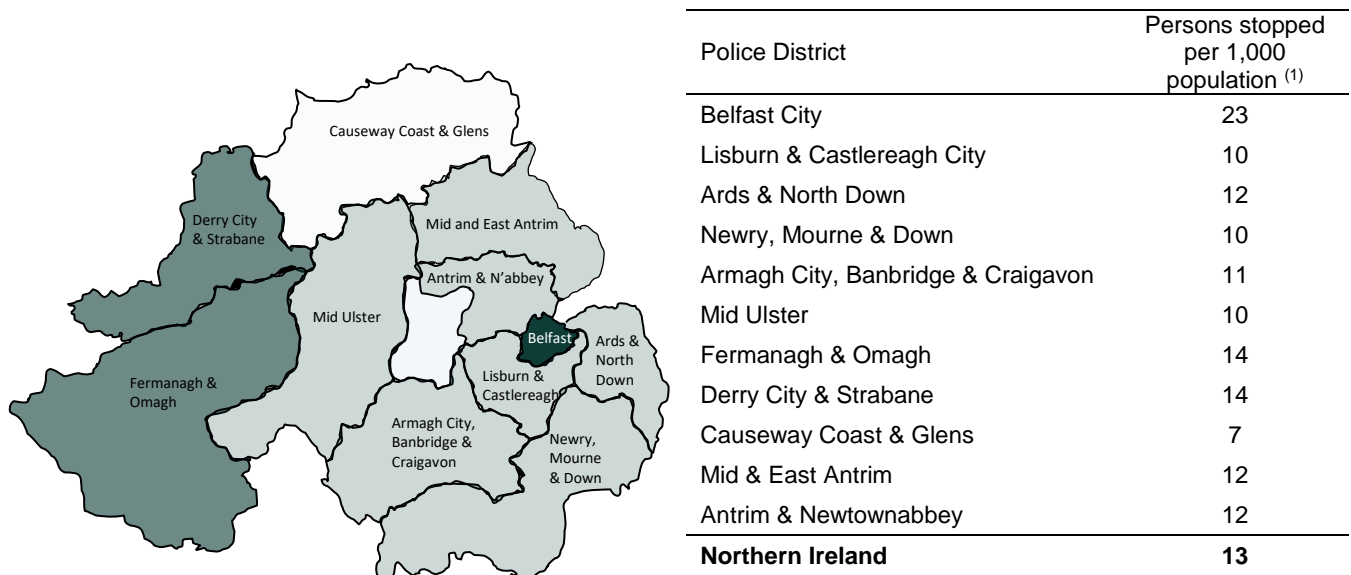
4.1 By policing district

Table 5: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested under all legislative powers during January 2023 to December 2023 by police district

Police District	Total persons stopped	Total persons arrested	Arrest rate ⁽¹⁾
Belfast City	8,066	658	8%
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	1,461	92	6%
Ards & North Down	2,000	64	3%
Newry, Mourne & Down	1,827	80	4%
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	2,429	143	6%
Mid Ulster	1,512	68	4%
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,672	57	3%
Derry City & Strabane	2,152	129	6%
Causeway Coast & Glens	1,021	62	6%
Mid & East Antrim	1,647	63	4%
Antrim & Newtownabbey	1,748	73	4%
Northern Ireland	25,535	1,489	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 January 2023 to December 2023



(1) Rates per 1,000 are calculated using NISRA's mid-2022 [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 January 2023 to December 2023, by age and gender

Age Group ^(1,2)	Persons stopped and searched/questioned				Persons subsequently arrested			
	Male	Female	Unknown/Other	Total	Male	Female	Unknown/Other	Total
12 and under	49	8	0	57	5	0	0	5
13 to 17	1,811	419	4	2,234	67	8	0	75
18 to 25	8,114	1,582	5	9,701	381	47	1	429
26 to 35	5,905	1,062	2	6,969	506	72	0	578
36 to 45	3,342	528	0	3,870	243	37	0	280
46 to 55	1,607	237	0	1,844	82	16	0	98
56 to 65	618	56	0	674	17	1	0	18
Over 65	158	16	0	174	5	0	0	5
Not specified	3	3	6	12	1	0	0	1
Total	21,607	3,911	17	25,535	1,307	181	1	1,489

(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 January 2023 to December 2023, by ethnicity

	Persons stopped and searched/questioned	Persons subsequently arrested
White	24,045	1,335
Irish Traveller ⁽¹⁾	399	58
Other Ethnic Group	409	38
Black	312	34
Asian	215	21
Mixed	106	3
Not specified	49	0
Total	25,535	1,489

(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.

