

Public perception of organised crime – results from an opinion poll

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- The majority of respondents (84%) believed that organised crime was a problem in the UK, but only a third (32%) thought it was a problem in their local area.
- The organised crime types that respondents thought the Government should prioritise were drug dealing and gun crime.
- Sixty per cent of the respondents were confident that the police were tackling organised crime effectively in their local area.
- Perceptions of specific crime types (such as drug dealing) may ‘drive’ perceptions of organised crime both at the national and local level.

Introduction

Tackling organised crime is a high priority on the Government’s agenda. Especially in times of growing globalisation and a challenging economic climate, organised crime needs to be targeted with a strong commitment. To address the organised crime problem in the most appropriate way, it is helpful to gain an understanding of how organised crime impacts on members of the public and how empowered people feel to tackle organised crime. This polling exercise was carried out to identify levels of concern about organised crime among members of the public, how much organised crime impacts on people’s daily lives, and how empowered people feel to tackle it.

Research approach

To assess public perception of organised crime, a set of 15 questions was included in an Ipsos MORI omnibus survey. In total 1,919 face-to-face interviews with people aged 16 and over in England and Wales were conducted from 27 February – 5 March 2009.

The survey used quotas to obtain a sample that reflected the population in terms of sex, household tenure, age and economic status. The data were weighted to the known profile of the population (using up-to-date weighting targets which compensate for population changes since the 2001 Census). This means that findings should be broadly representative of the adult population. However, as this was not a random sample, detailed results cannot necessarily be extrapolated.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

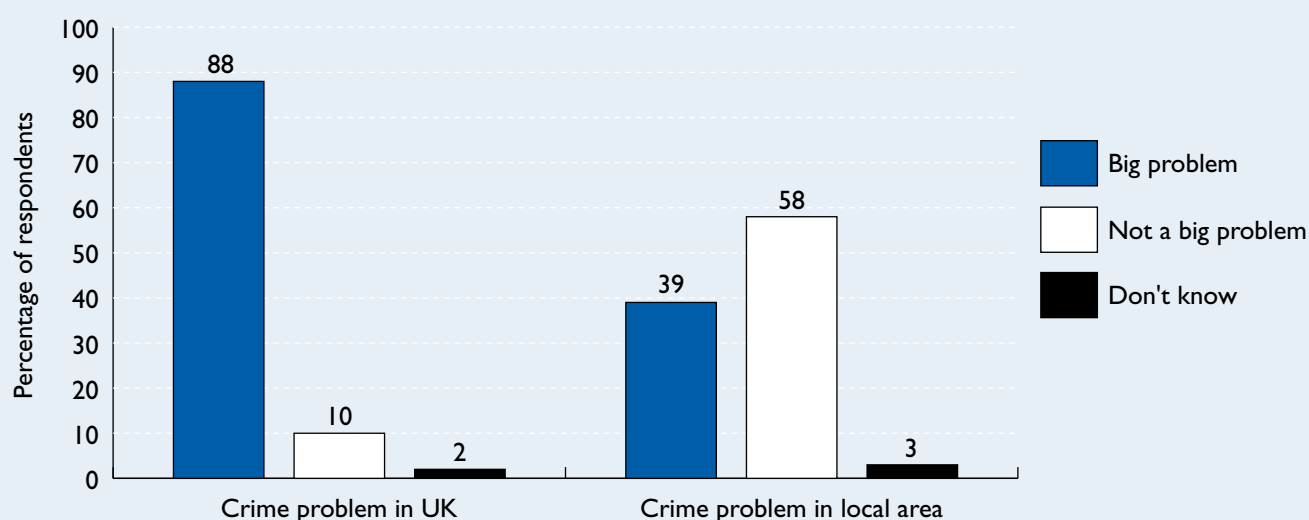
Key findings

The following section outlines the main findings of the survey. Results are based on all 1,919 respondents from England and Wales, unless otherwise stated. Where results do not sum to 100 per cent, this may be due to respondents providing multiple responses, statistical rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” answers or weightings.

Perception of crime in UK and local area

Almost nine in ten respondents (88%) said that crime was a very or fairly big problem *in the UK*. Females and those aged 65 years and over were most likely to state that crime was a problem. Interestingly, in respect to their *local area* only four in ten respondents (39%) stated that crime was a very or fairly big problem.¹ There were no gender differences in these results, but younger respondents (16 – 24 years and 25 – 39 years) were more likely than those aged 65 and over to state that crime was a problem in their local area.

