

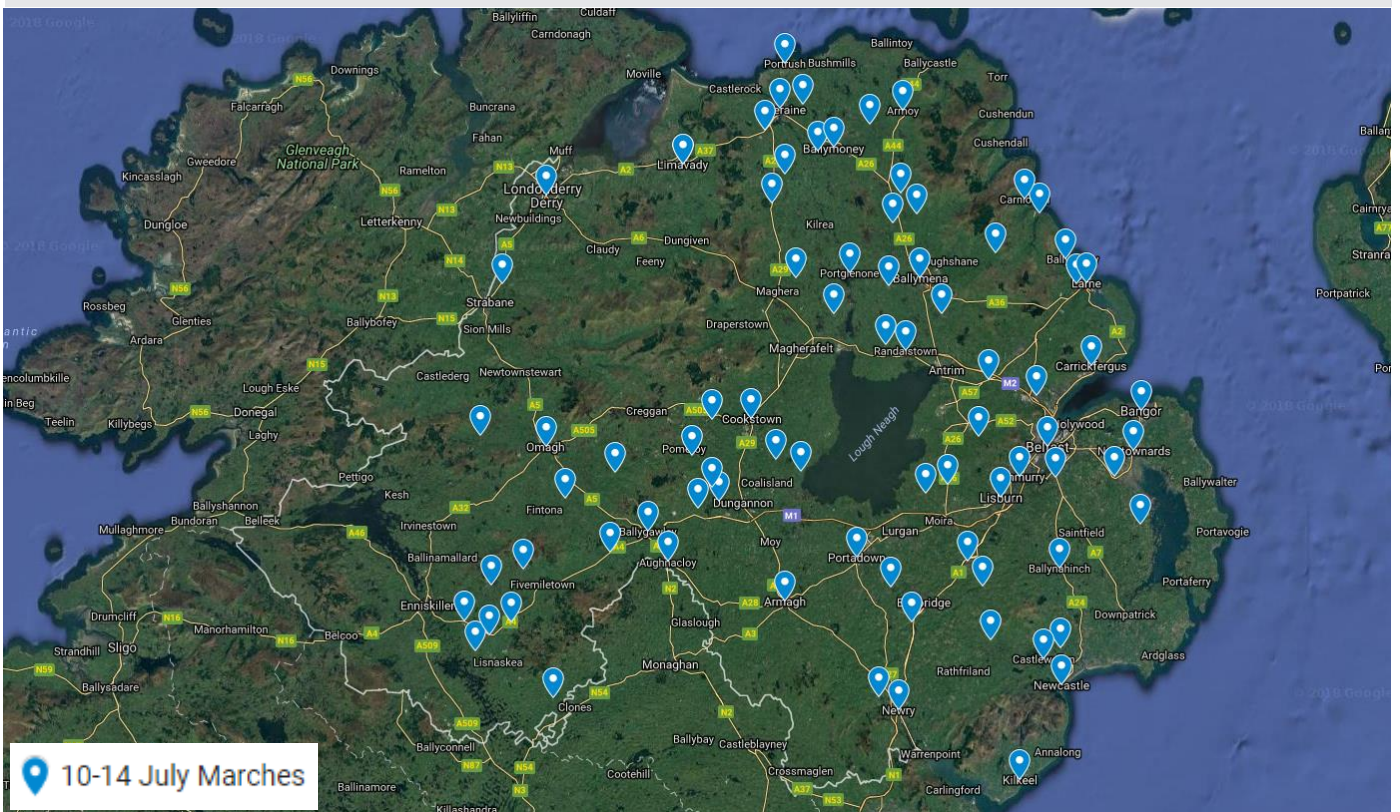




# Northern Ireland 2018 Summer Marching Season

## KEY POINTS

- Northern Ireland’s summer marching season has begun, running from April until September.
- The most symbolic and contentious marches occur on and around 12 July, to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.
- These marches occur amidst a period of political uncertainty in the region.



## SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

**Civil Unrest:** The annual Northern Ireland marching season runs from Easter Monday until September, and is approaching its peak. The most important marches occur on or around 12 July, to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The battle was fought between forces loyal to the Protestant William of Orange and Mary Stuart, and those who sided with the deposed Catholic monarch James II; the battle has been seen as a turning point in James’s attempts to regain the crown. The 12 July Orangemen marches are culturally significant to the Protestant and Loyalist sections of Northern Ireland, while generally disdained and opposed by the Catholic and Nationalist community, as they often march near or through Catholic majority areas. There are also related events on 11 July, including large bonfires, which often involve burning the effigies or pictures of notorious republicans.



## SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

The summer marching season has always proved one of the most difficult sticking points in the Northern Ireland Peace Process and continues to cause divisions in the region. This year's marches are of additional importance given the political deadlock which has beset Northern Ireland in 2017. Despite passing the official deadline, an executive for the Northern Ireland Assembly has yet to be formed due to differences between the Loyalist DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) and the Republican Sinn Féin, after snap elections in April 2017. The elections were called after a mismanagement scandal involving the former First Minister and current DUP leader, Arlene Foster, and a renewable energy scheme. These Assembly elections saw the greatest number of votes for Nationalist/Republican parties ever, with Unionist/Loyalist parties suffering a significant reduction in votes and seats.

The situation has been further complicated by the deal between the Conservative Party and the DUP in the national parliament, after the UK's 2017 election when no party gained a majority. Many DUP members want the party's leadership to use its newly found influence in Westminster, to persuade the government to allow marching routes through flashpoint areas, most importantly Garvaghy Road in County Tyrone. While a march through this area has not been permitted, that it has been strongly lobbied for may increase the risk of violent incidents.

It is unclear how the ongoing issues with the Irish border (brought about by the UK's decision to leave the European Union) will impact the marching season. The UK government has failed to secure a resolution for this issue despite the fact that the country is less than a year from leaving the EU. The Irish government have concerns over this, with Ireland's foreign minister suggesting that "we are in for an uncertain summer", in reference to the parades season. In the region as a whole, the potential for clashes between the Loyalists, Nationalists, and the police is higher than in the recent past, due to these political developments.

The 12 July marches are due to be the most well attended, with an estimated 500,000 people either marching or spectating. Armagh is due to hold the largest march, while Belfast will hold the longest; other marches are due to occur across the region (with at least 164 marches planned between 10 and 14 July), as the map above shows. The marches differ in size from dozens to thousands of people.

The 12 July 2017 parades period passed without significant incident, which is important to note as the political situation is broadly similar to one which the region experiences this year. The Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) reported no arrests over the 12 July period. However, an investigation was reportedly launched after a number of bonfires of Sinn Féin election posters, Irish tricolours and on one, a picture of the late Martin McGuinness inside a mocked-up coffin. Moreover, there was an apparent increase in the number of bonfires, with the Northern Ireland fire and rescue service reporting a 20 per cent increase in the callouts at bonfires across the region. In 2016, there were a few occurrences of violence during marches and countermarches near Nationalist communities, including in North Antrim, but levels of unrest were generally low. This included Crumlin Road, Belfast, where violence has been common in the past. In 2015, 24 police officers were injured when clashes ensued after they refused marchers entry to a Nationalist stretch of Crumlin Road. A 16-year-old girl was also injured after a car struck Nationalist protestors. In years past, marches have had deadly consequences. In 1998, for example, three boys were killed when Loyalist marchers firebombed their home in Ballymoney; their mother was Catholic but lived in a mainly Protestant area.



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## SECURITY ADVICE

## LOW CIVIL UNREST RISK



Due to the highly personal and sensitive nature of marches in Northern Ireland, clashes between marchers and counter-demonstrators are possible. As noted, the political instability over the past few years raises the possibility for such clashes to occur. However, it should be noted that tensions regarding the marching season have eased somewhat over the past five to ten years. Travellers are reminded to remain vigilant and employ sensible personal security precautions. It is also important to adhere to the instructions of police and local authorities in case hostility escalates into violence.

Travellers should also note that on the night of 11 July, huge bonfires are erected by members of the Loyalist community (these may also occur on other dates). These bonfires can be associated with anti-social behaviour and symbols of Irish Nationalism, such as the Irish Tricolour, are often burned. While travellers should not be concerned if they see large fires, the bonfires should be avoided due to the potential for clashes in their vicinity and general criminality. Bonfires are often poorly-controlled and may set neighbouring buildings alight.

Solace Global would not advise clients on the need to employ enhanced security precautions when visiting Northern Ireland. Travellers may wish to use travel tracking technology with an intelligence feed, to stay abreast of any security-related events which may occur. More information on the times and locations of marches can be found on the Parades Commission website at <https://www.paradescommission.org/>.



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