Table 8: Number of persons stopped and searched/questioned and subsequently arrested during January 2023 to December 2023, 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	2,191	417	4	2,612	459	90	1	550
Misuse of Drugs	14,487	2,891	8	17,386	793	87	0	880
Firearms	59	4	0	63	17	1	0	18
TACT S43	282	5	0	287	1	0	0	1
TACT S43A	189	6	0	195	0	0	0	0
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	737	175	1	913	5	0	0	5
JSA Section 24	3,983	421	4	4,408	46	3	0	49
Other	80	8	0	88	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 January 2023 to December 2023, 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	41	514	703	727	394	162	58	12	1	2,612
Misuse of Drugs Act	15	1,542	7,643	5,048	2,261	636	209	27	5	17,386
Firearms Order	0	12	21	14	10	4	2	0	0	63
TACT S43	0	0	36	26	102	81	33	9	0	287
TACT S43A	0	0	28	23	58	63	20	3	0	195
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	0	29	213	191	193	173	85	27	2	913
JSA Section 24	1	138	1,109	997	954	801	305	99	4	4,408
Other	0	8	37	17	10	14	0	2	0	88

- (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 January 2023 to December 2023

	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	72%	23%	7%	10%	10%	8%	8%	7%	
Misuse of Drugs Act	26%	69%	78%	72%	57%	33%	29%	15%	
Firearms Order	0%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	0%	
Counter Terrorism ⁽¹⁾	2%	7%	14%	18%	33%	58%	62%	77%	
Other	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	0%	1%	
	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 January 2023 to December 2023

Outcome	Number	%
Arrest	1,489	6%
Community Resolution	2,231	9%
Report to PPS	1,705	7%
Penalty Notice for Disorder	32	<1%
No Further Action Disposal	20,078	79%
Total	25,535	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 January 2023 to December 2023 by quarter ⁽¹⁾

	January to March	April to June	July to September	October to December	Total
PACE	584	539	736	753	2,612
Misuse of Drugs Act	4,296	4,385	4,408	4,297	17,386
Firearms Order	17	10	16	20	63
TACT S43	11	56	93	127	287
TACT S43A	9	31	62	93	195
TACT 47A	0	0	0	0	0
JSA Section 21	290	314	177	132	913
JSA Section 24	1,090	1,611	1,036	671	4,408
Other	43	21	16	8	88
Total ⁽¹⁾	6,340	6,967	6,544	6,101	25,952

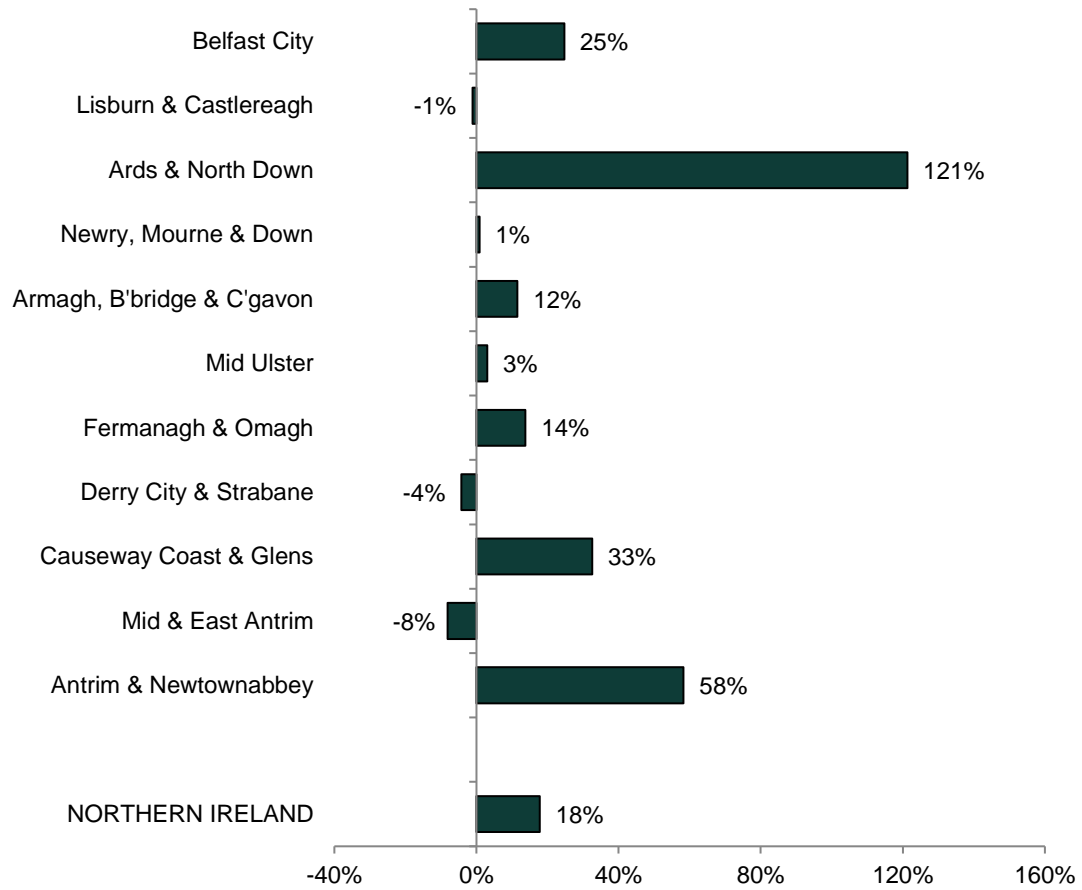
(1) As more than one legislative power can be used to stop and search/question a person, the sum of the powers used will be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched/questioned.

