

INTERNATIONAL

Bias ingrained early, study says

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BELFAST, Northern Ireland — Roman Catholic and Protestant children start learning to fear and loathe one another's communities when they are as young as 3 years old, a study published today found. It blamed parents and Northern Ireland's religiously divided school system.

"The surprising thing is how quickly these attitudes start to be expressed, almost as soon as they can talk," said Paul Connolly, lead author of the report, which was based on questioning 352 children ages 3 to 6. "You could imagine children drawing some of these distinctions at age 10, not 3."

Meanwhile, Catholic-Protestant violence continued in parts of Belfast. Protestants damaged several Catholic homes, and youths from both sides hurled stones at police Sunday. Three officers were reported injured.

Protestant extremists on

NORTHERN IRELAND Religious

violence continued Monday with an attack on Catholic university students living in a Protestant area.

Monday lobbed a nail-packed grenade into a house rented by three Catholic university students in a hard-line Protestant district called the Village. No injuries were reported.

Politicians on both sides warned that the spreading street violence is threatening to pull Northern Ireland back toward its darkest days after eight years of relative peace.

Sectarian tensions have been rising since politicians achieved the Good Friday accord of 1998, which inspired the current coalition government of British Protestants and Irish Catholics.

Connolly's research team found that boys and girls from the British Protestant and Irish Catholic sides of society are absorbing their communities'



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Shoppers run for cover Monday after being pelted by stones in Belfast.

prejudices by age 5, when they enter elementary schools that keep them almost entirely segregated in two separate systems. Only 4 percent of primary-age children in Northern Ireland are educated in religiously mixed schools.

"Our results, frankly, condemn the overall structure of Northern Ireland society," said Connolly, a University of Ulster sociologist.

The study, conducted by the University of Ulster, was commissioned by the government-funded Community Relations Council, which tries to promote

better relations between the communities.

The survey at 44 elementary schools and nurseries throughout Northern Ireland involved showing children pictures and objects, and asking them what they knew about each and whether they liked or disliked them. Connolly said he hadn't expected the youngest children to draw clear tribal distinctions, but some 3- and 4-year-olds already did — and added derogatory commentary unprompted.

ONLINE: University of Ulster, www.ulst.ac.uk