

Public attitudes to asset recovery and awareness of the Community Cashback Scheme - results from an opinion poll

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Key findings

Awareness of asset recovery (the legal powers of the police to recover money, property and belongings from criminals, if they have been gained through criminal activities)

- **Awareness of asset recovery was generally low** – in an opinion poll carried out in December 2009, around a third (32%) of respondents had never heard about asset recovery. However, 22 per cent said they knew a great deal/fair amount about it. A previous poll, conducted in January 2009, showed similar levels of awareness.

Support for asset recovery

- **As might be expected, respondents' views of asset recovery were mostly positive** with 87 per cent of respondents supporting the use of asset recovery powers. Even if respondents had only learned about asset recovery during the interview, 81 per cent said they supported it. Similar levels of support were reported in the previous poll.
- **Just over half of respondents (53%) thought that asset recovery was effective** in reducing and preventing crime. Again, this proportion was similar to the previous poll.

Knowledge about the Community Cashback Scheme

- **One-fifth (20%) of the respondents knew about the Community Cashback Scheme**, and 21 per cent of them said it improved their opinion of the local police.

Background

The confiscation of criminal assets by the Courts forms a key part of efforts to tackle the criminal economy and crime more generally. Seizing and confiscating the proceeds of crime has a number of benefits:

- it raises the actual and perceived risks of committing crime;
- it visibly deprives criminals of their profits, reducing their power and status within the community;
- it prevents profits from crime being reinvested into further criminality, or tainting the legitimate economy;
- fundamentally, justice is served in that people are not allowed to profit from crime and this is seen to be the case.

The Home Office commissioned a previous opinion poll in January 2009 to capture public awareness of, and attitudes towards, asset recovery. Results from this opinion poll were generally supportive of asset recovery. To ascertain if and how awareness and opinions have been changing, the Home Office repeated the poll in December 2009.

In addition to the questions on asset recovery, a number of new questions were asked to capture public perception of the Community Cashback Scheme. Community Cashback was launched during the summer of 2009 in England and Wales, designed to give local people a say in how the money of recovered criminal assets (for example, confiscated cash or property) should be spent in the fight against crime and anti-social behaviour in their communities.

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

The scheme aimed to:

- raise the profile of asset recovery as an important tool in disrupting and preventing criminal activity and taking the cash out of crime by seizing criminals' illegally acquired gains;
- give local people more of a say in how the recovered assets can be reinvested within their neighbourhoods and communities; and
- boost public confidence in criminal justice services and demonstrate that justice is being done by making sure that people can see it being done in their area.

This paper outlines the findings from this latest opinion poll. Findings were broadly similar to the previous poll. Key differences are highlighted in the text where relevant.

Research approach

To assess public knowledge and attitude towards asset recovery and the Community Cashback Scheme, a set of 15 questions was included in an Ipsos MORI omnibus survey in December 2009. The questions covered knowledge about the concept of asset recovery and attitudes about its effectiveness, as well as questions aimed to assess knowledge and opinions about the Community Cashback Scheme.

The definition of asset recovery given to respondents in the survey was

“the legal powers of the police to recover money, property and belongings from criminals, if they have been gained through criminal activity.”

In total 1,806 face-to-face interviews with people aged 16 and over in England and Wales were conducted from 10 to 21 December 2009. The survey used quotas to obtain a sample that reflected the population in terms of sex, household tenure, age and working 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).

It should be noted that this is not a random sample, so results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the broad population and should be treated as indicative. For the same reason, comparisons with results from the previous opinion poll on asset recovery cannot be interpreted as a precise measure of changes in public opinion, and should also be treated as indicative.¹ Therefore, whilst references to results from the previous poll are made throughout the text, no direct numerical or graphical comparisons are made.

Key findings

The following section outlines the main findings of the survey. Results are based on all 1,806 respondents from England and Wales, unless otherwise stated. Where results do not sum up to 100 per cent, this may be due to respondents providing multiple responses, statistical rounding or the exclusion of 'don't know'/'not stated' answers.

