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Article

Irish Soft Power in United States Politics: Mechanisms, Evolution, and Impact, (2005–2025) --- A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates Ireland's deployment of soft power in U.S. politics from 2005 to 2025, interrogating how a small, neutral state leverages economic interdependence, institutionalized cultural diplomacy, and diaspora mobilization to advance national interests amid geopolitical flux. Grounded in Nye's soft power framework and theories of asymmetrical interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2011), the research posits that these pillars—manifest in robust U.S. foreign direct investment, ceremonial engagements like St. Patrick's Day summits, and Irish-American advocacy—enable disproportionate influence, exemplified by safeguarding the Good Friday Agreement during Brexit. Employing Krippendorff's content analysis and Yin's case study triangulation, the analysis synthesizes governmental reports, economic datasets, and scholarly literature, revealing adaptive strategies that mitigated Brexit's threats through transatlantic lobbying and bipartisan congressional support. Key findings underscore Ireland's efficacy in shaping U.S. policy discourse, yet expose vulnerabilities, including fiscal overreliance on American multinationals and generational diaspora dilution. Critically, the paper advances small-state diplomacy scholarship by illuminating soft power's resilience in interdependent systems, though its qualitative emphasis could benefit from quantitative metrics for influence measurement. Implications include policy prescriptions for diversification and digital enhancement, offering a model for peripheral actors in global affairs, with avenues for comparative research on evolving diasporic dynamics.

Keywords: soft power; diaspora politics; U.S.-ireland relations; Good Friday Agreement; transatlantic diplomacy; foreign direct investment (FDI); small state diplomacy; brexit

Introduction

In today's world of global politics, the idea of soft power has become an important force in shaping how countries get along with each other. Joseph S. Nye (2004) came up with the term "soft power" to describe a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than through "hard power," which is coercion or payment. It comes from how appealing a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies seem to be (Nye, 2004, p. 5). For a small, militarily neutral country like Ireland on the edge of Europe, soft power is not just an alternative to hard power; it is the main way it has influence in the world. This is most evident in its relationship with the United States, a global superpower with which it has deep, complicated, and historically significant ties. Ireland, a country known for its rich cultural history and a global diaspora of 70 million people, has long been an important part of US politics (Department of the Taoiseach, 2025a; Government of Ireland, 2020). This influence goes beyond just feelings and ceremonies; it shows up as a real force in economic policy, diplomatic talks, and the priorities of lawmakers. The Irish American community, one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States, has historically been a keyway for this influence to spread, turning shared ancestry into political power.

Recent academic research has increasingly acknowledged the intricate characteristics of Ireland's soft-power strategy. Keohane and Nye (2011) contend that, in an era of intricate interdependence, small states can exploit asymmetrical relationships to attain a disproportionate influence. This theoretical framework is especially relevant to the relationship between Ireland and the United States, where cultural affinity, economic integration, and diaspora networks establish numerous channels of influence that surpass conventional diplomatic relations.

Research Scope and Thesis

According to this report, the Irish soft power strategy from 2005 to 2025 used economic symbiosis, institutionalized cultural diplomacy, and a reactivated diaspora to safeguard and advance its key national interests. This tactic was crucial in handling Brexit's existential danger to the Good Friday Agreement, proving that Irish influence is not just ceremonial but important to its statecraft (Murphy, 2019). A shared heritage typically frames the U.S.-Ireland relationship, but this study argues that purposeful, sustained, and adaptive diplomatic and economic action has made it effective. Changing geopolitical landscapes have shaped Irish soft power from 2005 to 2025. It began after the "Celtic Tiger's" height, survived the global financial crisis, and made Ireland a hub for U.S. multinationals. Most importantly, the UK's 2016 decision to quit the EU directly challenged peace in Ireland and catalyzed a forceful, coordinated response from Irish and Irish-American actors (O'Brien, 2019). This study builds on Gilmartin and White (2008) and Mac Éinrí (2007) to analyze Irish-American political engagement in the modern era and how traditional diaspora mobilization patterns have responded to geopolitical concerns. This study adds to the knowledge on small-state diplomacy and diaspora politics and sheds light on Irish soft power deployment.

Methodology and Structure

A thorough review of the primary and secondary sources was performed in this qualitative study (Bowen, 2009). The study draws from official publications and data from the Irish Government, the U.S. Congress, the White House, the Census Bureau, Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO), IDA Ireland, and the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland. Academic publications, reports from international organizations, such as the IMF, and credible media coverage provide a comprehensive summary of Ireland's soft power methods and their efficacy. The analytical approach uses Krippendorff's (2018) content analysis to identify influence and strategic coordination patterns in policy papers, diplomatic declarations, and economic data. Triangulation across different data sources improves validity and reliability, following Yin's (2017) case study on best practices.

The study guides the reader from historical underpinnings to an extensive investigation of its current mechanics. Section 2 summarizes the history of Irish-American political dominance and the U.S. role in Northern Ireland's peace. Irish soft power is built on an economic nexus, cultural diplomacy, and diaspora, as described in Section 3. The mobilization of these pillars in response to Brexit is discussed in Section 4. The data on the efficacy and evolution of the Irish influence are synthesized in Section 5. Finally, this article summarizes its findings and suggests policy changes for this long-standing transatlantic bond.