Table 13: Number of times all powers were used during January 2023 to December 2023 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	957	5,511	17	268	190	0	242	1,147	7
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	181	1,069	8	2	2	0	24	186	0
Ards & North Down	92	716	2	0	0	0	336	829	54
Newry, Mourne & Down	181	1,462	5	1	0	0	38	148	0
Armagh City, B'bridge & C'gavon	227	1,981	5	6	1	0	48	183	2
Mid Ulster	126	1,157	0	3	1	0	43	207	0
Fermanagh & Omagh	182	1,357	3	0	0	0	31	86	17
Derry City & Strabane	206	1,174	9	3	0	0	39	731	0
Causeway Coast & Glens	127	706	12	1	0	0	48	129	7
Mid & East Antrim	210	1,294	1	0	0	0	6	143	0
Antrim & Newtownabbey	123	959	1	3	1	0	58	619	1
Northern Ireland	2,612	17,386	63	287	195	0	913	4,408	88

(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.

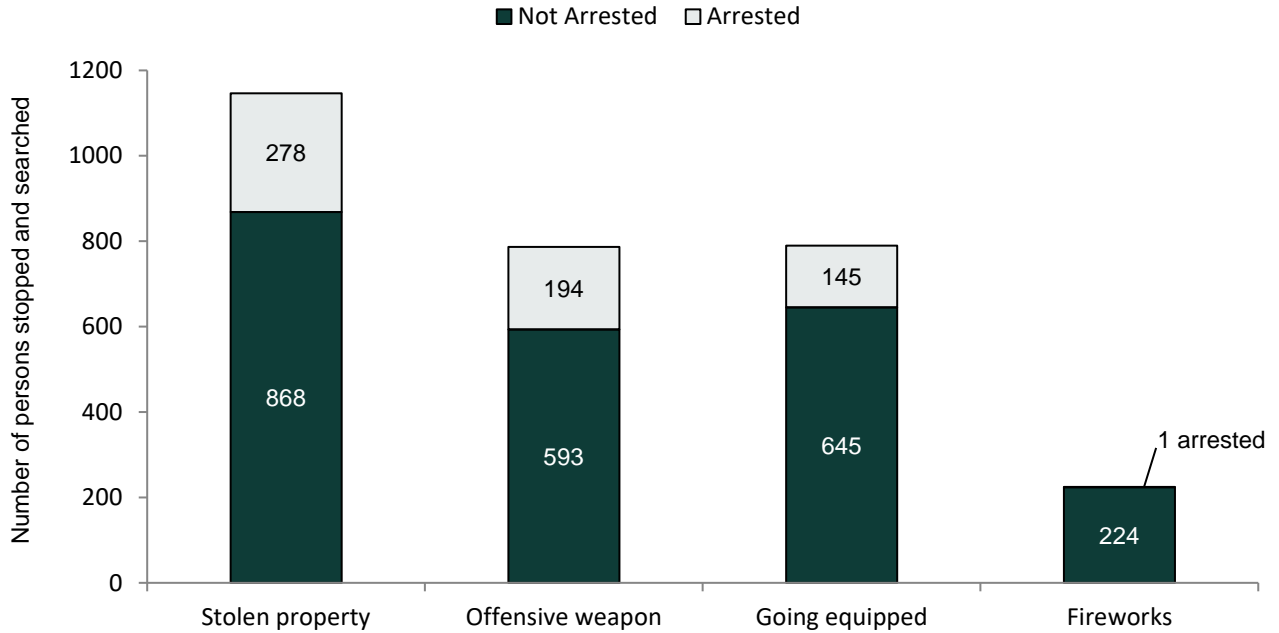
Figure 4: Percentage change in the use of all legislative powers by policing district during January 2023 to December 2023 compared to the previous 12 months