Perception of asset recovery as an effective measure against crime

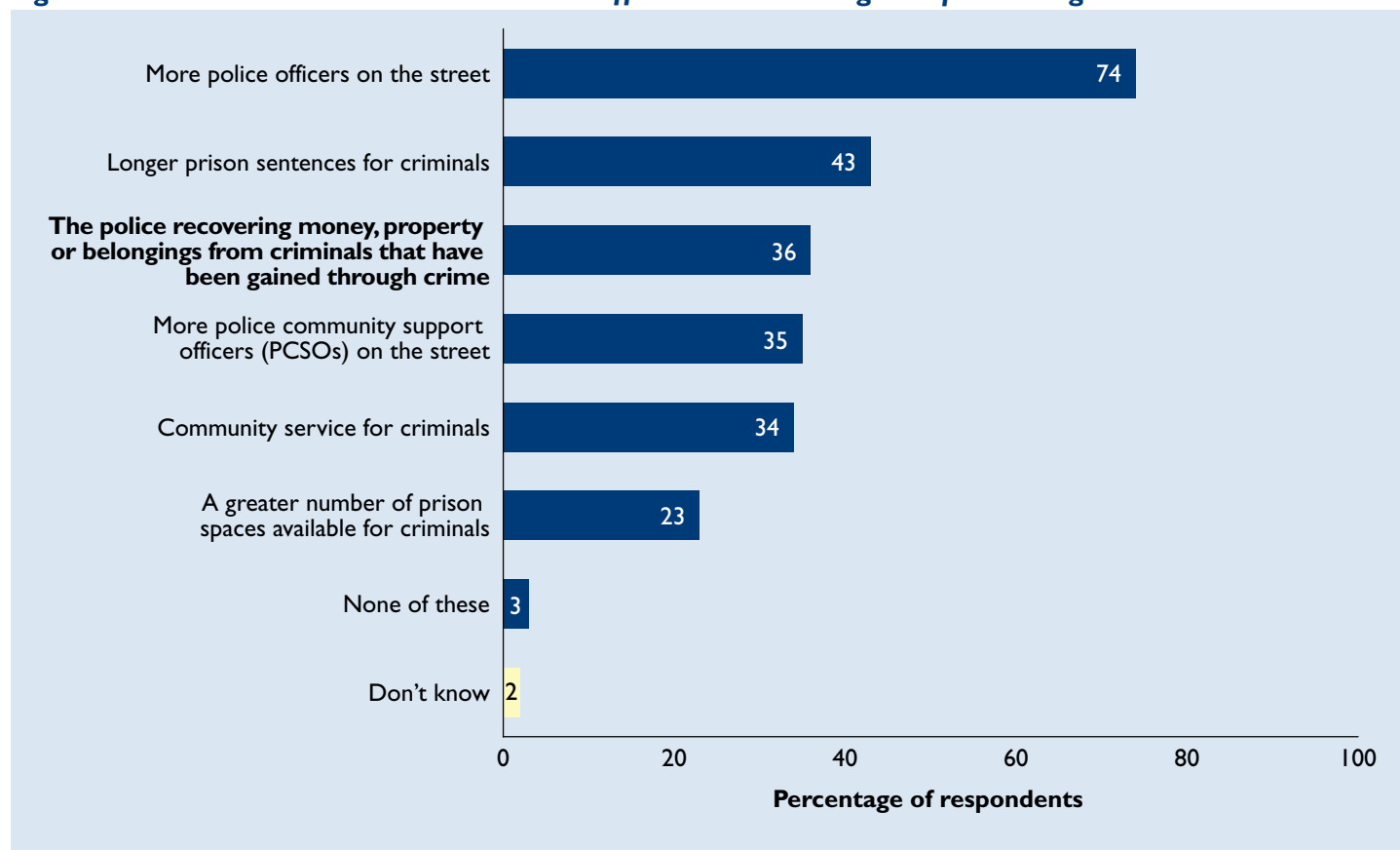
As shown in Figure 1, asset recovery was considered to be one of the most effective crime reduction techniques by over a third (36%) of the respondents. Those with a greater knowledge of asset recovery were slightly more likely to cite it as one of the measures that would be most effective (40% of those who said they knew a great deal/fair amount about it compared to 32% who had never heard of it). When asked to select from a list of options (shown in Figure 1) which

¹ The first opinion poll on asset recovery (Gottschalk, 2009), conducted in January 2009, surveyed 1,861 respondents using the same method and sampling techniques as in the present poll.

three actions would be most effective at reducing and preventing crime in their local area, just under three-quarters of respondents believed that a greater police presence on the streets would be most effective (74%) and forty three per cent of respondents thought longer prison sentences would be effective.

Respondents from the North East, North West and South West were the most likely to believe asset recovery would be effective (46%, 43% and 44% respectively); in contrast, just a quarter (26%) of those from London believed it would be one of the most effective methods.

Figure 1 *Actions that were seen as most effective in reducing and preventing crime*



Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales. Multiple responses possible.

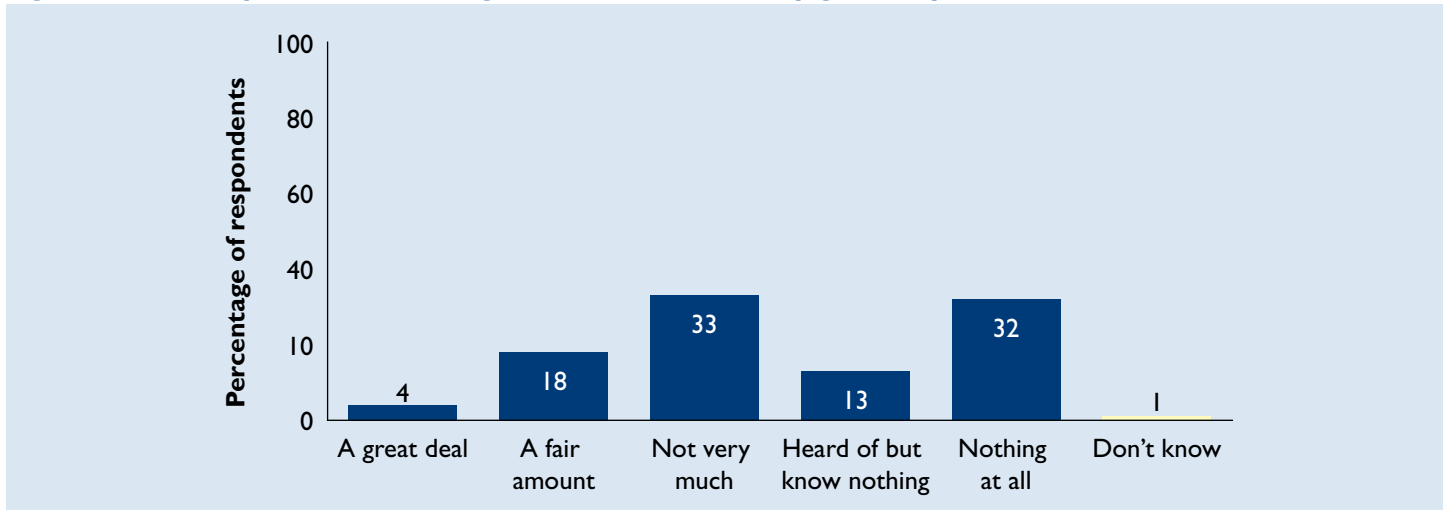
Knowledge and attitudes of asset recovery