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes 20 major 2015–2025 studies on soft power, diaspora politics, U.S.-Ireland relations, and related topics. The assessment covers theoretical advances in soft power and small-state diplomacy, Irish diaspora, and cultural influence on U.S. politics, economic interdependence, FDI dynamics, and Brexit's impact on transatlantic ties. Each study's conclusions, methodological strengths and weaknesses, and relevance to the research issue are critically assessed: From 2005 to 2025, how has Ireland used economic, cultural, and diasporic soft power in U.S. politics?

Advances in Soft Power and Small-State Diplomacy Theory: Chitty (2017) uses Ireland to emphasize "virtue" as a cultural attractor in Nye's soft power framework. Qualitative research shows

how Ireland's neutrality boosts its diplomatic appeal but criticizes the framework's influence quantification. This relates to the focus of this paper on Ireland's adaptive soft power. Digital public diplomacy, according to Cull (2019), provides minor states with disproportionate power through online cultural networks. According to interviews and content analysis, Ireland's digital diaspora activities are effective, but susceptible to misinformation. Ireland must update its digital tactics despite global development. Fan (2018) used Ireland-U.S. relations to study soft power in asymmetric relations. Historical document analysis shows how cultural affinity boosts economic leverage, but U.S. policy changes pose risks. This validates the study's multi-pronged strategy theory. Hayden (2015) criticizes soft power measurements and proposes small-state relational frameworks. Quantitative research on U.S. impressions of Ireland found significant cultural attraction but warned against overreliance on tradition. This helps to assess the long-term influence of Ireland. Keohane and Nye (2017) added cyber to their interdependence theory. Case studies, such as Ireland, show how economic linkages build political leverage, criticizing the model's domestic backlash supervision. Thus, Ireland's economic synergy is soft power.

Irish Diaspora and Cultural Influence in U.S. Politics: Cochrane (2020) surveys and interviews: Irish-American political mobilization post-GFA. Brexit reactivated the power of the diaspora and shifted activism to cultural networking. This study critically examines generational dilution as a part of its diaspora pillar. Devlin (2018) researched cultural diplomacy at St. Patrick's Day festivities, using ethnography. Rituals enable elite access but limit policy influence. Cultural diplomacy analysis was directly affected by this. Gleeson (2021) uses oral histories to trace Irish diasporic identity. The study shows political influence in U.S. elections, despite integration issues. This shows the role of the diaspora in the policy debate, supporting the research. Hickman et al. (2023) used mixed-methods surveys to study second-generation Irish identity in the U.S. Cultural links support soft power, but youth political engagement was low. This affects the future diaspora strategies. An archival analysis by O'Brien (2019) examined Brexit's Irish-American lobbying catalysis. It shows effective mobilization, but requires U.S. bipartisanship. This case study supports the Brexit concept.

Economic Interdependence and FDI: Barry and Van Egeraat (2019) use econometrics to evaluate Ireland's post-crisis FDI model. The findings show U.S. dominance, but a warning of tax policy concerns. It crucially links economic ties to political influence, thus supporting symbiosis. Coffey et al. (2023) quantitatively model the effects of corporate tax reforms on U.S.-Ireland FDI. The study indicates resiliency, but criticizes overconcentration. This improves the knowledge of soft power economic vulnerability. Lawless and Morgenroth (2019) used sector-level data to simulate Brexit's trade consequences. Despite methodological assumptions, the results predict that U.S. ties will alleviate disruptions. See the geopolitical stress test in the paper. Policy analysis by Regan (2024) criticizes Ireland's budgetary dependence on U.S. companies. It emphasizes the defense of soft power and advocates diversification. Relevant to the vulnerability discussion in this paper Seabrooke and Wigan (2020) examined Ireland's involvement in global wealth chains. Qualitative case studies show profit shifting but ethical issues. This informs an economic interdependence analysis.

Brexit's Transatlantic Impact: Gormley-Heenan and Aughey (2017) used discourse analysis to examine Brexit's border effects. Soft power prevents harsh borders and critiques the EU-UK disparities. Linked to the case study. Murphy (2019) evaluated Ireland's Brexit diplomacy through interviews. It praises multipillar activation, but highlights U.S. dependence. Thus, the adaptive statecraft thesis is supported. O'Malley (2023) biographically examined Biden's post-Brexit role. Diplomacy's heritage is the focus, not personalization. Relevant to presidential transitions. Ryan (2022) studied the growth of ceremonial diplomacy in U.S.-Ireland relations. Although symbolic, ethnographic data show a crisis adaptation. Cultural pillars are enriched. Sullivan (2022) examined Irish diplomacy under Trump using document analysis. It likes economic framing, but dislikes trade disputes. This concerns administration adaptability.

Table 1. Summary of Key Literature (2015-2025).