Figure 1: Perceived problem of crime in UK and local area



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

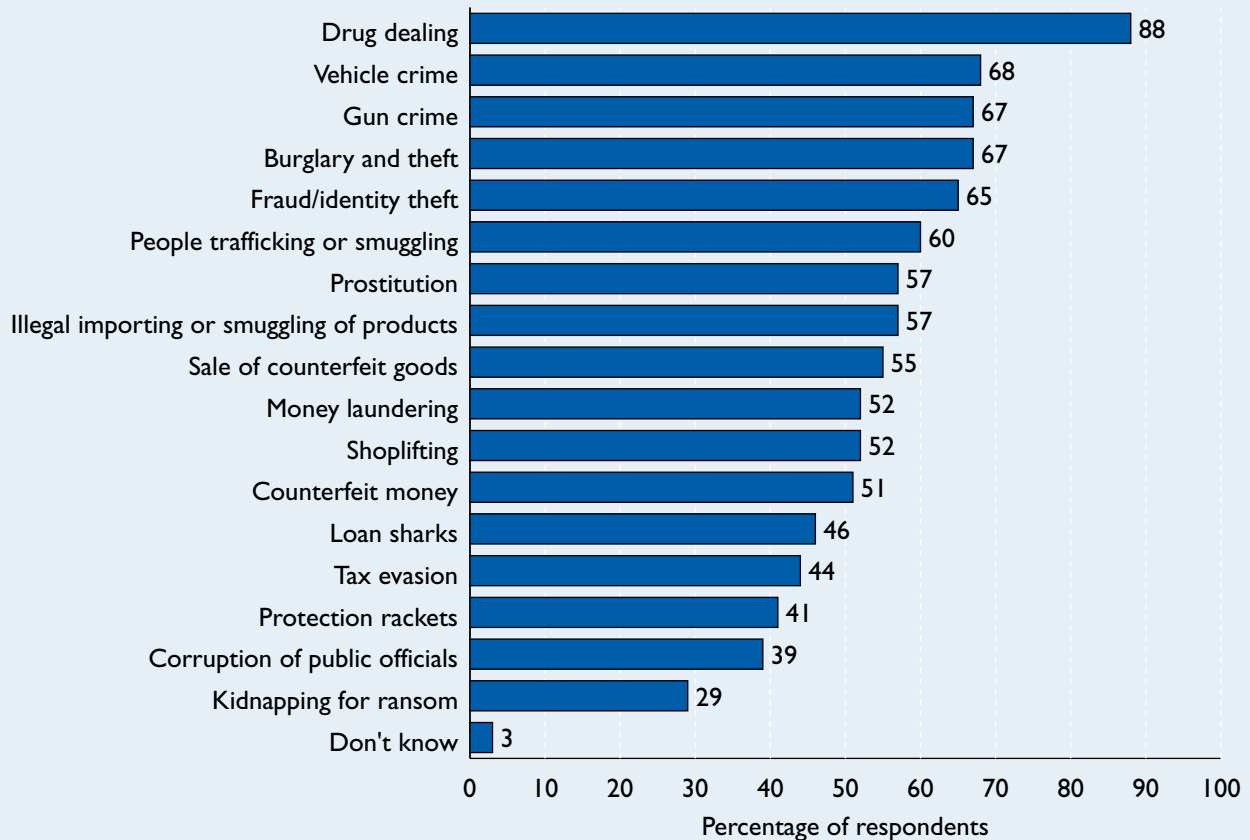
Perception of organised crime in UK and local area

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their perceptions of ‘organised crime’ (defined as “criminal activities that are run by groups for financial gain”).

When asked to select, from a list, the offences that respondents believed were currently being carried out by criminal groups in the UK, almost nine in ten respondents (88%) selected drug dealing. Around two-thirds stated that criminal groups were carrying out vehicle crime (68%), followed by burglary and theft, gun crime and fraud/identity theft.

¹ The BCS also finds that people have more negative perceptions about the national picture compared to their local area. (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html>)

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents who believe offence is being carried out by criminal organisations in the UK



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales. Multiple responses possible.

Respondents were asked whether they thought organised crime was a problem in the UK and in their local area and the extent to which they were personally affected by it.

Based on the definition of organised crime and the responses given above, the vast majority of respondents (84%) believed that organised crime was a very or fairly big problem *in the UK*.

Overall, those respondents who believed that organised crime was a very or fairly big problem in the UK were more likely to believe *that each of the individual crime types listed in Figure 2 were currently being carried out by criminal organisations*, compared to those who did not think that organised crime was a very big problem or a problem at all in the UK. This was particularly apparent for shoplifting (55% compared to 38%), drug dealing (92% compared to 77%), gun crime (71% compared to 56%) and vehicle crime (71% compared to 56%). This indicates that perceptions of these crime types may 'drive' perceptions of organised crime (Table 1).