Just over half (55%) of respondents claimed they knew something about asset recovery before they were interviewed, although most of these said they did not know very much.

Men were more likely than women to say they knew something about asset recovery (61% and 49% respectively).

Over one in ten respondents (13%) were aware that their local police had used their powers of asset recovery in the last 12 months. This percentage was roughly the same percentage across all Government Office Regions.

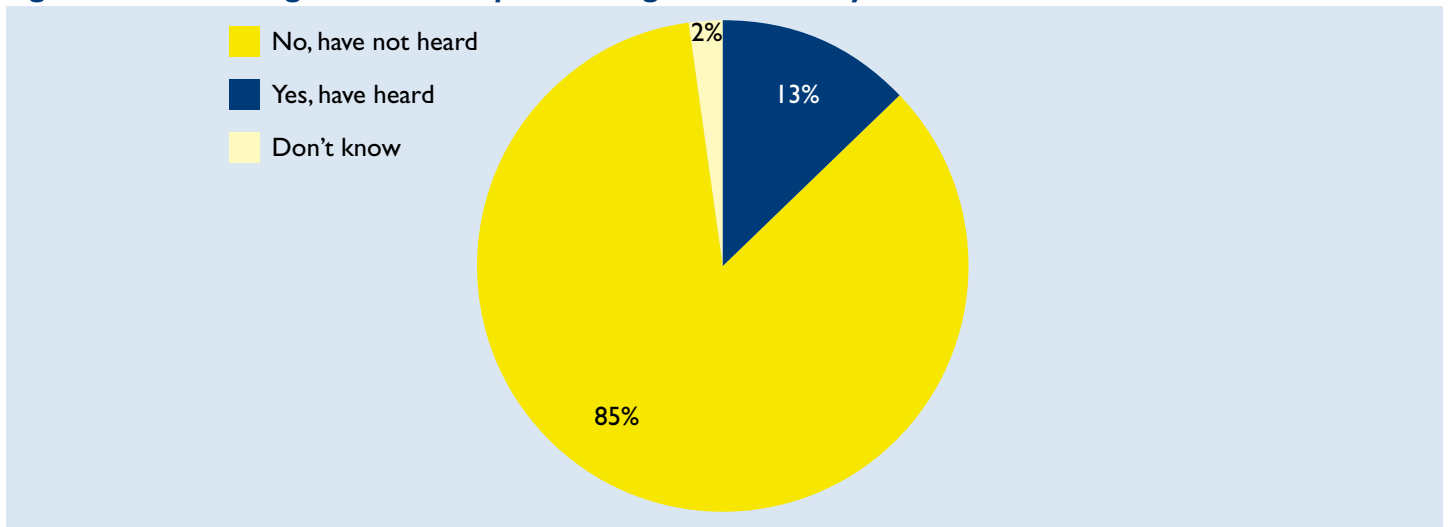
Figure 2 Perception of knowledge about asset recovery generally



Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

Only 13 per cent of respondents knew that their local police force had used asset recovery powers to confiscate crime proceeds over the last 12 months.

