# Rangers fans’ sectarian chants in Belfast reignite urgent calls for action



A recent incident involving Rangers fans has reignited concerns over sectarianism within football culture in Northern Ireland. A video surfaced online over the weekend showing supporters chanting sectarian insults while travelling on an open-top bus through Belfast city centre. The fans, reportedly from a Belfast-based supporters club, were en route to an event at the SSE Arena on a Friday evening when the footage was captured and widely disseminated across various social media platforms.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has confirmed that they are aware of the video and are conducting inquiries into the situation. This latest occurrence follows a troubling pattern of similar incidents associated with Rangers supporters, particularly linked to the chanting of songs that contain anti-Catholic lyrics. The 'Billy Boys' song, often associated with Glasgow Rangers supporters, has been at the centre of previous controversies, including a notable incident in July 2021 when footage showed individuals chanting it at a bonfire in north Belfast. Local authorities condemned the behaviour at the time, labelling it 'disgraceful'.

The ongoing challenges surrounding sectarian chanting have not gone unnoticed by institutions and organisations connected to the sport. Historical incidents, such as the ban imposed by Stena Line in 2005 on Rangers supporters travelling as foot passengers, highlighted the depths of the issue. Complaints from other passengers regarding 'loutish' behaviour, including the singing of sectarian songs after a match, catalysed this decision. While Stena Line continued to allow fans travelling by coach, the exclusion of foot passengers remains symbolic of broader societal concerns regarding fan behaviour.

Efforts to address sectarianism among football fans have occasionally emerged from within the fanbase itself. In 2011, after UEFA sanctioned Rangers FC for sectarian chanting, various supporters' groups convened to discuss self-policing and the need to curb sectarian songs. Representatives from multiple supporter clubs pledged to eliminate such chants, highlighting a recognition of the broader negative implications for the club's public image. Despite these efforts, incidents continue to surface, revealing that the journey towards eliminating sectarianism within football culture is fraught with challenges.

Recent years have seen a spate of arrests, such as three men charged in 2021 for sectarian singing at an Old Firm match. This incident garnered significant attention, with officials affirming a zero-tolerance policy towards racist conduct within the sport. The divisional commander for Greater Glasgow emphasized the seriousness of the matter, asserting that police response to such behaviour would be vigorous.

While legislative measures have also been introduced to combat sectarianism in Scotland, such as the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, criticisms persist regarding their effectiveness and fairness. The act, which sought to outlaw sectarian songs including those with anti-Catholic sentiments, has faced scrutiny for inadequately addressing the root causes of sectarianism among fans.

The recent actions of the Rangers fans in Belfast remind us that sectarian expressions remain a significant issue in both Northern Ireland and the wider UK context. As investigations proceed, the broader societal implications emphasise the urgent need for effective strategies to foster greater respect and understanding among all supporters, regardless of allegiance.

### Reference Map

Paragraph 1: (1)
Paragraph 2: (1), (2)
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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/psni-making-inquiries-after-rangers-fans-sing-sectarian-songs-from-open-top-belfast-bus/a1338190376.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/07/13/news/headline-2384573/> - In July 2021, footage emerged showing individuals chanting the 'Billy Boys' song at a bonfire in north Belfast. The 'Billy Boys' is a song associated with Glasgow Rangers supporters, containing anti-Catholic lyrics. The incident was widely condemned as 'disgraceful' by local authorities and communities. The song's controversial nature has led to previous sanctions against Rangers FC for similar incidents involving their supporters. The event highlighted ongoing tensions and the persistence of sectarian expressions in Northern Ireland.
3. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/stena-bans-rangers-fans-as-foot-passengers-on-ferries-1.484070> - In August 2005, ferry company Stena Line banned Glasgow Rangers supporters from traveling as foot passengers due to 'loutish' behavior, including the singing of sectarian songs. The decision followed complaints from passengers about the conduct of fans returning from an Old Firm game in Glasgow. Stena Line stated that while they would continue to carry Rangers supporter groups traveling by car and coach, they would no longer accept foot passengers from Rangers groups due to the incidents.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/13274492> - In 2011, following UEFA sanctions against Rangers FC for sectarian chanting by supporters, fan groups pledged to self-police and eradicate sectarian songs. Representatives from 80 supporters clubs, the Rangers Supporters Trust, the Rangers Assembly, and the Blue Order met to address the issue. They agreed to eliminate songs with sectarian references and emphasized the need for stringent self-policing to improve the club's image and address the problem proactively.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-58421171> - In August 2021, three men were arrested and charged with singing racist songs in Glasgow. The arrests followed footage showing Rangers fans singing a sectarian song before the first Old Firm game of the season at Ibrox. Police stated that the men, aged 19, 21, and 24, were the first of 'numerous' arrests expected. The divisional commander for Greater Glasgow emphasized that racist conduct would not be tolerated.
6. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/linfield-fans-anger-over-rangers-sectarian-chants/36207452.html> - In 2017, Linfield FC fans expressed anger over Rangers supporters singing sectarian songs, including 'The Billy Boys,' during a Scottish Challenge Cup game in Dundee. Linfield fans attending the match reported hearing the controversial songs, which also included 'Rule Britannia' and 'I Was Born Under a Union Jack.' The incident led to condemnation from Linfield fans and highlighted ongoing issues with sectarian chanting among football supporters.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offensive_Behaviour_at_Football_and_Threatening_Communications_%28Scotland%29_Act_2012> - The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 was legislation aimed at addressing sectarianism and offensive behavior in Scottish football. The act prohibited singing 'sectarian songs,' such as Irish rebel songs or anti-Catholic songs like 'No Pope of Rome.' The law led to numerous charges and convictions, but it was criticized for being illiberal and unfairly targeting football fans. In 2017, a bill was introduced to repeal the act, citing its failure to tackle sectarianism effectively.