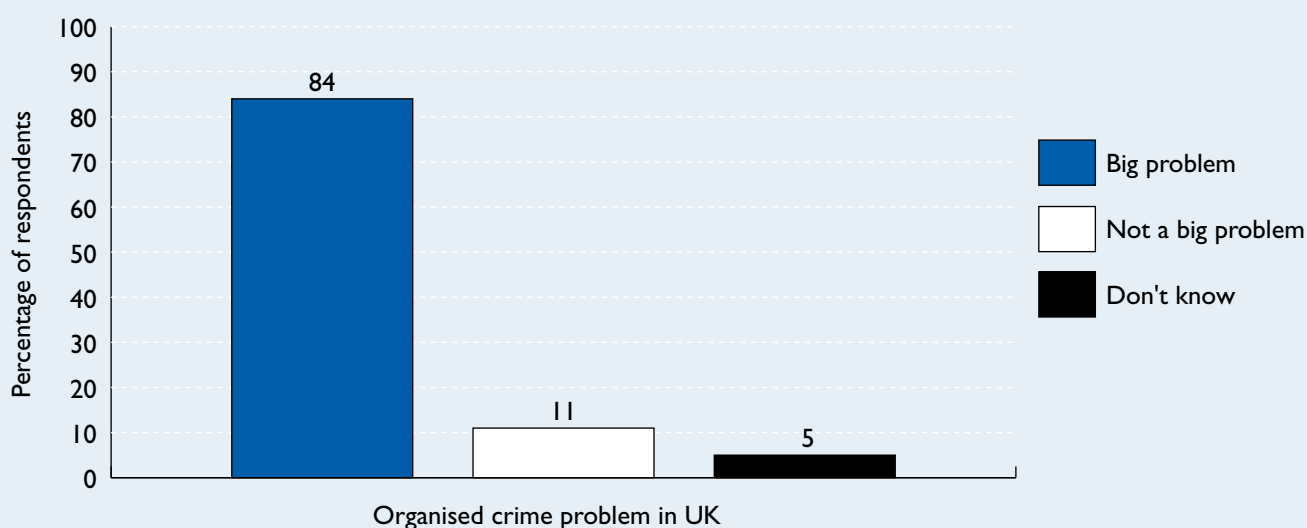
Table 1: Proportion of respondents who thought organised crime was/was not a big problem in the UK, who also thought that specific offence types were being carried out by criminal groups in the UK today

Perception that offence is carried out by organised crime groups	Organised crime a problem in the UK		Difference Percentage points
	Yes %	No %	
Shoplifting	55	38	17
Drug dealing	92	77	15
Gun crime	71	56	15
Vehicle crime	71	56	15
People trafficking or smuggling	64	50	14
Burglary and theft	70	57	13
Fraud/identity theft	69	57	12
Loan sharks	49	37	12
Prostitution	60	48	12
Sale of counterfeit goods	59	47	12
Illegal smuggling or importing of products	61	50	11
Tax evasion	47	37	10
Money laundering	55	46	9
Protection rackets	43	35	8
Kidnapping for ransom	30	24	6
Corruption of public officials	41	35	6
Counterfeit money	54	49	5

Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales

Eleven per cent believed that organised crime was not a very big problem or not a problem at all in the UK. There was no clear difference between males and females.

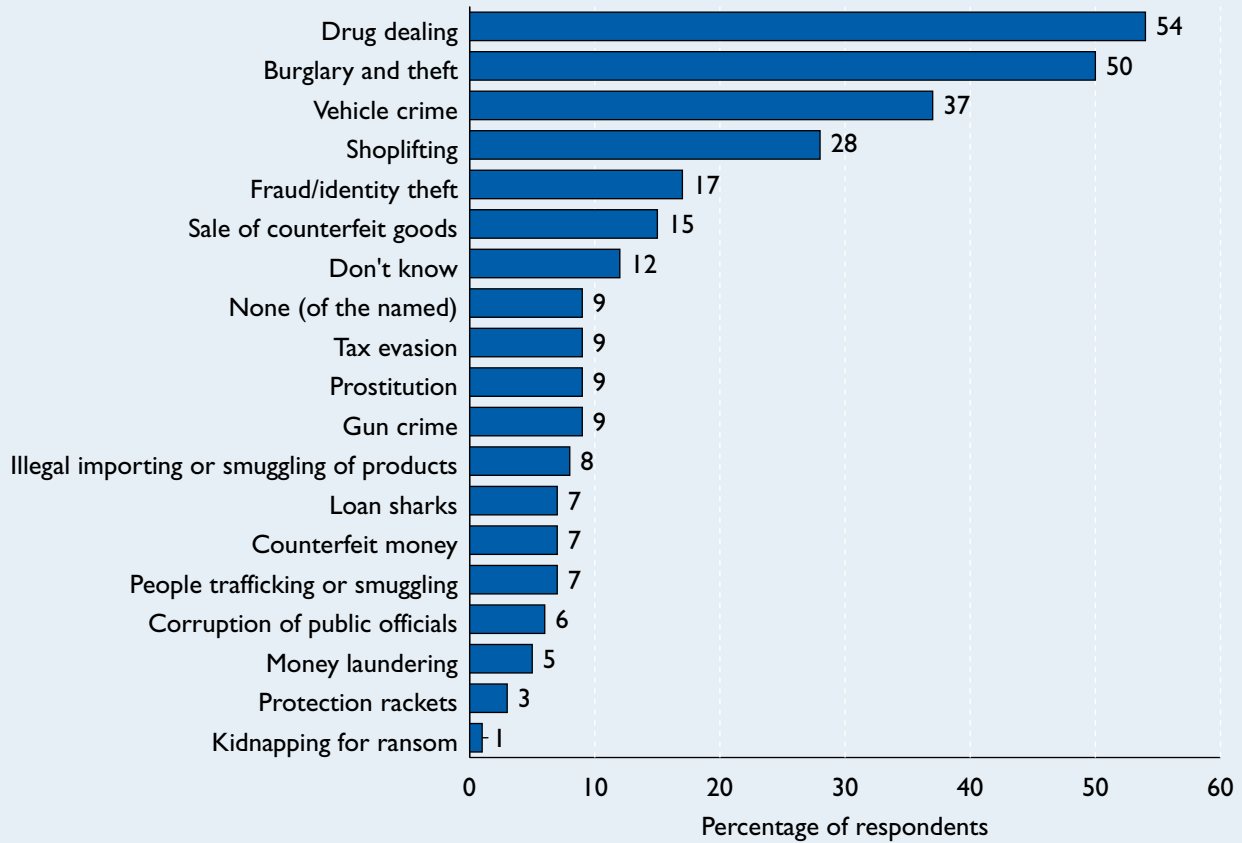
Figure 3: Perceived problem of organised crime in UK