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings	Outcomes/Relevance to Research Question
Barry & Van Egeraat	2019	Econometric analysis	U.S. FDI dominance in Ireland; risks from tax changes	Highlights economic symbiosis vulnerabilities
Chitty	2017	Qualitative case studies	Virtue enhances small-state soft power	Frames Ireland’s neutral appeal
Cochrane	2020	Surveys and interviews	Diaspora shift to cultural networking; Brexit reactivation	Supports diaspora mobilization pillar
Coffey et al.	2023	Quantitative modeling	Tax reforms sustain FDI but increase concentration	Informs economic interdependence
Cull	2019	Interviews and content analysis	Digital networks amplify small-state influence	Relevant for digital diaspora strategies
Devlin	2018	Ethnography	St. Patrick’s Day facilitates access but is ceremonial	Critiques cultural diplomacy limits
Fan	2018	Historical document analysis	Cultural affinity amplifies economic leverage	Connects to multi-pronged strategies
Gleeson	2021	Oral histories	Persistent diasporic political influence	Illustrates identity evolution
Gormley-Heenan & Aughey	2017	Discourse analysis	Soft power averts hard borders in Brexit	Ties to geopolitical case study
Hayden	2015	Quantitative surveys	Relational models for soft power metrics	Evaluates perception-based influence
Hickman et al.	2023	Mixed-methods surveys	Weak youth engagement in diaspora politics	Warns of generational challenges
Keohane & Nye	2017	Case studies	Interdependence creates political leverage	Frames economic ties as soft power
Lawless & Morgenroth	2019	Sector-level modeling	Brexit trade disruptions mitigated by U.S. ties	Links to stress test outcomes
Murphy	2019	Interviews	Multi-pillar activation in Brexit response	Validates adaptive statecraft
O’Brien	2019	Archival analysis	Brexit catalyzes lobbying	Demonstrates crisis mobilization
O’Malley	2023	Biographical methods	Biden’s heritage aids diplomacy	Addresses presidential adaptability
Regan	2024	Policy analysis	Fiscal dependency requires diversification	Critiques economic vulnerabilities
Ryan	2022	Ethnographic data	Ceremonial diplomacy adapts to crises	Enriches cultural pillar analysis
Seabrooke & Wigan	2020	Qualitative case studies	Wealth chains benefit Ireland but raise ethical issues	Informs profit-shifting dynamics
Sullivan	2022	Document analysis	Economic framing effective in Trump era	Highlights resilience across administrations

Background on Ireland

Ireland, known as Éire in its native language, has a rich history, culture, and political evolution that influence its identity. Ireland is an island nation on the western coast of Europe, separated

politically between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK. This split has a different cultural and political trajectory because of its complex colonial past with Britain (Coogan, 2002). The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty gave Ireland independence as a dominion, and in 1949 it became a republic, ending its connections to the British monarchy (Foster, 1988). This struggle for sovereignty shaped Ireland's national spirit of self-determination and cultural revival. The partition of Ireland caused ongoing conflicts that shaped 20th-century Irish politics and diplomatic relations (Jackson, 1999). In the 1990s, the "Celtic Tiger" period saw strong economic expansion and modernization (O'Hagan, 2000). Foreign direct investment, particularly from American multinational corporations, European Union structural funding, and a young, educated workforce, drove this economic boom (Barry, 2003). Ireland's growth from an agrarian economy to a service-based economy has changed its global economic position and made it more appealing to investors. Rapid growth generated the weaknesses that surfaced during the 2008 financial crisis. Ireland's banking sector collapse and economic recession exposed the dangers of its development model, prompting major financial and fiscal policy reforms (Donovan & Murphy, 2013). The crisis also highlighted the significance of strong international partnerships, notably with the US, for economic stability and investment.

Ireland has a rich literary, musical, and artistic legacy that influences the global culture. Literary titans such as James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and Seamus Heaney shape Ireland's global cultural influence (Kiberd, 1995). Despite inconsistent success, the Irish language revival effort has remained a crucial part of cultural identity, promoted globally by groups like Gaeltacht Éireann and Irish cultural institutions (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Irish folk music, with its distinctive tunes and instruments, resonates globally (Longley, 2005). Ireland has actively pushed this cultural export to maintain diaspora relationships (White, 2017).

The diaspora helped spread Ireland's culture abroad. With millions claiming Irish ancestry worldwide, especially in the US, the Irish diaspora strengthened Ireland's cultural and political power (Kenny, 2014). Ireland's soft power strategy relies on its transnational character to influence global politics through familial and cultural ties. Gray (2013) and Hickman et al. (2012) demonstrated the changing nature of Irish diasporic identification and political mobilization.

Since 1973, Ireland has participated in regional economic and political initiatives as an EU member (Smith, 2020). Its EU membership has shaped international diplomacy and trade policy, enabling strong economic growth through access to European markets. Multilateralism and peacekeeping have strengthened Ireland's worldwide influence (MacGinty, 2017). The country's military neutrality and UN peacekeeping participation have earned a positive reputation worldwide (Tonra, 2006).

Ireland, or Éire, is an island nation in Western Europe, divided between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the latter being a part of the UK. Its modern identity was shaped by colonial history with Britain, culminating in independence through the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and full republican status in 1949. The resulting partition has led to ongoing political and cultural divisions. The late 20th century "Celtic Tiger" era marked rapid economic growth driven by foreign direct investment, EU support, and a skilled workforce, transforming Ireland from an agrarian to a service-based economy. However, the 2008 financial crisis exposed vulnerabilities, leading to major reforms and highlighting the role of international partnerships, especially with the US, for economic resilience.

Culturally, Ireland's global influence is seen in its literary giants (Joyce, Yeats, and Heaney), vibrant folk music, and ongoing efforts to revive the Irish language. Organizations such as Gaeltacht Éireann and Culture Ireland have promoted this heritage abroad, reinforcing diaspora connections. The Irish diaspora, notably in the US, amplifies Ireland's cultural and political reach. Since joining the EU in 1973, Ireland's diplomacy and trade has benefited from multilateralism and integration with European markets. Its military neutrality and commitment to peacekeeping have further enhanced its positive international reputation.

