

Post-Primary School Segregation in Belfast, Northern Ireland



INTRODUCTION

Twenty years have passed since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement which officially signaled the end of the Troubles, yet Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland remain highly divided. This is especially evident in schools. The majority of state schools are predominantly Protestant, while the Catholic Church maintains schools attended by mostly Catholic students. Data from the most recent country-wide census (2011) showed that roughly half of the country's school children attended schools where 95% or more of their fellow pupils were of the same religion.

Using the most recent annual school census data from the 2016/17 academic year, this project analyzes the current degree of religious segregation at post-primary schools in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

It seeks to identify:

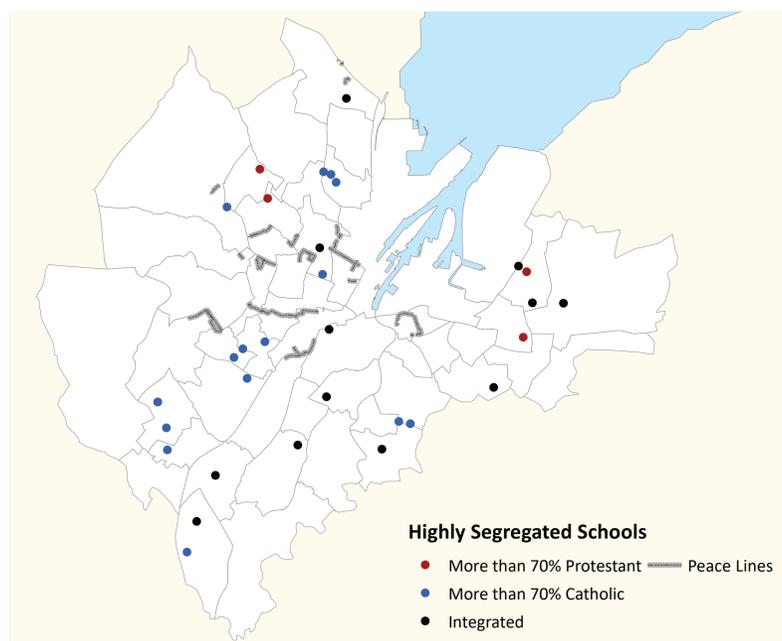
- Where are schools located relative to peace lines and other physical divisions?
- Where are the most highly-segregated schools, and conversely, where are the most highly-integrated schools?

Conflict in Belfast has been the focus of much research and the general consensus is that the majority of violent incidents occur in highly-segregated neighborhoods. Specifically, conflict-related deaths are highly correlated with areas whose residents are more than 90% Protestant or Catholic. Violence also occurs along the fault-lines between highly segregated communities. Therefore, this project also asks:

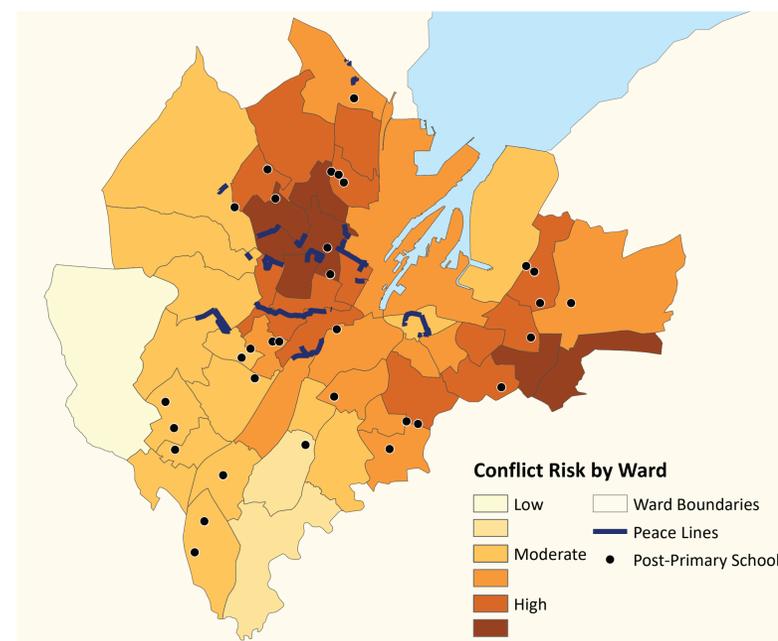
- Where are highly-segregated schools in close proximity to other schools with a very different student religious makeup?
- And, are there any wards that might be at a higher risk for conflict than others?