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

When asked about the type of organised crime offences that respondents thought were a problem in their local area, again, drug dealing was the most frequent response (54%), followed by burglary/theft and vehicle crime.

Figure 4: Crime types perceived to be a problem in local area



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales. Multiple responses possible.

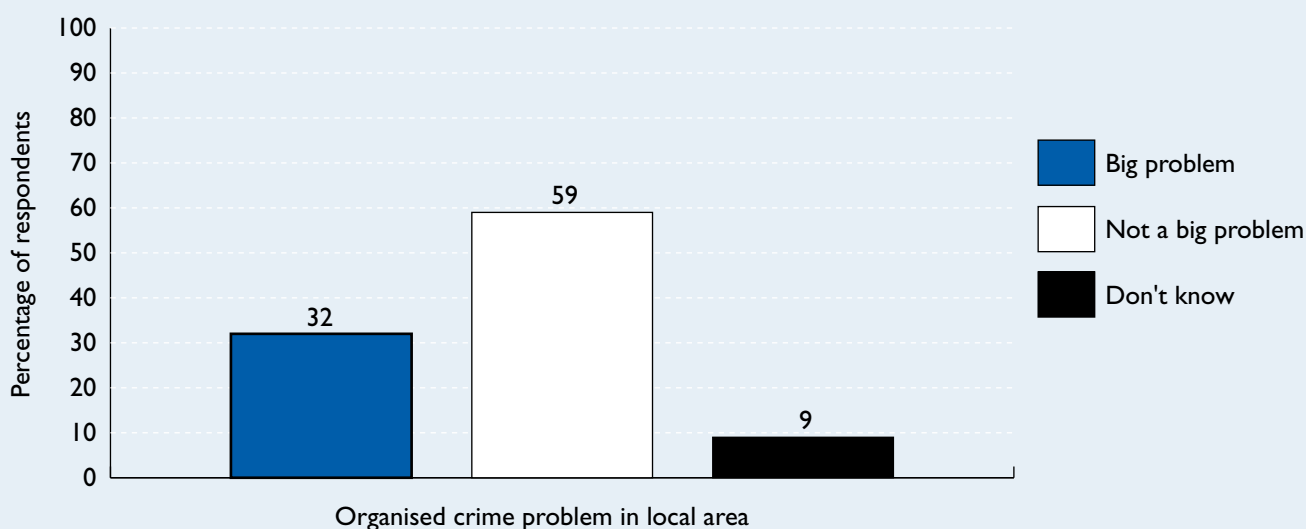
Again, those respondents who believed that organised crime was a very or fairly big problem in their local area were more likely to believe that *each of the individual crime types listed in Figure 4* were also a problem in their local area, compared to those who did not think that organised crime was a very big problem or a problem at all in their local area. This was particularly apparent for drug dealing (73% compared to 49%), burglary and theft (67% compared to 44%) and vehicle crime (52% compared to 32%). Again, this indicates that perceptions of these crime types may ‘drive’ perceptions of organised crime in local areas (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of respondents who thought organised crime was/was not a big problem in their local area, who also thought that specific offence types were a problem in the local area

Perception that offence is a problem in local area	Organised crime a problem in local area		Difference Percentage points
	Yes %	No %	
Drug dealing	73	49	24
Burglary and theft	67	44	23
Vehicle crime	52	32	20
Shoplifting	39	24	15
Gun crime	19	4	15
Prostitution	14	6	8
Loan sharks	11	5	6
Tax evasion	13	7	6
Money laundering	9	3	6
Counterfeit money	11	5	6
People trafficking or smuggling	10	5	5
Corruption of public officials	9	4	5
Fraud/identity theft	21	16	5
Sale of counterfeit goods	19	14	5
Illegal smuggling or importing of products	12	7	5
Kidnapping for ransom	3	0	3
Protection rackets	5	3	2

Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

Overall, in respect to *their local area* a third of all respondents (32%) believed that organised crime was a very or fairly big problem and the majority (59%) thought it was not a problem. Once again, it is clear that respondents perceived organised crime to be more of a problem at a national level rather than in their local area.

Figure 5: Perceived problem of organised crime in local area

Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

Based on the definition of organised crime and the responses given above, three in ten (30%) respondents said that they had personally felt intimidated, threatened or in danger because of organised crime activities in their local area. These experiences could involve respondents witnessing drug dealing, or feeling at risk of becoming a victim of burglary, theft or vehicle crime. This view was consistent across gender, age and socio-economic group. As noted in Table 2, 73 per cent of the respondents who perceived organised crime to be a problem in their local area also believed that drug dealing was a problem in their local area.