Historical Roots of Ireland-US Affinity

The deep connection between Ireland and the United States is rooted in a shared history of migration, hardship, and integration. Waves of Irish immigration during the 19th and 20th centuries created a dynamic Irish-American population. The devastating Great Famine (1845–1852) led to the deaths of about one million people and forced another two million to emigrate, significantly shaping both the Irish and American demographics. Early Catholic Irish immigrants in the predominantly Protestant United States faced discrimination and poverty. The infamous “No Irish Need Apply” signs epitomized the challenges encountered by Irish newcomers encountered (Kenny, 2000). Through resilience and collective organization, Irish immigrants established powerful networks in cities such as Boston, New York, and Chicago, relying on the Catholic Church, labor unions, and political machines (O'Donnell, 2015; Smyth, 2024).

Scholars describe the Irish-American experience as “ethnic succession,” where generations moved from marginalized immigrants to economic and political leaders (Alba & Nee, 2003). Their English proficiency, familiarity with British-style democracy, and concentration in urban centers enabled Irish Americans to become influential in city politics by the late 19th century, championing labor rights and social reforms (Erie, 1988). Political figures like “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald in Boston and Charles Francis Murphy of Tammany Hall exemplified Irish-American influence. The election of John F. Kennedy as the first Irish-Catholic U.S. president in the 20th century marked the community's full integration into American politics and reinforced transatlantic ties (O'Brien, 2005). The Kennedy era allowed Irish-Americans to advocate for democracy at home and abroad, especially as awareness of Northern Ireland's struggles grew (Wilson, 2016).

The United States played a crucial role in the peace process in Northern Ireland. “The Troubles,” a violent conflict from 1968 to 1998, left over 3,500 dead and shaped Irish American political activism (English, 2003). Despite the initial reluctance to interfere in UK affairs, successive U.S. administrations and Congress supported peaceful solutions (Congressional Research Service, 2025). American involvement evolved from a hands-off approach to active participation, ultimately contributing to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), or Belfast Agreement. This historic treaty established devolved, power-sharing governance in Northern Ireland, which required majority consent for any constitutional change. It includes provisions for prisoner releases, police reform, and paramilitary disarmament (McGarry & O'Leary, 2004).

President Bill Clinton's diplomacy was pivotal, especially his decision to grant a visa to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams in 1994, despite opposition from the State Department and British government. Irish-American lobbying and Clinton's personal commitment to peace are instrumental (Mitchell, 2001; O'Brien, 2019). George Mitchell's appointment as a Special Envoy was also significant. His “Mitchell Principles” established the foundation for successful negotiations, and he became a respected figure in the peace process (Mitchell, 1999). The U.S. now acts as a “guarantor” of the agreement, with Irish and Irish-American politicians defending its stability against geopolitical challenges (Kelly & Neal, 2025). The U.S.-backed International Fund for Ireland, established in 1986, provided nearly \$2 billion in support (Arthur, 2010).

Today, the economic relationship between Ireland and the U.S. is thriving. Major U.S. technology, pharmaceuticals, bioscience, and medical device companies base their European and global operations in Ireland. Firms such as Google, Apple, Meta (Facebook), Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Intel have a significant presence, attracted by Ireland's educated, English-speaking workforce, stable political climate, and access to the EU single market (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Barry & Van Egeraat, 2008). Ireland's historically low corporate tax rate, now 15%, in line with OECD standards remains appealing. World-class institutions such as Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin support research and innovation (Clancy & Doherty, 2019). The government agency IDA Ireland reported continued strong foreign direct investment, with 179 new high-value projects in the first half of 2025, especially in R&D, digital transformation, and sustainability. Ireland's adaptability to global economic changes and its close partnership with the U.S. underpin its ongoing prosperity and international influence.

Bilateral Trade Dynamics: This massive investment footprint fueled an equally massive trade relationship. As Table 2 shows, the value of bilateral goods trade has grown exponentially, with Ireland consistently running a large surplus. Data from Ireland’s Central Statistics Office (CSO) reveal that exports to the U.S. surged dramatically during the latter half of the study period. In the first five months of 2025, goods exports to the U.S. reached €70.8 billion, a 153% increase over the same period in 2024 (Central Statistics Office, 2025c). This extraordinary growth is dominated by high-value products from US-owned multinationals, particularly in the medical and pharmaceutical sectors. The phenomenon reflects what economists’ term “profit-shifting” and “transfer pricing,” whereby multinational corporations route their global profits through Ireland to take advantage of favorable tax conditions (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2017). However, it also represents genuine economic activity, with Ireland serving as a major production and distribution hub for American companies in European and global markets.

Table 2. Key U.S. Multinational Corporations in Ireland by Sector (2025).

Sector	Major Companies	Employment (Approximate)	Primary Activities
Technology	Google, Meta, Microsoft, Apple, LinkedIn	45,000	Software development, data centers, European operations
Pharmaceuticals	Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Eli Lilly	38,000	Manufacturing, R&D, regulatory affairs
Medical Devices	Medtronic, Abbott, Boston Scientific	32,000	Manufacturing, innovation centers
Financial Services	Bank of America, Citigroup, State Street	15,000	International banking, fund administration
Manufacturing	Intel, IBM, Dell Technologies	18,000	Semiconductor manufacturing, hardware production

Source Information Summary: IDA Ireland (2025b) focuses on FDI attraction; American Chamber of Commerce Ireland (2025a) on bilateral business relations.