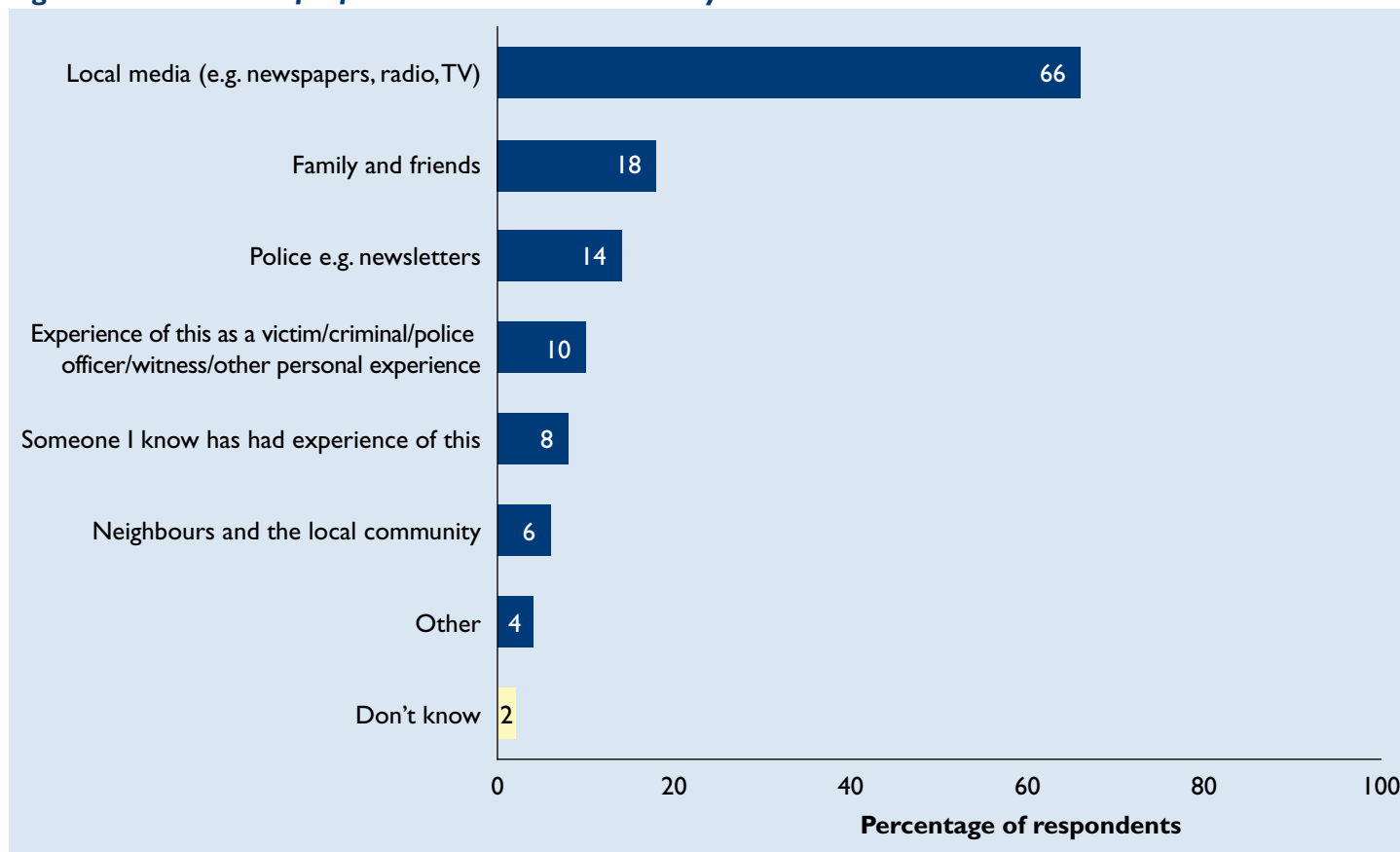
Figure 3 Knowledge about local police using asset recovery



Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

Reports from the local media remain the most prevalent source of information about asset recovery, with two-thirds (66%) of those who had heard about the use of asset recovery by their local police citing this as their source.

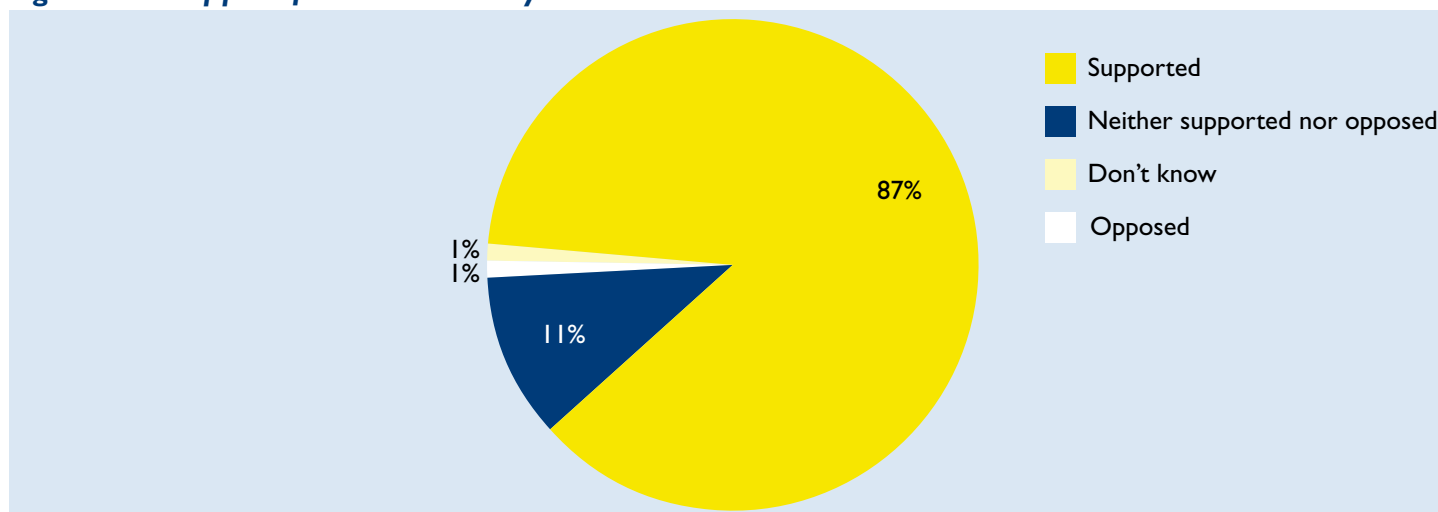
Figure 4 Sources of information on asset recovery



Base: 224 respondents from England and Wales who said they have heard of asset recovery being used in their local area.