(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 January 2023 to December 2023 by reason for search



- (1) As more than one reason can be used to stop and search a person, the sum of the reasons may be greater than the total number of persons stopped and searched under PACE.
 (2) 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 January 2023 to December 2023 compared to the previous 12 months ⁽¹⁾

Legislation ⁽²⁾	January 2022 - December 2022	January 2023 - December 2023	Percentage change
	Number of vehicles stopped	Number of vehicles stopped	
PACE	483	480	-1%
Misuse of Drugs Act	5,958	6,788	14%
Firearms Order	30	35	17%
TACT S43	39	202	418%
TACT S43A	31	204	558%
TACT 47A	0	0	-
JSA Section 24	3,105	5,729	85%
Other	20	41	105%

- (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.

Figure 6: Number of stops per 1,000 population during 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 by police force^(1,2,3)

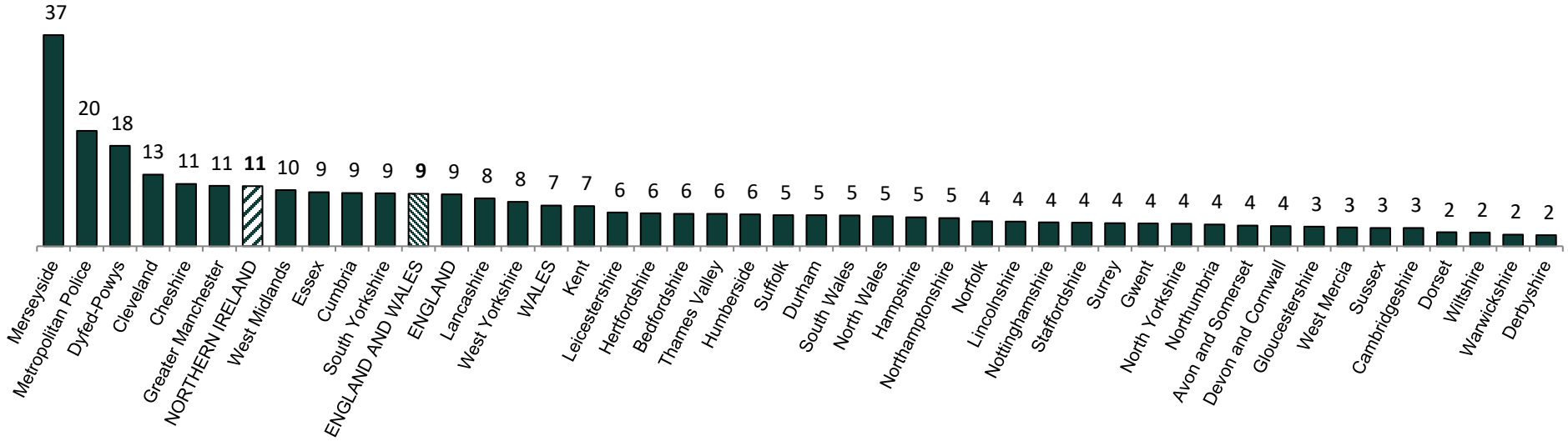
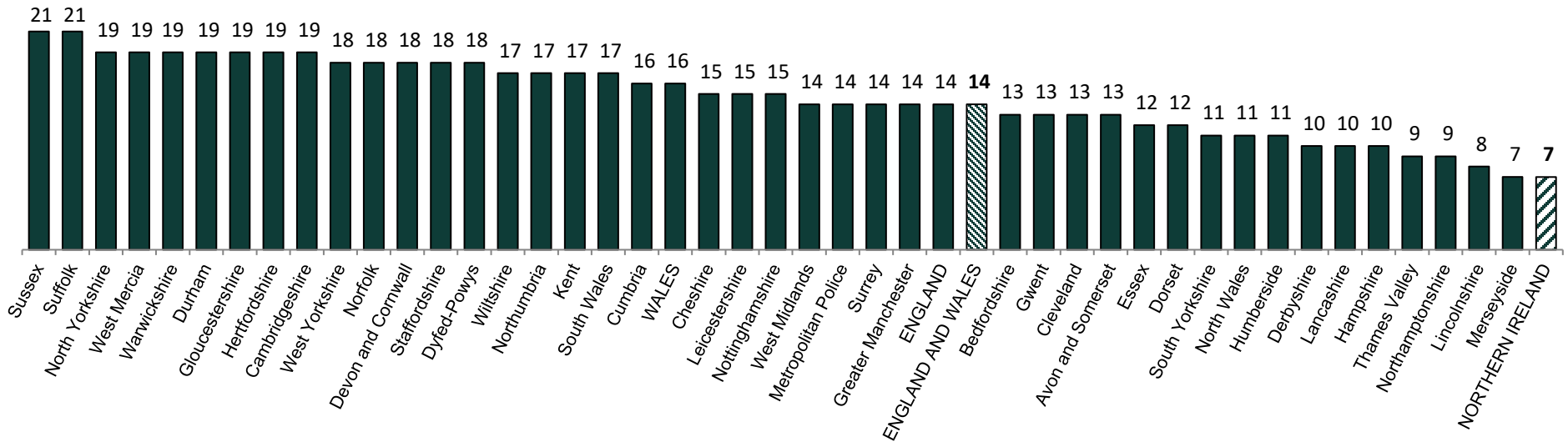
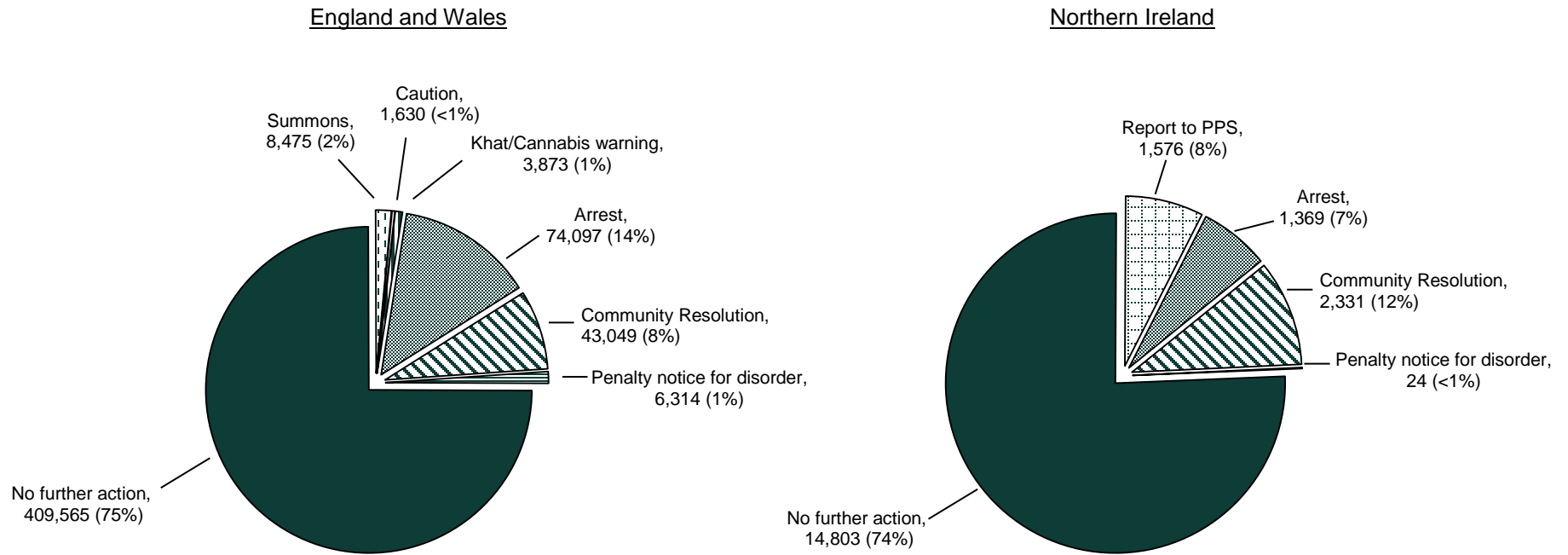


Figure 7: Percentage of stops resulting in an arrest during 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 by police force^(1,2)



(1) The latest data available for England and Wales is 2022/23 (*Police powers and procedures, England and Wales, year ending March 2023*). For comparability, the 2022/23 NI figures are also shown.
 (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-2022 [population estimates](#).

Figure 8: Principal outcome of stop and search during 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023^(1,2)



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

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

- (1) The latest data available for England and Wales is 2022/23 (*Police powers and procedures, England and Wales, year ending March 2023*). For comparability, the 2022/23 NI figures are also shown.
- (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 (3% of all searches). Northern Ireland figures do not.
- (4) 'No further action' figures for England and Wales include voluntary attendance, verbal warning, seizure of property, guardian intervention and other action.
- (5) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

9. 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.

The figures in this report are the number of stop and search incidents rather than the number of unique individuals stopped and searched, that is, multiple searches on the same people are counted as separate incidents.

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.