Table 3. U.S.-Ireland Bilateral Goods Trade (€ Billion), 2005–2025 (Selected Years).

Year	Irish Exports to U.S.	Irish Imports from U.S.	Trade Balance
2005	16.3	8.5	+7.8
2010	15.9	6.1	+9.8
2015	26.6	7.2	+19.4
2020	59.8	11.5	+48.3
2023	67.7	17.8	+49.9
2025 (Jan-May)	70.8	8.9	+61.9

Note: Data for 2005-2015 are compiled from historical CSO reports and may reflect different methodologies. Data for 2020-2025 is from contemporary CSO releases. Figures are unadjusted for seasonality. Source Information Summary: Central Statistics Office (2015, 2025c) on trade data; World Bank (2015) on economic summaries; National Treasury Management Agency (2018) on U.S. impacts.

Recent increases in shipments have been linked to companies expediting exports ahead of possible U.S. tariffs, highlighting Ireland’s economic sensitivity to the American trade policy (Central Bank of Ireland, 2025; Trading Economics, 2025). This dependence presents both risks and opportunities to Irish policymakers. The economic relationship is mutual: Ireland is now among the top ten sources of FDI in the U.S., ranking sixth in 2025, with Irish firms employing over 118,000 Americans (American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, 2025a). Companies such as CRH, the Kerry Group, and Kingspan have invested heavily in U.S. operations, fostering economic interdependence that encourages both nations to maintain strong political and economic ties.

Table 4. U.S. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Position in Ireland (\$ Billion), 2005–2025 (Selected Years).

Year	U.S. FDI Stock in Ireland (Historical-Cost Basis)
2005	74.4
2010	165.7
2015	310.2
2020	445.8
2022	574.3

Note: FDI position is the year-end value of U.S. direct investors’ equity in and net outstanding loans to their foreign affiliates. Data for 2023–2025 is not yet fully available in this format from the primary source. Source Information Summary: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (2006, 2025a) on investment data; U.S. Department of State (2024) on climate statements.

Ireland’s most significant soft power asset and vulnerability is its substantial economic reliance on U.S. multinationals, which exposes the country to external policy risks. Any changes in U.S. tax or trade regulations could have outsized effects on Ireland’s export-driven economy and its relatively narrow corporate tax base. Recent studies highlight that international moves such as the OECD’s BEPS initiative further expose Ireland’s economic model to shifting global frameworks. As a result, Irish diplomatic efforts with the United States are often defensive, centered on maintaining strong political relationships in Washington to protect these economic interests.

Against this backdrop, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a crucial strategic tool complementing Ireland’s economic engagement. The annual St. Patrick’s Day visit to Washington D.C. by the Irish Prime Minister exemplifies Ireland’s soft-power approach. This tradition, involving direct meetings with the U.S. President and congressional leaders, guarantees that Irish priorities are presented at the highest levels of the American government, irrespective of the broader international context. These institutionalized encounters provide opportunities for both ceremonial and substantive policy discussions, enabling Ireland to address real challenges and opportunities. Scholars note that St. Patrick’s Day evolved into a sophisticated instrument of diplomacy, allowing Irish leaders to engage U.S. policymakers early in the political calendar. The informal cultural environment encourages candid dialogue on pressing issues, as seen in recent years when discussions included topics such as Ukraine, the Gaza, and trade disputes. This regular exchange normalizes high-level access and fosters constructive conversations.

Symbolically, the U.S. Ambassador’s residence in Dublin, located opposite the Irish President’s home, underscores a relationship built on equality and mutual respect, strengthening bilateral confidence, especially during crises. Beyond these annual events, strategic initiatives such as “Global Ireland 2025” and the “Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025” aim to expand Ireland’s international presence through new diplomatic missions, cultural programming, and diaspora engagement, further leveraging Ireland’s cultural connections to advance its foreign policy objectives.

Table 5. Irish Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives in the United States (2020–2025).

Initiative	Investment (€ millions)	Objective	Key Outcomes
Ireland House Los Angeles	12.5	Expanding West Coast presence	Opened 2024, 15% increase in CA business leads
Irish Arts Center NYC	8.2	Cultural programming hub	300+ events annually, 50,000 visitors
Digital Diaspora Platform	3.7	Online community engagement	2.1 million registered users
Young Irish Professionals Network	2.1	Next-generation engagement	45 chapters across US
Irish Language Promotion	1.8	Cultural identity preservation	125 Irish language classes nationwide

Source Information Summary: Government of Ireland (2019, 2020) on strategy documents; Culture Ireland (2025) on annual reports.

Recent evaluations of these cultural diplomacy initiatives suggest that they have been highly effective in maintaining and strengthening Irish-American connections (McCarthy & O’Sullivan, 2024). The programs have been particularly successful in engaging younger generations of Irish Americans, who may have weaker ancestral connections but strong cultural interests. The Diaspora Dividend: Latent Power Reactivated The third pillar of Irish soft power is its vast and influential diaspora in the United States. While the cultural affinity of the broader Irish American population provides a receptive audience for cultural diplomacy, a more focused and politically engaged core serves as a powerful advocacy network.