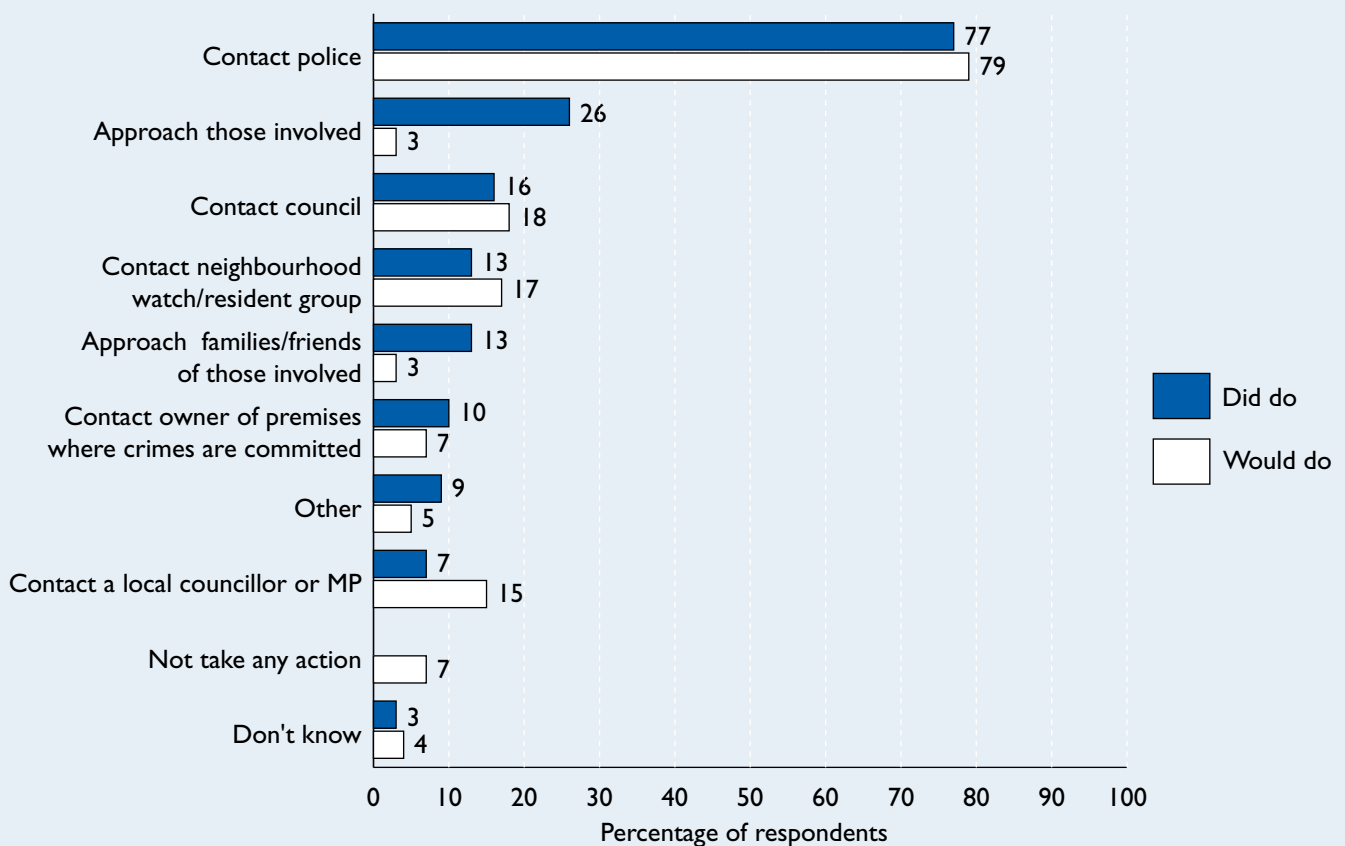
Empowerment to tackle organised crime

Respondents who stated that organised crime was a big or fairly big problem in their local area (almost one-third of all respondents) were asked if they had ever taken any action against the problem. Almost one in five (18%) of these respondents stated that they had taken action.

Of those that had taken action, the majority (77%) had contacted the police. Just over a quarter (26%) had approached those involved and around one in six (16%) had contacted the local council.

Those who stated that organised crime was not a very big problem or not a problem at all in their local area (59% of all respondents) were asked, hypothetically, what action they would be likely to take if it was a problem. Again, the majority of respondents (79%) stated that they would contact the police. In contrast to those who had already been faced with the problem, fewer respondents believed they would approach those involved (3%). Seven per cent believed they would not take any action if organised crime was a problem in their local area.

