# Green councillor criticises double standards over paramilitary flags and Kneecap controversy in Northern Ireland



As Northern Ireland approaches its annual marching season, the issue of paramilitary flags littering the landscape has rekindled robust discussions about governance and the legacy of the Troubles. Green councillor Brian Smyth from East Belfast has publicly denounced the apparent hypocrisy of individuals who condemn the Irish rap group Kneecap while simultaneously justifying the display of paramilitary flags associated with groups like the UVF and UDA, both of which are classified as terrorist organisations under UK law.

Smyth’s comments were particularly pertinent in light of the recent arrest of Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, a member of Kneecap, who faces charges under the Terrorism Act for allegedly waving a Hezbollah flag during a performance in London. He expressed frustration at the double standards prevalent in public discourse: “You can’t criticise one and then try and defend paramilitary flags. They’re classed as illegal organisations,” Smyth articulated, emphasising the inconsistency in the treatment of different groups within the community.

The councillor's frustrations extend beyond the socio-political hypocrisy; he voiced a broader concern about the ongoing presence of paramilitary flags, feeling it marks a failure of governance. “We live in 2025, and flags of illegal organisations are still going up on lampposts,” he lamented, urging both the Department for Infrastructure and the PSNI to take definitive action. He highlighted a growing sense of anger among constituents who find these displays detrimental to community cohesion and wellbeing.

Echoing Smyth's sentiments, Belfast’s Lord Mayor Micky Murray described the flags as “littering” urban spaces. He stressed that while celebrating cultural heritage is important—especially around significant events such as VE Day and the Twelfth of July—paramilitary flags signify a troubling connection to violence and criminality. “People don’t want these littering communities,” he remarked, indicating a clear divide between cultural displays and those emblematic of past violence.

In response to the mounting concerns, the Alliance Party, to which Murray belongs, is advocating for new legislation that would provide a regulatory framework for flag displays. Their proposal aims to establish guidelines governing the use of emblems on public structures, addressing both the cultural and contentious aspects of such displays.

While local voices call for legislative changes, the PSNI maintains a cautious approach, asserting that they will address flag-related incidents on a case-by-case basis. A spokesperson noted, “Where any offences have been committed, the circumstances will be thoroughly investigated,” committing to a nuanced engagement with community representatives to promote a safer and more inclusive society.