Demographics of Irish America: According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 38.6 million Americans reported Irish ancestry, either alone or in combination with another ethnicity, making it the third-largest detailed ancestry group in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a). This figure represents a broad cultural identity, a “sleeping giant, “ of latent political power. While surveys suggest that for many, this identity influences their political perspective only intermittently, its sheer scale provides a formidable foundation for political mobilization when a sufficiently critical issue arises (Smyth, 2024). Contemporary research on Irish-American identity reveals a complex relationship between ancestral heritage and political engagement (Gleeson, 2021). While many Irish-Americans maintain cultural connections through organizations, festivals, and family traditions, political mobilization around specifically Irish issues tends to occur primarily during periods of crisis or significant political development in Ireland.

Table 6. Irish-American Population Distribution by State (2020 Census).

State	Irish-American Population	Percentage of State Population	Political Significance
California	3,374,000	8.5%	54 Electoral votes
Massachusetts	1,476,000	21.4%	Strong Irish political tradition
New York	2,320,000	11.9%	Financial center influence
Pennsylvania	1,687,000	13.2%	Swing state demographics
Illinois	1,298,000	10.2%	Midwest political hub
Texas	1,456,000	5.0%	Growing political importance

Source Information Summary: U.S. Census Bureau (2023a) on ancestry data.

The non-partisan Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus serves as the primary channel for advancing Irish interests in the U.S. Congress. Established in 1981 to promote peace in Northern Ireland, the Caucus has remained central to U.S.–Ireland relations (Kelly & Neal, 2025). Its bipartisan leadership, currently co-chaired by Representatives Mike Kelly (R-PA) and Richard Neal (D-MA) in the 119th Congress, underscores cross-party consensus on Irish issues. Both co-chairs, prominent Irish-Americans, have a longstanding involvement in Irish affairs. The Caucus supports legislation, organizes the annual Speaker’s Luncheon, and informs the U.S. administration of its role as a guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).

Recent congressional studies recognize the Friends of Ireland Caucus as more effective than other ethnic causes, attributing its success to strong bipartisan leadership, a significant Irish-American presence in key swing states, and the typically non-controversial nature of Irish political concerns in the United States (Thompson & Williams, 2023). Beyond Congress, non-governmental organizations and community groups play a vital role in diaspora politics. The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) is instrumental in cultural preservation and political advocacy, including calls to appoint a new Special Envoy to Northern Ireland in 2025. Other organizations, such as the Irish

American Unity Conference (IAUC) and the Irish National Caucus (INC), directly lobby Congress on human rights and justice, particularly opposing the UK legacy legislation perceived as granting amnesty for past violence.

Philanthropic and cultural organizations such as The Ireland Funds and the New York Irish Center further bolster these efforts by raising funds for peace and reconciliation projects while fostering strong community ties. While the political urgency of Irish-American advocacy diminished after the 1998 GFA, the 2016 Brexit vote reactivated the diaspora’s influence, demonstrating its ability to mobilize rapidly when core interests, such as an open Irish border, are threatened (O’Brien, 2019).

Managing Geopolitics: Brexit and Good Friday Agreement Defense

Britain’s exit from the EU posed the most significant foreign policy challenge for Ireland in decades, testing its soft power strategy in the United States. The central concern was the risk of a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which could jeopardize the progress achieved under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The GFA was facilitated by both UK and Ireland’s EU membership, enabling an open border that fostered economic integration and peace. In 2016, cross-border trade reached €6 billion with over 30,000 daily crossers, and border communities developed tightly interwoven economies. The creation of a hard border—marked by customs checks and infrastructure—threatened to reignite sectarian tensions and undermine the foundations of peace as the removal of border infrastructure became a symbol of reconciliation.

Faced with these risks, Ireland and its American allies have mounted a highly coordinated diplomatic campaign in Washington. Irish diplomats and Irish-American political leaders united a clear message: any Brexit outcome that endangered the peace process would prevent a US-UK trade agreement. This message was powerfully echoed in 2019 by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who declared that Congress would block any trade deal if the GFA were compromised. Representative Richard Neal, Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, reiterated this stance, reinforcing Congress’s role as a gatekeeper for trade agreements.

The Irish government’s approach exemplifies a sophisticated understanding of American political processes and leverage points. By mobilizing bipartisan support within Congress and leveraging the strong Irish-American presence in key states, Irish advocates effectively positioned the GFA as a non-negotiable element in US-UK relations. This transatlantic lobbying effort, described as a “masterclass” in soft power diplomacy, demonstrated the ability of Irish and Irish-American leaders to shape foreign policy outcomes by making the protection of peace in Northern Ireland a prerequisite for future Anglo-American economic ties. Their actions underscored the enduring influence of diaspora advocacy, and the importance of international alliances in defending peace agreements.

Table 7. Key U.S. Legislative and Executive Actions Supporting the GFA Post-Brexit (2016–2025).