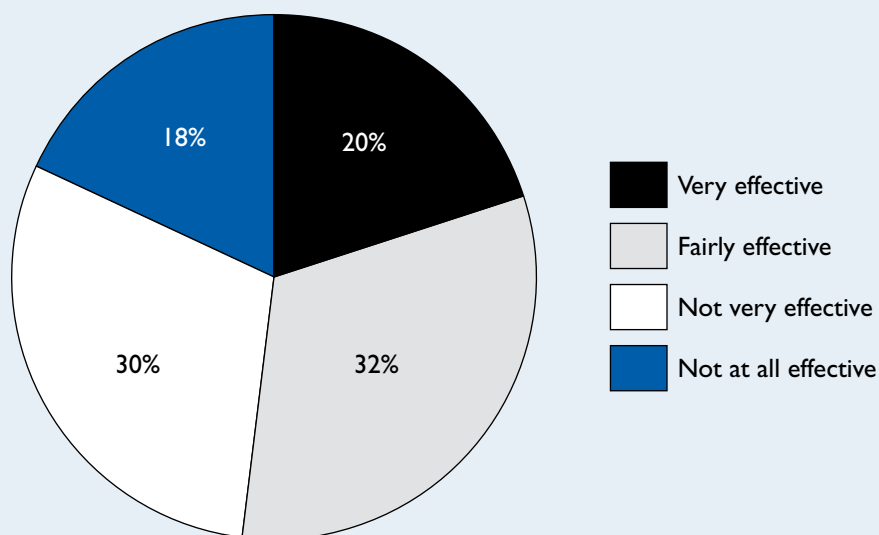
Figure 6: Action taken to tackle organised crime problem in local area



Base: 118 respondents from England and Wales who responded that organised crime was a problem in their local area and that they had taken action to tackle it were asked what action they had taken (“Did do”). 1,284 respondents from England and Wales who responded that organised crime was not a problem in their local area or that they didn’t know, were asked what action they would be likely to take (“Would do”). Multiple responses possible.

Respondents who had taken action to tackle the organised crime problem in their local area (18% of those who stated that organised crime was a problem in their local area; 5% of the full sample) were asked how effective they felt their action had been in tackling the problem. Due to the small proportion of respondents who reported taking each action, only contacting the police can be considered with a sufficient degree of confidence. Of those who had contacted the police, opinion was divided in terms of how effective this action was perceived to be in addressing the problem.

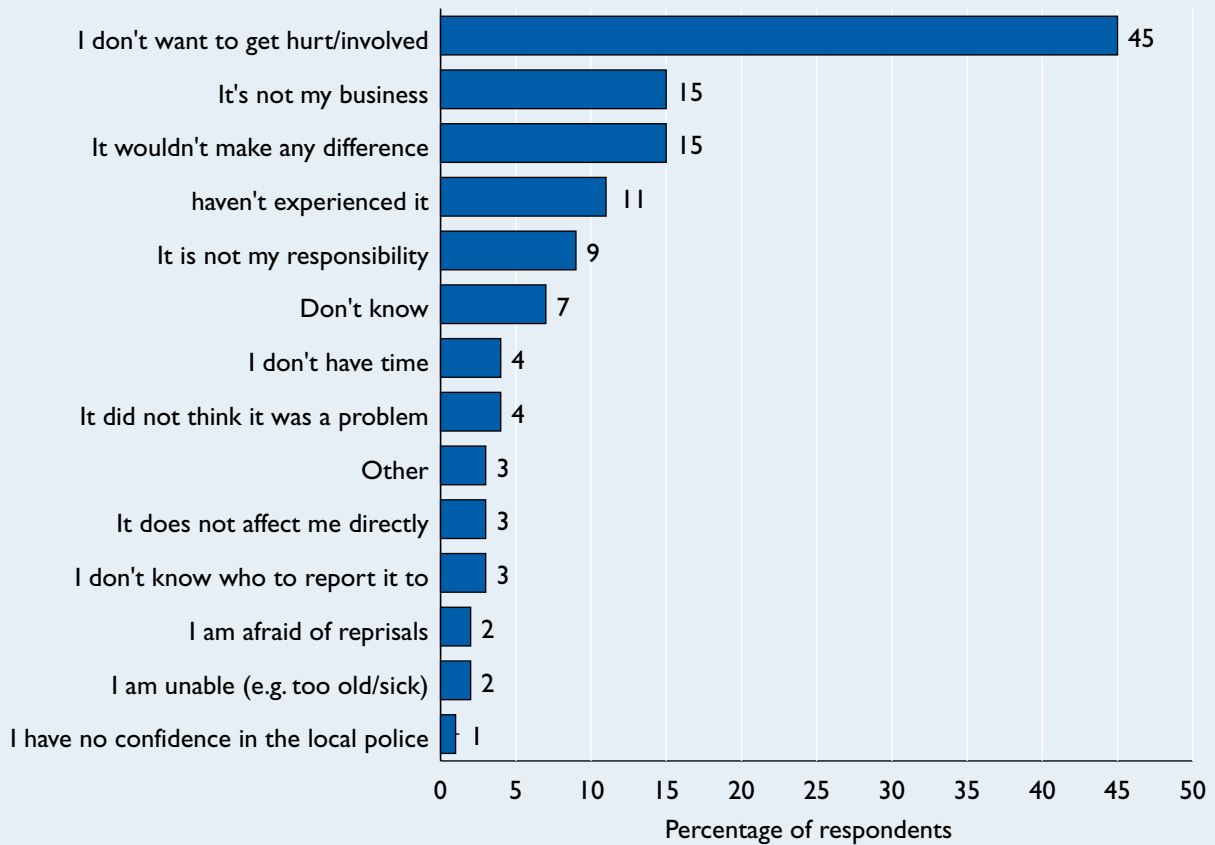
Figure 7: Effectiveness of contacting the police to solve the problem



Base: 88 respondents who stated they had contacted the police to take action against organised crime in their local area.