When asked to what extent they support or oppose asset recovery, almost nine in ten (87%) respondents said they would 'strongly support' or 'tend to support' the use of asset recovery powers. Only one per cent stated they would tend to oppose asset recovery. Support for asset recovery increased with age (from 78% of those aged from 16 to 24 to 94% of those aged 65 and over).

Figure 5 Support for asset recovery

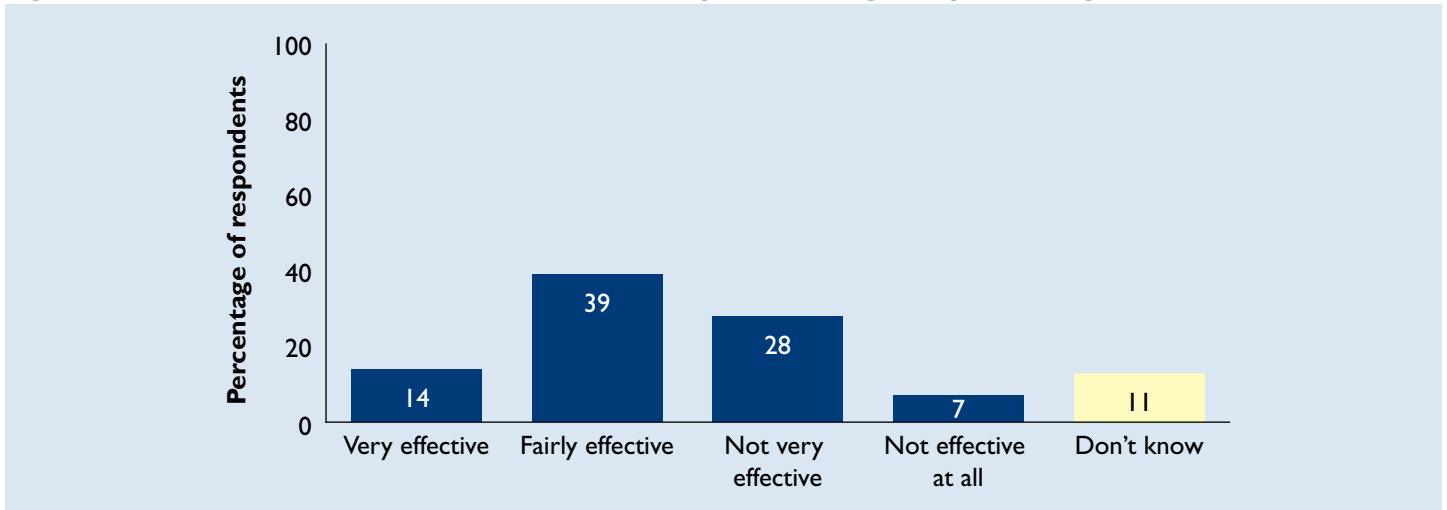


Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

Over half of all respondents (53%) said that they thought asset recovery was either very or fairly effective in reducing and preventing crime, compared with around one-third (35%) who did not consider it to be an effective tool.

Those who said they knew a great deal/fair amount about asset recovery were more positive about its use (64% believed it to be very or fairly effective versus 47% of respondents who knew nothing about it). One in ten (11%) respondents did not know whether or not they thought it was effective, almost all of these reported knowing very little or nothing about it.

