

Public opinion research on political party finance issues in Northern Ireland

- 1.1. Tracking research was commissioned to measure the effectiveness of the Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign ahead of the 4 June European Parliamentary elections. Three waves of research were conducted in February/March (pre-wave), March/April (mid-wave) and May/June (post-wave) 2009. For each wave, interviews were conducted with a representative sample of just under 1,000 adults in Northern Ireland (a total of 2,945 people were interviewed across all three waves).
 - 1.2. A number of questions relating to political party funding were included on the survey. Key findings are set out below:
- 2 Availability of information on party donations

Percentage of respondents who think that information about who donates money to political parties in Northern Ireland should be:

	Pre-wave %	Mid-wave %	Post-wave %
Made available to the public	64	63	65
Don't mind	26	25	24
Kept confidential	8	10	9
Don't know	3	1	2

- Over six in ten (63-65%) felt that information about who donates money to political parties in Northern Ireland should be made available to the public, about a quarter (24-26%) did not mind either way, and around one in ten (8-10%) said that it should be kept confidential.
- Men were more likely than women to say donation information should be made available to the public, and women were more likely than men to report that they did not mind either way.

3 Confidence in the enforcement of political party finance rules

Percentage of respondents confident that when a political party or a politician is caught breaking the rules on political party finance, the authorities will take appropriate action:

	Pre-wave %	Mid-wave %	Post-wave %
Very confident	10	9	7
Fairly confident	40	27	24
Not very confident	28	32	30
Not at all confident	12	26	32
Don't know	10	6	6

- In the pre-wave survey half (50%) of respondents said that they were very or fairly confident that the authorities would take appropriate action if someone is caught breaking party finance rules. The proportion that said they were confident decreased to 36% at the mid-wave (March/April 2009) and 32% at the post-wave (May/June 2009)¹.

4 Awareness of sources of party funding

Percentage of respondents who think that parties in Northern Ireland get most of their money from:

	Pre-wave %	Mid-wave %	Post-wave %
The state	29	32	30
From private business	27	27	26
From members of the public	23	21	24
From overseas donations	5	8	5
Don't know	16	11	15

- The public were split on how they think political parties are mainly funded. Around one in three (29-32%) respondents thought that parties in Northern Ireland get most of their money from the state, 26-27% from private business and 21-24% said it came from members of the public. Less than one in 10 said that parties were mostly funded through overseas donations (5-8%).
- People in the higher social groups (ABC1s) were more likely to say that parties in Northern Ireland get their money from private business.

¹ Note that the MPs expenses scandal did not break in the media until after the mid-wave research was completed.

5 Awareness of who oversees party funding

Percentage of respondents who think that the funding of political parties in Northern Ireland is overseen by:

	Pre-wave %	Mid-wave %	Post-wave %
The Government	32	33	34
The Northern Ireland Assembly	19	23	21
The Electoral Commission	17	17	17
The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland	8	7	8
None of these	1	1	1
Don't know	23	19	19

- About one-third (32-34%) thought that that Government oversees the funding of political parties in Northern Ireland, while approximately one-fifth (19-23%) believed this fell within the remit of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Electoral Commission was chosen by 17% of respondents and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland by less than one in 10 (7-8%).
- Those in the higher social groups (ABC1s) were more likely to name the Commission as the body that oversees the funding of political parties.