Unit 4:
The Home Rule Crisis 1912-14

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(Source: B. Walker (ed.), Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801–1922 (Dublin, 1978))

Source 2. **DOCUMENT:** ‘Ulster’s prayer. Don’t let go!’ Unionist anti-Home Rule postcard
(Source: © National Museums Northern Ireland Collection Ulster Museum BELUM.W2011.1323)

Source 3. **DOCUMENT:** Solemn League and Covenant souvenir parchment signed by James Craig
(Source: Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D1413/109)

Source 4. **MAP:** Percentage of non-Catholic Ulster adults (over sixteen) that signed the (a) Solemn League and Covenant, (b) the Women’s Declaration

Source 4 (a-b)

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(Source: Cork City and County Archives, de Róiste Papers)

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(Source: © Irish Examiner)

Source 8. **MAP:** The Howth Gunrunning, July 1914

Source Background and Captions
 ULSTER'S PRAYER

Don't let go!

Caption
Ulster's
Solemn League and Covenant.

Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are under-written, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V., humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. 4 And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority. 4 In sure confidence that God will defend the right we here to subscribe our names. 4 And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant.

The above was signed by me at The City Hall, Belfast, “Ulster Day,” Saturday, 28th September, 1912.

James Craig (Captain).

God Save the King.
The defeat of Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' in the House of Lords precipitated a general election in January 1910. The Liberals were intent on ending the Lords' veto, which would allow for the passing of their more progressive social reforms. In Redmond's eyes, its ending would also give the Liberal Party a freer hand to deal with the issue of Home Rule for Ireland. His support for the Liberals in the January 1910 election was predicated on Asquith's stated commitment in December 1909 to solve the Irish 'problem' through a system of self-government. The Irish vote in Britain could only be delivered on the basis of this resolve to deal with the Irish question. The result of the election put Redmond (his party winning seventy-one seats) and Home Rule at the heart of British politics.

Support for the Ulster Covenant and Women's Declaration was strong throughout the province of Ulster, despite marked regional variation in the proportion of non-Catholic men and women (aged over sixteen in 1911) who signed these documents. Participation was much lower in the Belfast region than in mid-Ulster: signature ratios for Armagh approached 90 per cent by comparison with about 70 per cent in County Down. Yet the involvement of two thirds of Protestant adults in almost every county was a matchless triumph of Irish political mobilisation. These signature ratios can also be compared with the reported membership of three major unionist bodies – the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the Unionist Clubs and the Orange Order (4c, 4d 4e). In all three cases, enlistment in the Belfast region fell proportionately short of that in mid-Ulster, where Catholics were more prevalent. The impetus for Protestant solidarity was doubtless stronger in the presence of powerful Catholic communities, as suggested by the high concentration of Ulster Volunteers in Cavan and Monaghan, though not in Donegal (Fig. 4c).
The arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in April 1914 escalated the Irish Home Rule Crisis. Under pressure from Ulster-unionist hawks, Sir Edward Carson and the Ulster unionist leadership agreed to fund a purchase of c. 20,000 rifles and two million rounds of ammunition from an arms dealer in Hamburg. After a series of adventures and misadventures, the ship carrying the arms, the SS Clyde Valley (disguised for the return voyage to Ireland) docked in the small port of Larne, north of Belfast, on the night of 24 April 1924. The UVF planned the landing meticulously, mobilising hundreds of vehicles and members for the operation. The militia sealed off the harbour with pickets and organised a false landing in Belfast Lough to act as a decoy. Moving quickly before morning light, Ulster Volunteers removed the arms to pre-arranged dumps around Ulster. Their speed forestalled any interference from police or other Crown forces in the event the government had decided to act. The audacious nature of the gunrunning raised unionist morale, while damaging government prestige. UVF propagandists celebrated the event, which quickly became enshrined in unionist folklore. Prior to Larne, Prime Minister Asquith and John Redmond had suggested that the Ulster unionists did not intend to carry through with threatened armed resistance to Home Rule. After the gun-running, that sentiment was increasingly seen as wishful thinking. The failure of the British government to prevent the Larne arms landing occurred a month after the ‘Curragh Mutiny’, in which British army officers refused to countenance government instructions to move against the Ulster unionists. With a seemingly complacent British government refusing to protect the Home Rule bill, that defence was taken up by the Irish Volunteers militia. Once considered unimaginable, civil war between Irish unionists and nationalists was now a real possibility.