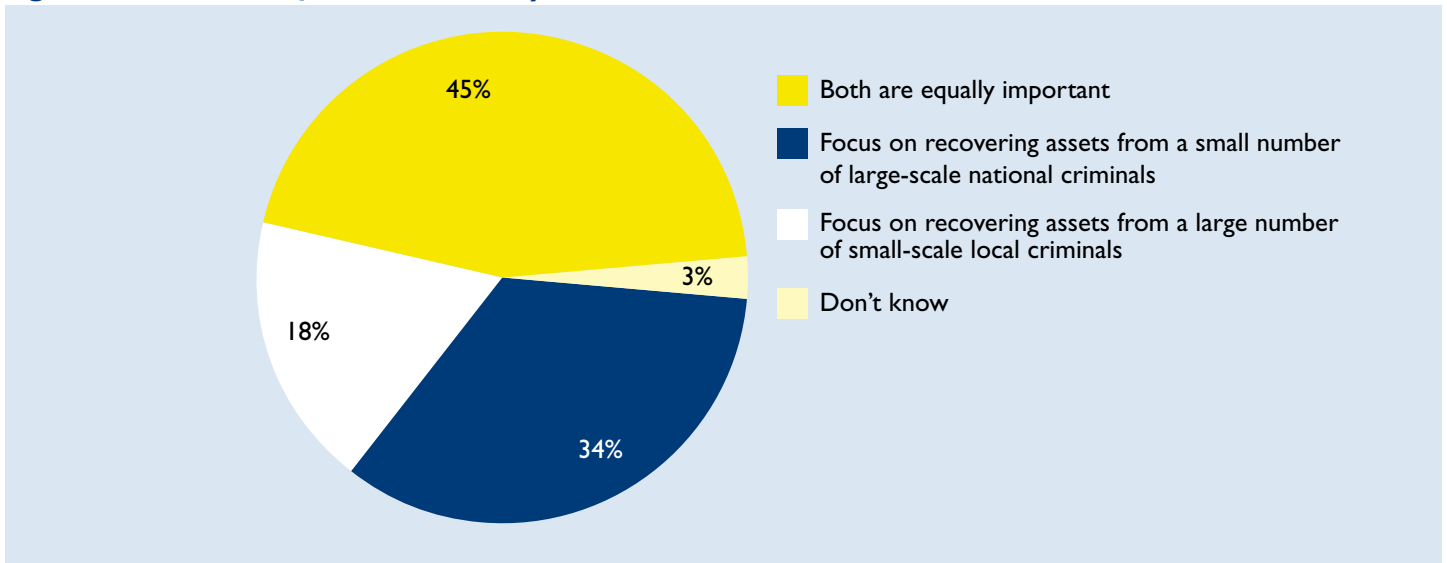
Figure 6 Assumed effectiveness of asset recovery in reducing and preventing crime



Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

When asked about priorities for asset recovery action, there was broadly twice as much support for focusing on a small number of large-scale national criminals (34%) than a large number of small-scale local criminals (18%). Two-fifths (45%) said that both were equally important. Results from the previous poll conducted in January 2009 were similar.

Figure 7 Priorities for asset recovery



Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

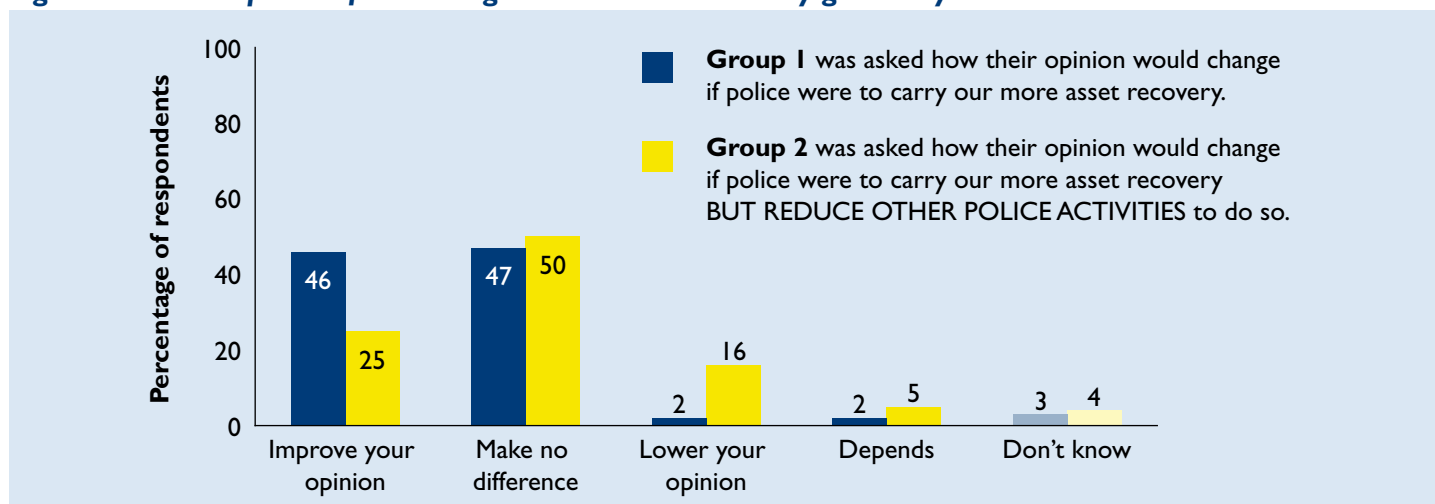
The impact of asset recovery on opinions of the police

Half of the sample were asked how their opinion of the local police would change if they carried out more asset recovery. The other half of the sample were asked how their opinion of the local police would change if they were to carry out more asset recovery but reduce other police activities in order to do so.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, in both groups around half of respondents believed that increasing asset recovery would not have any effect on their opinion of the police. However, almost half of the respondents (46%) from the first group believed their opinion of the police would improve. This fell to 25 per cent for the group that was asked about their opinion of the police if asset recovery were to be prioritised at the expense of some other activities. Correspondingly, respondents were more likely to say that increasing asset recovery would lower their opinion of the local police if this meant that other police activities would be reduced as a result.

The proportion of respondents in both groups who said increasing asset recovery would improve their perception of the police is slightly lower compared to the poll conducted in January 2009. More people stated that it would make no difference to their opinion compared to the January 2009 poll, whilst around the same proportion in both polls said it would lower their opinion.

