

**The 'Deserving' Victims of Political Violence:
'Punishment' Attacks in Northern Ireland**

Colin Knox

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Biographical Statement: Colin Knox is Professor of Public Policy at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. His research interests are in public administration reform and conflict resolution. His most recent book is entitled *Conflict Resolution at the*

Micro Level: Northern Ireland, Israel and South Africa (Macmillan, 2000) with P. Quirk.

Abstract:

The plight of the victims of political violence in Northern Ireland and the enduring suffering of their families has recently assumed much greater public prominence. Some see this new-found concern by government for victims as no more than a necessary part of the political and public relations management of the prisoners' early release programme within which victims were mere pawns in the wider unstoppable agenda for a peace deal. Preconceived notions of perpetrators and victims have been politically contested in ways which suggest there are those who are 'deserving' or 'undeserving' of victimhood status. This paper considers one category of victim, those subject to paramilitary 'punishment' beatings and shootings, and argues that they have become expendable and legitimate targets for violence in Northern Ireland. They are expendable in the sense that any attempt to deal with the problem in a serious way would have widespread political ramifications for parties currently in devolved government. They are legitimate in that victims' culpability derives from the communities within which they live and their 'punishment' is meted out by paramilitaries acting on the communities' behalf.

Key words: victims; paramilitaries; punishment; Northern Ireland.

Professor Tim Newburn
Social Policy and Politics
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20 October 2000

Dear Professor Newburn

Criminal Justice: The International Journal of Policy and Practice

Further to my letter dated 1st September 2000 I attach 3 copies of the **revised version** of the article entitled *The 'Deserving' Victims of Political Violence: 'Punishment' Attacks in Northern Ireland* for your consideration in the journal Criminal Justice. I have enclosed a separate written statement which sets out how I have sought to address the reviewers' comments in the revised article.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Colin Knox
School of Public Policy, Economics & Law

Article Title: The ‘Deserving’ Victims of Political Violence: ‘Punishment’ Attacks in Northern Ireland

Addressing the Reviewers’ Comments.

I have sought to incorporate the useful comments made by the reviewers as follows:

1. The research methodology is explained in more detail including the selection of interviewees and focus groups (see page 2).
2. The article is grounded more thoroughly in the criminology literature on victimhood status, the community and relationship between crime/fear of crime and punitive attitudes (see for example the exploration of work by Ní Aoláin, Rolston, Hough, Walklate Christie, Miers, pages 5, 7, 10, 11)
3. The key recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review with regard to victims are revisited in the text (see page 17).
4. The ‘rationality’ of community attitudes towards ‘punishment’ attacks is examined with reference to crime statistics in Northern Ireland and the most recent fear of crime and victimisation report (see page 9).
5. The politicisation of ‘punishment’ attacks by anti-Agreement Unionists and Conservatives to embarrass the Labour Government set alongside the Conservative Party’s ambivalence to victims of state violence is highlighted (see page 12).
6. Other minor observations/comments by referees have also been addressed. See for example:
 - relocate central themes of the article to front of paper (see pages 1/2)
 - relatives of victims’ cynicism over the government’s intentions (see page 3)
 - issue of shared view of victimhood (see page 18)
 - query over victims described as ‘forgotten’ (see page 20).