Date	Action/Statement	Key Actors	Significance/Impact
Apr 2019	Speaker Pelosi’s statement	Speaker Nancy Pelosi	Explicitly stated “no chance” of a U.S.-UK trade deal if GFA is undermined, setting a clear red line for Congress
May 2021	Senate Resolution 117	U.S. Senate	Expressed formal Senate support for the full implementation of the GFA and the Northern Ireland Protocol
Dec 2022	Appointment of Special Envoy	President Joe Biden	Appointed Joseph Kennedy III as Special Envoy for Economic Affairs to promote investment and reinforce stability
Feb 2023	White House statement	President Joe Biden	Welcomed the Windsor Framework as an “essential step” to preserve the peace and progress of the GFA

May 2023	Senate Resolution 157	U.S. Senate	Commemorated the 25th anniversary of the GFA and reaffirmed U.S. commitment to the peace process
Feb 2025	Relaunch of Caucus	Reps. Mike Kelly, Richard Neal	The Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus was formally relaunched, ensuring a continued bipartisan focus on Irish issues

Source Information Summary: Congressional Research Service (2025) on peace process; Kelly and Neal (2025) on caucus relaunch; O’Brien (2019) on lobbying; U.S. Congress (2021, 2023) on resolutions.

Lobbying resulted in significant legislative and political actions, with several Congressional resolutions reaffirming support for the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and linking it directly to future trade negotiations. Dublin skillfully leveraged its influence in Washington to shape outcomes in the UK Kingdom’s negotiations with Brussels, compensating for its limited sway over London. The U.S. Congress, strongly backed by the Irish American diaspora, pledged to block any Brexit resolution that Ireland opposed. This demonstrates the strategic use of soft power and coalition-building, as Congress’s stance effectively gave Ireland a critical voice in transatlantic affairs.

During the UK-EU negotiations, the Northern Ireland Protocol and its subsequent amendment, the Windsor Framework, addressed Irish concerns over a hard border. The Windsor Framework, announced in February 2023, established “green lanes” for goods remaining in Northern Ireland (with minimal checks) and “red lanes” for goods entering the EU Single Market (with full customs procedures). This arrangement created a trade border in the Irish Sea, protecting the open land border on the island of Ireland and satisfying most Irish priorities, while allowing the UK to maintain dignity in the process. The Biden administration welcomed the framework, emphasizing its importance in upholding the GFA and highlighting the administration’s commitment to multilateralism and alliances, as reflected in President Biden’s Irish heritage.

U.S. support extended beyond diplomatic statements. In December 2022, President Biden appointed former Congressman Joseph Kennedy III as Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs. Kennedy’s role symbolized Irish-American leadership and renewed the U.S. commitment to peace. He promoted economic incentives as a soft power, leading to a major U.S. corporate delegation to Northern Ireland in 2023. This initiative resulted in nearly \$1 billion in investment commitments, particularly in aerospace and fintech, underscoring the region’s economic potential and dividends of peace. Kennedy’s appointment was warmly endorsed by the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Caucus, and Irish-American advocacy groups, highlighting the enduring influence of the Irish-American political network.

Conclusion and Discussion

From 2005 to 2025, Ireland’s soft power has proven to be both resilient and adaptive, anchored in three interconnected pillars: economic leverage, cultural diplomacy, and diaspora engagement. This multifaceted approach has enabled Ireland to navigate the shifting American administrations and evolving global dynamics. Foundational theories by Keohane and Nye (2017) and Fan (2018) highlight how interdependence grants small states, such as Ireland, outsized influence, while Regan (2024) notes that fiscal vulnerability requires ongoing diplomatic vigilance. During Brexit, Ireland’s economic interests, cultural ties, and diaspora mobilization served as bulwarks, demonstrating the effectiveness of complex interdependence strategies (Coffey et al., 2023; Ryan, 2022).

American foreign direct investment (FDI) provides a significant influence on transatlantic relations. Major U.S. corporations invested in Ireland’s stability underpin this relationship, granting Ireland credibility in Washington. However, overreliance on US-dominated sectors creates fiscal fragility, as highlighted by Regan (2024), making diversification a strategic necessity. Seabrooke and Wigan (2020) further emphasize the need for Ireland to address ethical and global wealth chain risks to sustain its influence.

Cultural diplomacy is vital. High-level events such as St. Patrick's Day foster regular policy dialogue and mitigate the risks linked to Ireland's economic model. This evolution from celebration to statecraft has enabled Irish leaders to navigate complex issues and leverage cultural capital during key negotiations (McKenzie, 2023; Devlin, 2018; Cull, 2019). Hybrid strategies that blend digital outreach with ceremonial events are recommended to counter the challenges of misinformation and changing media landscapes.

Diaspora engagement has been central to Ireland's diplomatic success, especially during crises, such as Brexit. The Irish-American community, through advocacy and congressional caucuses, exerted significant influence over U.S. policy, including threats to block trade deals unfavorable to Ireland. However, scholars such as Cochrane (2020) and Hickman et al. (2023) caution that generational change and waning ethnic identification may threaten a diaspora's political potency in the future.

Ireland's adaptability has been tested by fluctuating U.S. administrations, from the multilateralism of Obama to Trump's transactional approach and Biden's heritage-driven diplomacy. Each transition required Ireland to recalibrate its strategy, balancing economic growth, cultural memory, and responsiveness to shifting American priorities (Sullivan, 2022; O'Malley, 2023; Ryan, 2021). The return of multilateralism under Biden and his commitment to the Good Friday Agreement reinforced Ireland's position during Brexit negotiations, though future uncertainties remain, especially with the specter of renewed protectionism and corporate tax disputes.

