# Racism and sectarian violence escalate with renewed attacks in Ballymena and Larne



The escalating crisis of racism and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, particularly in unionist districts such as Ballymena, has reached alarming levels, with recent incidents underscoring a disturbing trend. Just this week, the Larne Leisure Centre was vandalised following an outbreak of violence that began in the Harryville area of Ballymena, a locality with a long history of sectarian strife. This recent unrest is reminiscent of previous attacks that had targeted ethnic minorities in the same region last August, where violent mobs inflicted damage on homes and assaulted families based purely on their backgrounds.

For decades, the Harryville area has been mired in a reputation for intolerance. Incidents of violence against the Church of Our Lady illustrate this legacy; since its opening in the 1960s, the church has been subjected to vandalism and hostility. Notably, in the late 1990s, loyalist tension escalated, with local leader David Tweed playing a significant role in orchestrating harassment against congregants. Such acts included bottle-throwing at Mass attendees and disruptions during services, drawing comparisons by observers to the racial violence seen in the deep South of the United States.

Concerning developments this week, two teenagers appeared in court following a serious incident in Ballymena involving the sexual assault of a young girl, raising concerns over the potential correlation between heightened tensions and violent behaviour among youth. Critics, including Danielle Hill, an Olympic swimmer from Larne, have passionately condemned the violence, labelling it “racism in its rawest and most dangerous form.” Her call for compassion and unity in rebuilding the community reflects a yearning for collective healing amid chaos.

The response from local and national political leaders has been mixed. Stormont communities committee recently passed a motion of no confidence in Gordon Lyons, the DUP’s communities minister, in light of his remarks that many deemed irresponsible and inflammatory. Even Secretary of State Hilary Benn suggested that Lyons reevaluate his statements; thus, reinforcing the need for political figures to exercise caution and promote calm in their communications during such volatile times.

Moreover, the cycle of violence has not been restricted to isolated instances. Reports indicate a pattern of sectarian attacks, including an arson attack against a Catholic primary school in Ballymena and paint bomb assaults on religious institutions. The Catholic community has been at the receiving end of such hostility, struggling to maintain their places of worship amid ongoing tensions.

As the situation develops, the need for community solidarity and vigilance against escalating violence has never been more critical. The recent disturbances serve as a stark reminder that while no single group holds a monopoly on bigotry, destructive attitudes can manifest dangerously when unchecked. Strategies for resolution must include not only accountability but also a commitment to fostering understanding and respect across all communities in Northern Ireland.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/), [[2]](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ballymena-prepares-for-further-loyalist-violence-1.113688)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/), [[3]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30218562.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/), [[4]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30276458.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/), [[6]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30218562.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/), [[5]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30276458.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/racism-in-its-rawest-and-most-dangerous-form-must-be-challenged-the-irish-news-view-3IG7CIH4EZHHPL3XBIOOHMAGPQ/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ballymena-prepares-for-further-loyalist-violence-1.113688> - This article discusses the escalating sectarian violence in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, particularly in the Harryville area. It highlights concerns over loyalist protests and the targeting of Catholic institutions, including the Church of Our Lady. The piece also covers the broader context of sectarian tensions in the region and the potential for further unrest, emphasizing the need for vigilance and community solidarity.
3. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30218562.html> - The article reports on a recent arson attack targeting a Catholic primary school in Ballymena, Northern Ireland. The school, located on the Cullybackey Road, suffered significant damage due to the fire. This incident is part of a series of sectarian attacks orchestrated by loyalists in the north Antrim area, highlighting the ongoing tensions and challenges faced by the Catholic community in the region.
4. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30276458.html> - This piece covers a paint bomb attack on the Church of Our Lady in Harryville, Ballymena. The attack involved two paint bombs thrown at the church's front door, causing damage. The incident is linked to the history of loyalist pickets and sectarian violence in the area, underscoring the persistent challenges faced by the Catholic community in maintaining their places of worship.
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