Respondents who stated that they had not or would not take any action to address organised crime (32% of the whole sample) were asked why this was the case. Almost half of these respondents said the reason they had not taken any action was because they did not want to get hurt or involved. Approximately one in seven (15%) stated that they thought it would not make any difference and the same proportion stated it was not their business.

Figure 8: Reasons for not taking any action against organised crime

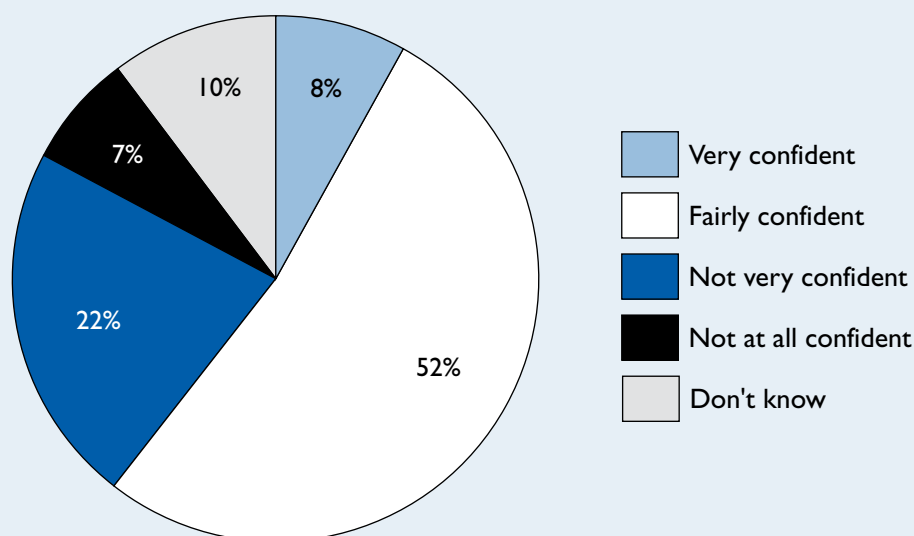


Base: 618 respondents who stated they have not or would not take action against organised crime in their local area.

Confidence in police and local authorities to combat organised crime

The majority of respondents (60%) were very or fairly confident that the police and local authorities were effectively tackling organised crime in their local area. However, nearly one-third of respondents were not confident that this was the case.

Figure 9: Confidence that police and local authorities are tackling organised crime effectively in local area



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

Among those respondents who thought organised crime was a very or fairly big problem in their local area, 56 per cent were confident that the police and local authorities were tackling organised crime effectively in their area. For respondents who did not consider organised crime to be a very big problem or a problem at all in their local area, this figure was higher (64%).

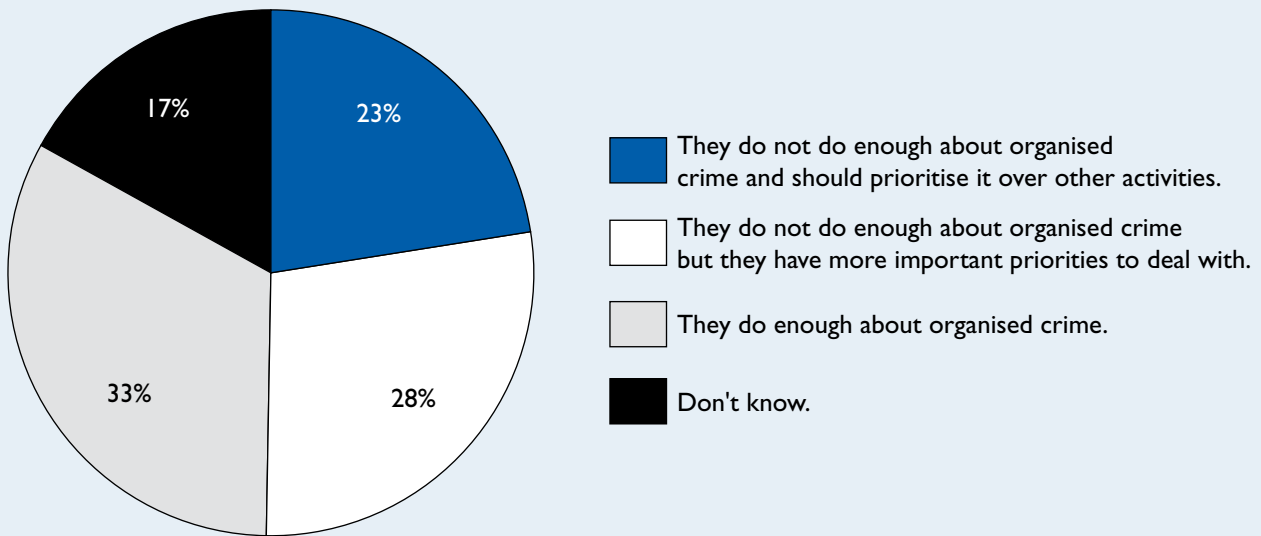
Table 3: Confidence in police and local authorities by perception whether organised crime is a problem in the local area