Despite its achievements, Ireland has faced structural challenges. Its economic dependency on U.S. multinationals exposes it to external shocks and limits its policy autonomy (Breathnach, 2023). The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is also contingent on alignment with American political currents, which may be undermined as younger Americans move away from their ethnic identities (Martinez & Chen, 2024). Furthermore, diaspora mobilization is most effective when Irish interests coincide with U.S. political agendas, but economic interests that conflict with American labor or security may strain this alignment. Analysts such as Barry and Van Egeraat (2019) and Lawless and Morgenroth (2019) argue for greater economic diversification to reduce vulnerability.

Brexit showcased Ireland's soft powers. Early consistent advocacy, coalition building, and leveraging diaspora networks helped shape both British and American policies, proving that small-state diplomacy can influence major powers when tied to widely shared values and strategic interests. Irish officials' engagement across federal, state, and local U.S. levels, combined with strategic alliances in Congress, elevated Irish priorities in transatlantic negotiations (Gormley-Heenan & Aughey, 2017; Murphy, 2019). Political scientists stress that complex interdependence, marked by overlapping relationships and mutual interests, is key to small-state resilience (Keohane & Nye, 2011). Ireland's approach offers a model of how transnational ethnic networks can shape foreign policies (Adamson & Dade, 2022).

Ireland's enduring influence stems not only from historical affinity, but also from a sophisticated, adaptive, soft power strategy. Its ability to maintain a political presence in the U.S. through cultural diplomacy—transforming annual events into policy platforms—has been instrumental. St. Patrick's Day visits to the White House serve both symbolic and practical purposes. While some scholars advocate for increased digital engagement (Devlin, 2018; Ryan, 2022), economic partnership with the U.S. remains a key pillar, with over 200,000 Irish employed by American companies. Maintaining and deepening these connections requires ongoing diplomatic efforts and diversification to mitigate external dependency (Regan, 2024; Coffey et al., 2023).

The political power of the Irish-American community remains a significant asset, capable of mobilizing support for Irish interests in times of crisis. However, the risk of generational disengagement is high (Hickman et al., 2023; Cochrane, 2020). Nonetheless, the successful campaign to safeguard the Good Friday Agreement during Brexit demonstrates that coordinated small-state diplomacy, strategic messaging, and multi-level engagement can influence the decisions of larger states. Ireland's open-border policy is a testament to how smaller nations can employ soft power to

achieve their foreign policy objectives, especially when leveraging the diaspora and cultural ties (Murphy, 2019; Gormley-Heenan & Aughey, 2017).

Despite its strengths, Ireland's soft-power strategy is limited. Economic dependence on U.S. multinationals constrains domestic policy, while the impact of cultural diplomacy is not guaranteed as American demographics evolve. Scholars suggest that Ireland's experience offers valuable lessons for global statecraft, particularly regarding the orchestration of multiple influence channels, strategic adaptation, and the alignment of national interests with broader Western values and institutions (Lawless & Morgenroth, 2019; Barry & Van Egeraat, 2019; Chitty, 2017; Hayden, 2015).

Looking ahead, Ireland must adapt its soft power strategy to meet emerging challenges, such as technological change, climate risks, generational shifts, and global power realignments. The study demonstrates that small states can enhance their international influence through well-managed, multi-channel soft power and that enduring affinity—rooted in attraction, collaboration, and strategic partnership—remains a powerful diplomatic asset. Ireland's experience underscores the potential of resilient, well-coordinated soft power in contemporary geopolitics (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

Building on this study's principal insights into Ireland's highly effective yet susceptible soft power strategy—including its economic interdependence, cultural diplomacy efforts, and diaspora engagement—alongside conclusions about adaptability, synergy, and the limitations inherent in small-state diplomacy, the following research avenues are proposed: These aim to broaden the examination of soft power within asymmetric relationships, particularly amidst current challenges, such as digital transformation, generational shifts, and geopolitical instability.

Evolving Dynamics of Small-State Soft Power: Comparative case studies of other small states (such as Singapore or New Zealand) to analyze the adaptation of multi-faceted soft power strategies in the context of great power rivalry, informed by lessons from Ireland's Brexit response and the theory of complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2017; Fan, 2018). Employing mixed-method designs may enable the quantification of influence measures and resilience across volatile global environments.

Diaspora Engagement and Generational Change: Examine the role of digital platforms and youth disengagement in shaping diaspora politics, thereby extending insights from Irish-American mobilization (Cochrane, 2020; Hickman et al., 2023). Longitudinal surveys and network analyses could clarify approaches to sustaining latent political power amidst diminishing ethnic identities, which holds relevance for transnational advocacy during crises.

Economic Vulnerabilities and Interdependence: Investigate the enduring impacts of global developments, including tax reforms and disruptions to trade, on small economies that are heavily dependent on FDI (Regan, 2024; Lawless & Morgenroth, 2019). The use of econometric modelling and policy simulations will aid in evaluating diversification strategies that address fiscal fragility while maintaining economic leverage as an aspect of soft power.

Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Era: Assess the integration of hybrid (online-offline) cultural initiatives aimed at combating misinformation and expanding elite access, as demonstrated in Ireland's adaptations of St. Patrick's Day celebrations (Cull, 2019; Ryan, 2022). A qualitative content analysis of digital campaigns can offer guidance on how small states sustain their attractiveness in rapidly evolving media environments.

These recommended avenues are practical and methodologically accessible, employing techniques such as document analysis and surveys, and directly supporting further inquiry into the evolution of soft power within global affairs.

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