As the tensions surrounding these displays of allegiance to paramilitary groups continue to surface, they lay bare not only the ongoing struggle for peace in Northern Ireland but also the broader implications of political expression and identity. This ongoing debate encapsulates a society striving to reconcile its complex past with aspirations for a united future, underscoring the delicate balance between cultural pride and the remnants of conflict that still resonate in everyday life.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/mayor-and-east-belfast-politician-slam-paramilitary-flags-littering-north-amid-kneecap-controversy-3H5EJ24C6JBAVLCCT3NMSN62RE/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/mayor-and-east-belfast-politician-slam-paramilitary-flags-littering-north-amid-kneecap-controversy-3H5EJ24C6JBAVLCCT3NMSN62RE/> - An East Belfast councillor has criticised those who denounce Kneecap but justify the hanging of paramilitary flags on lampposts, as officials, including the mayor, call for the annual displays to stop. The comments come ahead of the marching season. Green councillor Brian Smyth criticised those speaking out against Kneecap but defending the hanging of paramilitary flags. He stated that under UK law, these flags represent illegal terrorist organisations. Kneecap member Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh was charged with a terror offence after allegedly waving a Hezbollah flag on stage at a gig in London. Mr Smyth called for the annual displaying of UVF and UDA flags around the summer marching season to cease, describing it as a failure of governance and statutory bodies. Belfast’s Lord Mayor Micky Murray echoed these views, stating that the flags were 'littering' areas of the north. The Alliance Party is currently pushing for legislation that would regulate the display of flags and emblems. A PSNI spokesperson stated they will consider each incident on a case-by-case basis, and where any offences have been committed, the circumstances will be thoroughly investigated.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-band-kneecap-say-terrorism-charge-seeks-silence-artists-2025-05-22/> - Irish-language rap group Kneecap has condemned a terrorism-related charge against band member Liam O'Hanna as an attempt to silence politically outspoken artists. O'Hanna, 27, was charged by London's Metropolitan Police for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag—representing the Iran-backed militant group banned in the UK—during a performance in November. Kneecap stated the flag was thrown on stage and denied endorsing Hezbollah or Hamas, emphasising their condemnation of all attacks on civilians. The band, known for advocating Irish identity and Irish unity, has been scrutinised recently for pro-Palestinian messaging during their Coachella performance. In April, they also apologised for previously controversial comments perceived as encouraging violence against MPs. O'Hanna is scheduled to appear in court on June 18. Despite mounting criticism, including calls from UK lawmakers for their exclusion, Kneecap is still set to perform at the Glastonbury Festival in June.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/951643fa3345a152f86b59bbdcbd0a49> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, also known by his stage name Mo Chara and a member of the Irish hip-hop group Kneecap, has been charged by British police under the Terrorism Act for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance at London's Kentish Town Forum on November 21, 2024. The charge comes amid a broader investigation into the group by counterterrorism authorities, following videos purportedly showing the band endorsing Hezbollah and Hamas and inciting violence against lawmakers. Kneecap has denied these allegations, claiming their remarks were misrepresented by political figures. The group, based in Belfast, is recognised for promoting Irish-language culture but is controversial for its provocative lyrics and political stances. The controversy has led to several concert cancellations and calls from politicians to drop the band from events, including the upcoming Glastonbury Festival. Kneecap garnered wider attention following the release of their gritty self-titled feature film, which premiered at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival and was shortlisted for Academy Awards but did not advance to the final nominations. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear in court on June 18, and police continue to investigate footage from a separate 2023 concert.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known by his stage name Mo Chara and a member of the Belfast-based Irish-language rap trio Kneecap, has been charged with a terrorism offence under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000. The charge pertains to allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a concert at London’s O2 Forum in November 2024, an act believed to suggest support for a proscribed organisation. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on June 18. If convicted, he faces up to six months in prison and/or a fine. Kneecap has rejected the allegations, calling the charges a political distraction and an attempt to silence artists critical of global injustices, particularly in Gaza. They emphasised their condemnation of all attacks on civilians and denied support for Hamas or Hezbollah. The group's performances, including a recent appearance at Coachella, have drawn attention for their political stance and symbolism rooted in Irish Republican sentiments. The charge follows an investigation by the Metropolitan Police’s Counter Terrorism Command using audience-filmed footage.
6. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/07/04/news/uda-3408423/> - Concerns have been raised after a UDA flag was put up in a mixed housing development in south Belfast. It is understood the offensive flag was recently put up in the Bests Hill area of Newtownbreda. The flag includes the letters UDA, the paramilitary organisation which was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people during the Troubles. South Belfast SDLP assembly member Matthew O'Toole has raised concerns about the latest paramilitary flag. Similar loyalist flags have been hung from lampposts in the area in recent weeks. Mr O'Toole said local people are opposed to the flags. 'There should be nowhere in our community or our society where people are forced to live under the banners of paramilitary organisations involved in criminality,' he said.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/05/28/news/loyalist_paramilitary_flags_outside_tesco_creating_a_chill_factor_for_shoppers-3308777/> - The appearance of loyalist paramilitary flags outside a major Tesco store in south Belfast is creating a 'chill factor' for shoppers, a councillor has said. A blue UDA flag was among flags appearing on lampposts near the grounds of Tesco Newtownbreda in recent days. Elsewhere, UVF flags were also spotted along the lower part of the Ravenhill Road towards the Ormeau embankment. SDLP councillor Donal Lyons said political leadership was needed to tackle the familiar blight of unwanted flags. 'There's no cause or excuse that justifies the flying of any paramilitary flag,' he told The Irish News. 'Unfortunately, it's nothing new and it's deeply frustrating. For years we've been fobbed off with talks of a flags protocol that clearly never worked in any shape or form that was meaningful.'