		Organised crime a problem in local area	
		Yes	No
Confidence that police and local authorities are tackling organised crime effectively	Confident	56%	64%
	Not confident	38%	26%
	Don't know	6%	10%
Total		100%	100%

Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the police and local authorities were doing enough about organised crime in their local area, in relation to other issues/priorities. One-third of respondents believed that the police and local authorities were doing enough about organised crime. Over a quarter (28%) believed they were not doing enough about organised crime but that they had more important priorities to deal with. Just under a quarter (23%) believed that they were not doing enough about organised crime and should prioritise it over other activities. Seventeen per cent of respondents did not know whether the police and local authorities were doing enough about organised crime in their area.

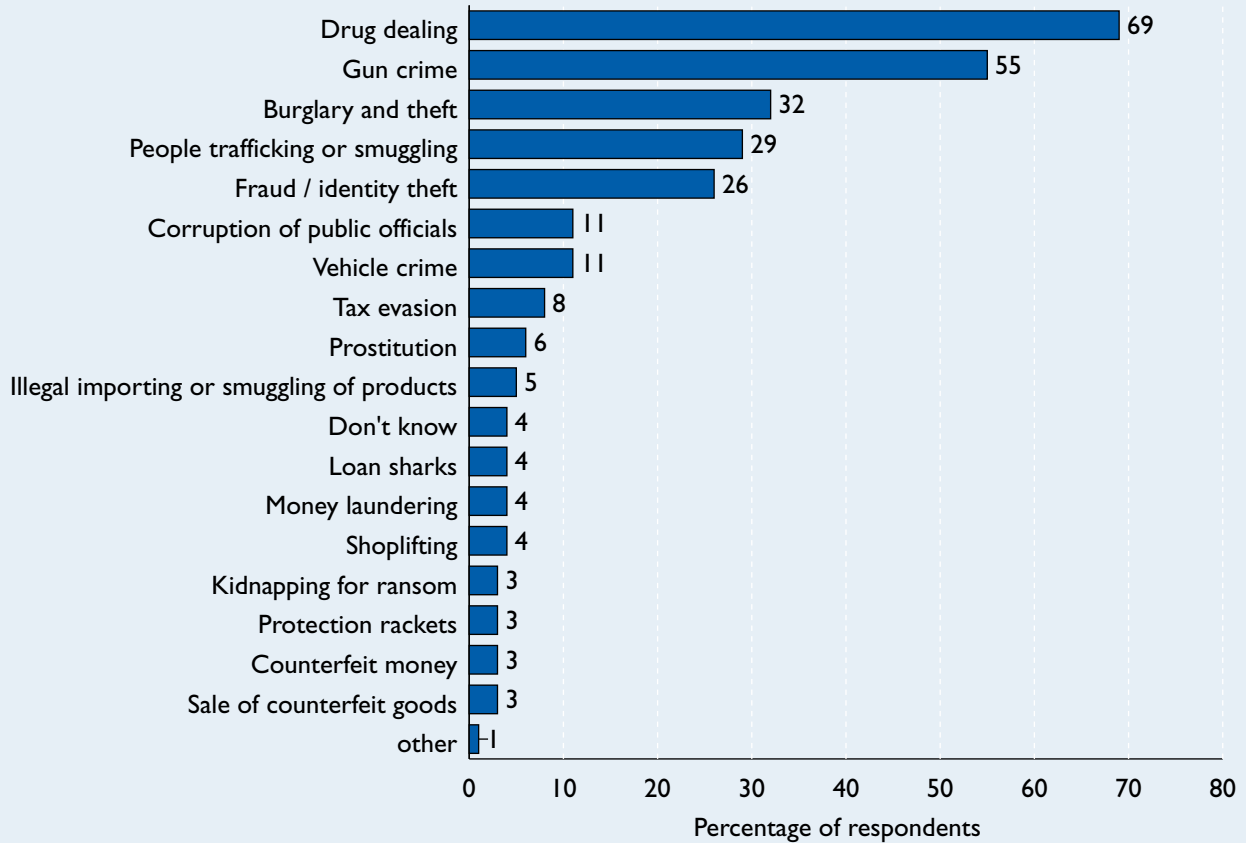
Figure 10: View on how the police and authorities deal with organised crime in local area



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales.

When asked to select three organised crime types that the Government should prioritise in the UK, the most frequent response (69%) was drug dealing. Gun crime was the second most frequent response (55%), followed by burglary and theft (32%), people trafficking/smuggling (29%) and fraud/identity theft (26%).

Figure 11: Organised crime types the Government should prioritise



Base: 1,919 respondents from England and Wales. Up to three crime types were selected from a list.

It is notable that drug dealing was the most frequently selected option when asked about involvement of organised criminals (Figure 2), it was the crime type perceived to be most problematic in local areas (Figure 3) and it was selected as the crime type the Government should prioritise (Figure 9).