Figure 8 Perception of knowledge about asset recovery generally



Base: Group 1 – 891 respondents, Group 2 – 915 respondents.

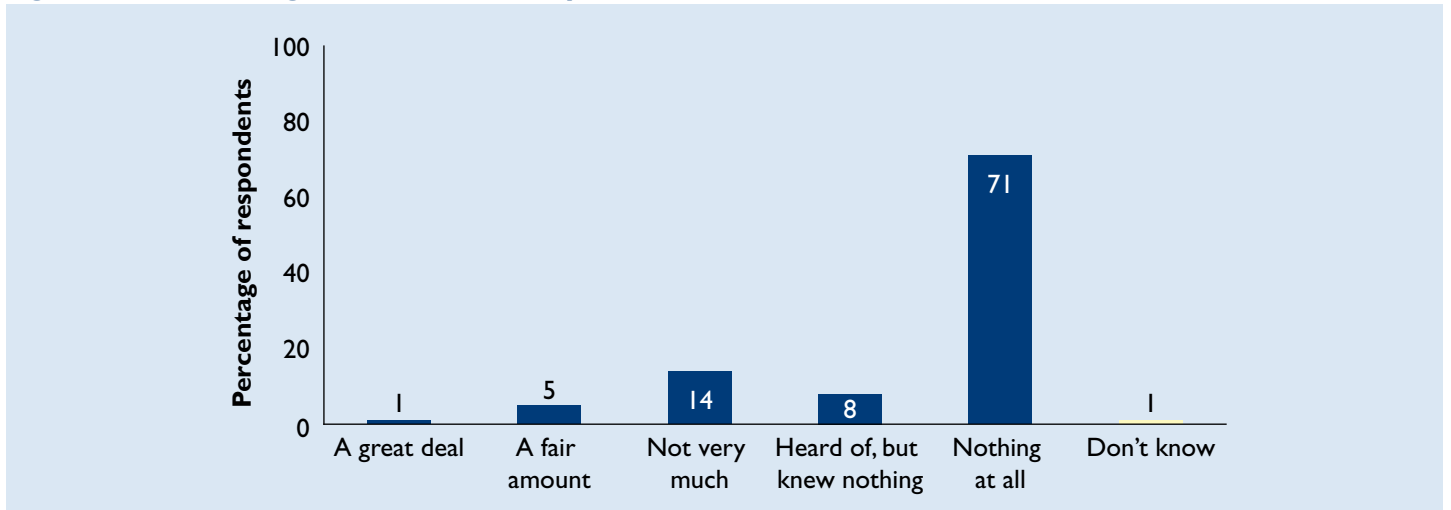
Knowledge and attitudes about Community Cashback

In terms of awareness of the Community Cashback Scheme, seven in ten (71%) had never heard of it before the interview, two in ten (20%) knew something about the scheme, and less than one in ten (8%) had heard of the scheme but knew nothing about it.²

Respondents who knew something about asset recovery were also more likely to know something about the Community Cashback Scheme.

² Please note that the percentages are based on a sample across all of England and Wales and also include areas where the Community Cashback Scheme was not available.