Cork City’s Irish Volunteers in mid-1914 reflected a healthy cross-section of ‘respectable’ working-class and lower-middle-class Catholic society. A sample shows that over half were either skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, with most of those (37 per cent) coming from the artisan class. Clerks and small shopkeepers also featured in this mobilisation, comprising 18 per cent of the total. Their strength can be seen in concentrations in the small working-class houses and modest homes in places like Blarney Street, Fair Lane, Sheares Street, Horgan’s Buildings and Douglas Street. At this stage shop assistants were under-represented (they later joined the Irish Republican Army in large numbers), especially those ‘living in’ at drapery establishments on Patrick’s Street. Far fewer middle- and upper-class Catholics joined the movement (professionals and merchants combined comprised just 10 per cent of the total), as seen by the scarcity of members in the affluent suburbs of Sunday’s Well, Blackrock Road and the Western Road. University College, Cork students as well as residents associated with the British army also avoided the Irish Volunteers, with gaps visible in localities surrounding Victoria Barracks in the city’s north side,
and on the University College Cork campus on the south side. The poorest labourers in the city likewise did not participate in Volunteers activities, with their absence notable in the tenements of 'The Marsh' area near Bachelor's Quay, and in the poor working-class area of Gillabbey Street, near St Fin Barre's Cathedral. Overall, one can describe the Irish Volunteers at this time as appealing to those Catholics with steady jobs but possessing only modest incomes and social standing.

[Source: Cork City and County Archives, de Róiste Papers]

Source 7  PHOTOGRAPH: Irish Volunteers march in Killarney, County Kerry

On 28 November 1913, Belfast republican Alf Cotter addressed an Irish-language class in Killarney town. At his urging, the forty students present formed a Killarney branch of the Irish Volunteers, perhaps the first unit organised outside of Dublin. County Kerry became a hotbed of Volunteers activity. Unlike the rest of the country, the majority of Irish Volunteers in Kerry followed the republican leadership at the time of the split in the organisation in 1914, and the county would see some of the first notable disruptions of British army recruiting meetings in Ireland. [Source: © Irish Examiner]

Source 8  MAP: The Howth gunrunning of 26 July 1914

The Howth gunrunning of 26 July 1914 electrified both constitutional and advanced nationalists across Ireland. The Irish Volunteers' landing at Howth resembled the Ulster Volunteer Force's (UVF) Larne gunrunning, but differed in three significant ways: John Redmond and the Irish Party leadership were unaware of the arms importation, which was organised primarily by the Irish Republican Brotherhood in conjunction with a flinty band of wealthy Liberal supporters; the weapons comprised only a fraction of the UVF's imported arsenal; and finally (and perhaps most importantly), Dublin Castle attempted to prevent the Howth landing, in contrast with its passivity at Larne. At Howth about 900 single-shot 1871 German Mauser rifles with ammunition were brought ashore at daylight from the sailing yacht Asgard. These rifles were carried to Dublin by roughly 1,000 Volunteers mobilised for the operation. Along the way they were blocked by a body of the Dublin Metropolitan Police. The police gave way after a brief brawl, with some constables refusing to interfere with their fellow Irish nationalists. The police were reinforced by regular British army troops from the King's Own Scottish Borderers Regiment. After a largely bloodless clash with the troops, the Irish Volunteers dispersed, but retained most of their new weapons. Angry Dubliners heckled and stoned the returning soldiers, who fired into a crowd at Bachelor's Walk Quay near Dublin city centre, killing three and wounding thirty-seven. Dublin Castle's aggressiveness outraged Irish nationalists, who perceived a double standard in their treatment compared with state permissiveness towards the Ulster unionists. The following week a second Irish Volunteers arms landing at Kilcoole, County Wicklow further emboldened nationalists. Events at Howth underlined John Redmond's Irish Party's seeming failure to satisfy nationalist aspirations on the eve of the First World War.