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RESULTS



METHODS

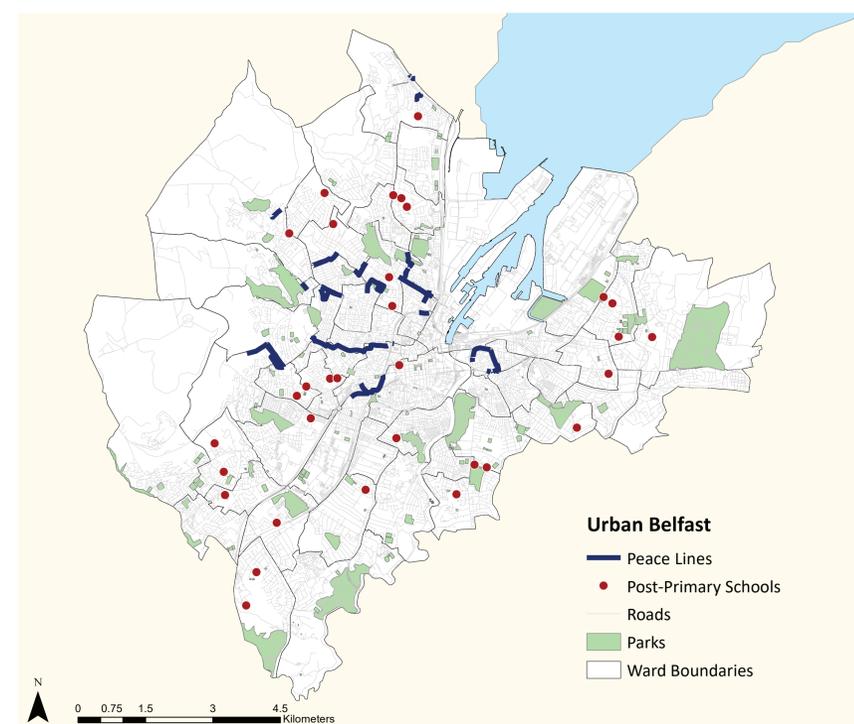
This project uses the most recent school census data collected on October 7th, 2016 by the Department of Education. This data reflects the post-primary student makeup for the 2016/17 academic year.

First, schools were assigned a ranking from 0-3 by the degree of religious segregation. A rank of 0 corresponds to low segregation – less than 30% of the student body all-Catholic or all-Protestant – while a rank of 3 is given to highly-segregated schools with more than 90% of students from one religion or the other.

Schools were then divided into three groupings:

- 'Integrated,' or those that received a score of 0-1;
- 'Highly-segregated Catholic,' those with a rank of 2-3 or more than 70% Catholic;
- 'Highly-segregated Protestant,' those with a rank of 2-3 or more than 70% Protestant.

From here, the distances between different school groupings were calculated in order to see where schools with very different student demographics were in closest proximity to each other. In other words, where are the highly-segregated Catholic



schools in relation to highly-segregated Protestant schools and to integrated schools?

These high-risk schools were then transposed onto the ward level administrative boundaries in order to visualize which wards might be most at risk for violent conflict between post-primary students.

Data Sources: ESRI, Open Street Map, UK Data, Northern Ireland Office, & the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.
Northern Ireland Department of Education: School Locations & School-level Post-Primary Religion dataset (updated February 28, 2017)
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Administrative boundaries

CONCLUSIONS

Given the history of inter-religious conflict in Belfast and that violence most often occurs where highly-segregated communities abut one another, identifying the schools that fit this description is a potential starting point for developing youth-focused conflict transformation interventions.

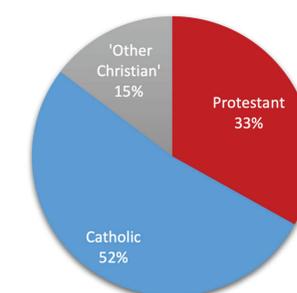
This analysis identifies seven wards that are at particularly high risk for post-primary level school conflict: Ardoyne, Cherryvalley, Chichester Park, Cliftonville, Crumlin, Knock, and Water Works.

Four schools fall within these wards: Belfast Model School for Girls, Belfast Royal Academy, and St. Malachy's College.

One of the main limitations for this project has been that the Department of Education only collects student religion data for the post-primary level, so it has not analyzed primary and nursery schools that may also be at risk. Given that the vast majority of Catholic parents report sending their children to Catholic schools while Protestants attend state-run schools, it is very feasible to carry this analysis further taking younger students into account.

As Brexit casts uncertainty onto the future relationship between Ireland and Northern Ireland, a resurgence of latent tensions appears increasingly likely. Commencing peace education at the youngest age possible is essential to maintaining the hard-won peace in these communities, rendering this analysis useful for curriculum development and prioritization.

Total Enrollment: 28,833



Map projection: TM 65 Irish Grid
Cartographer: Emma Creighton
Developed for: GIS for International Applications
Instructor: Patrick Florance
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