Figure 9 Knowledge about Community Cashback Scheme

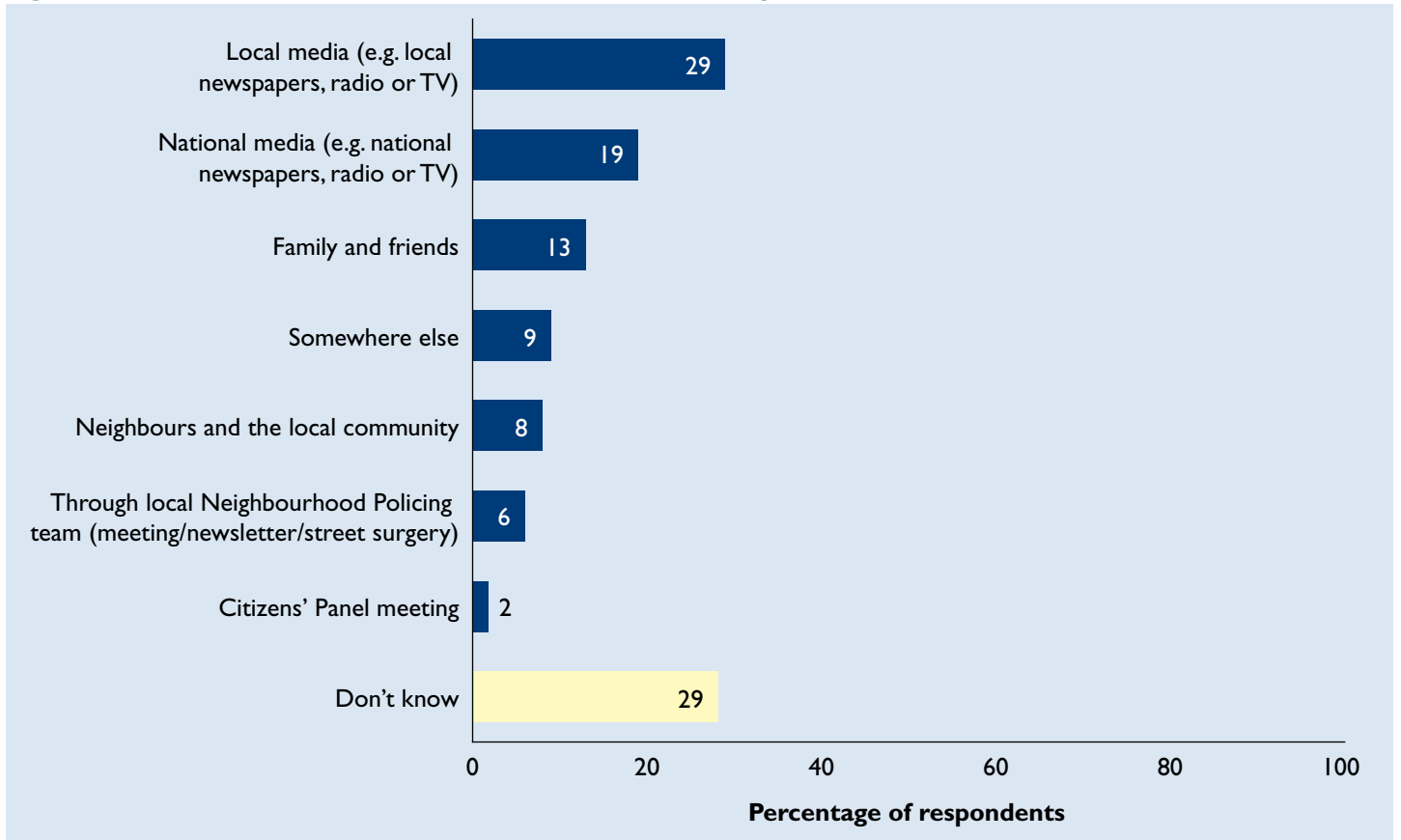


Base: 1,806 respondents from England and Wales.

As with information on asset recovery, the local media were the most prevalent source of information about the scheme (29%) although one-fifth did not know how they became aware of it (26%).

Three per cent of those who were aware of the scheme said that they had participated in the scheme and had a say in how the money was spent in their local area.

Figure 10 Sources of information about the Community Cashback Scheme

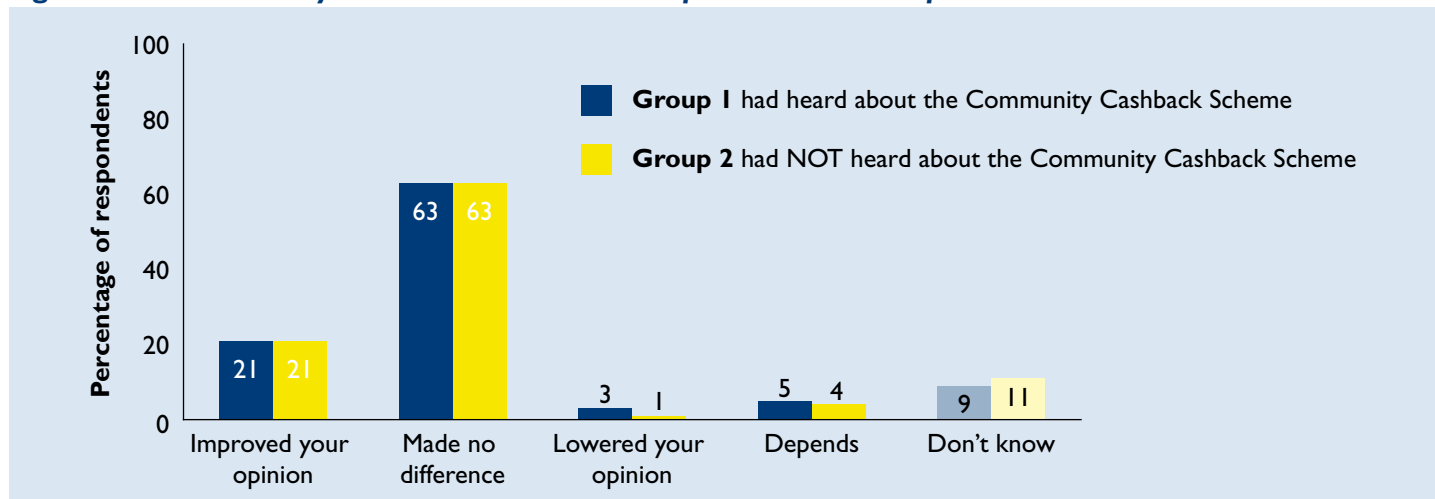


Base: 515 respondents from England and Wales who said they had heard of the Community Cashback Scheme.

The impact of the Community Cashback Scheme on opinions of the police

For more than six in ten (63%) respondents the Community Cashback Scheme made no difference to their opinion of their local police, compared to one-fifth for whom it improved their opinion (21%). These views did not vary depending on whether respondents had previously heard of the scheme or if they first came to hear about it during the interview.

Figure 11 Community Cashback Scheme and opinion about the police



Base: Group 1 – 515 respondents, Group 2 – 1,291 respondents.