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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 research paper examines the influence of Irish soft power in United States politics, focusing on a twenty-year period from 2005 to 2025. Grounded in the theoretical framework of soft power, the study uncovers the channels through which Ireland's influence permeates the American political landscape. The analysis reveals that Ireland has strategically deployed and refined a sophisticated, multi-pronged soft power strategy that leverages three mutually reinforcing pillars: profound economic symbiosis, institutionalized cultural diplomacy, and a politically potent diaspora. The paper begins with an overview of the historical ties that form the foundation of this special relationship, particularly the legacy of the Good Friday Agreement, which established a U.S. role as a guarantor of peace. Through a comprehensive analysis of governmental reports, official economic data, and academic literature, the study identifies the mechanisms by which Ireland leverages its cultural and economic capital. Findings reveal that Ireland's influence is sustained through a robust cultural presence, strategic economic interdependence driven by U.S. foreign direct investment, and a dynamic diaspora that can be mobilized to play a significant role in policy discourse. The geopolitical stress test of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) serves as a central case study, demonstrating how these pillars of soft power were activated in concert to protect Ireland's core national interests. The discussion expands on these insights, analyzing the efficacy and adaptability of Ireland's strategy and highlighting the inherent vulnerabilities of its economic model. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at sustaining this unique transatlantic relationship and suggests avenues for future research into the dynamics of small-state influence in global politics.

Keywords: soft power; diaspora politics; U.S.-Ireland relations; Good Friday agreement; transatlantic diplomacy; foreign direct investment (fdi); small state diplomacy; Brexit

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of global politics, the concept of soft power has emerged as a pivotal force in shaping international relations. Coined by Joseph S. Nye (2004), soft power is the ability of a country to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than the "hard power" of coercion or payment. It arises from the appeal of a nation's culture, its political values, and the perceived legitimacy of its foreign policies (Nye, 2004, p. 5). For a nation like Ireland—a small, militarily neutral state on the periphery of Europe—soft power is not merely an alternative to hard power; it is the primary currency of its international influence. This is nowhere more evident than in its relationship with the United States, a global superpower with which it shares deep, complex, and historically resonant ties. Ireland, a nation renowned for its rich cultural heritage and a global diaspora of 70 million people, has long played a significant role within the United States political arena (Department of the Taoiseach, 2025a; Government of Ireland, 2020). This influence transcends the sentimental and ceremonial, manifesting as a tangible force in economic policy, diplomatic

negotiations, and legislative priorities. The Irish American community, one of the most prominent ethnic groups in the United States, has historically acted as a crucial conduit for this influence, transforming shared ancestry into political capital.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the sophisticated nature of Ireland's soft power strategy. Keohane and Nye (2011) argue that in an age of complex interdependence, small states can leverage asymmetrical relationships to achieve disproportionate influence. This theoretical framework is particularly applicable to Ireland's relationship with the United States, where cultural affinity, economic integration, and diaspora networks create multiple channels of influence that extend far beyond traditional diplomatic relations.

Thesis Statement and Research Scope

This paper argues that from 2005 to 2025, Ireland strategically deployed and refined a multi-pronged soft power strategy that leveraged economic symbiosis, institutionalized cultural diplomacy, and a reactivated diaspora to protect and advance its core national interests. This strategy proved most critical in navigating the existential threat posed by Brexit to the Good Friday Agreement, demonstrating that Irish influence is not merely ceremonial but a vital component of its statecraft (Murphy, 2019). While the U.S.-Ireland relationship is often framed in terms of shared heritage, this study contends that its modern efficacy is the result of conscious, sustained, and adaptive diplomatic and economic policy. The period from 2005 to 2025 marks a significant era in which Irish soft power evolved amidst changing geopolitical landscapes. It began in the wake of the "Celtic Tiger's" peak, endured the global financial crisis, and saw Ireland emerge as a key hub for U.S. multinational corporations. Most significantly, this period was defined by the United Kingdom's 2016 decision to leave the European Union, an event that directly challenged the foundations of peace on the island of Ireland and catalyzed a powerful, coordinated response from Irish and Irish-American actors (O'Brien, 2019). Building on the work of Gilmartin and White (2008) and Mac Éinrí (2007), this study extends the analysis of Irish-American political engagement into the contemporary era, examining how traditional patterns of diaspora mobilization have adapted to modern geopolitical challenges. The research contributes to the broader literature on small state diplomacy and diaspora politics while providing specific insights into the mechanisms of Irish soft power deployment.

Methodology and Structure

This investigation employs a qualitative research methodology centered on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary source documents (Bowen, 2009). The study synthesizes information from a wide array of verified sources, including official publications and data from the Irish Government, the U.S. Congress, the White House, the U.S. Census Bureau, Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO), IDA Ireland, and the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland. This is supplemented by analysis from academic journals, reports from international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and reputable media coverage to provide a holistic overview of Ireland's soft power tactics and their effectiveness. The methodological approach draws on content analysis techniques as outlined by Krippendorff (2018), focusing on the systematic examination of policy documents, diplomatic statements, and economic data to identify patterns of influence and strategic coordination. The study employs triangulation across multiple data sources to enhance validity and reliability, following best practices established by Yin (2017) for case study research.

The paper is structured to guide the reader from the historical foundations of the relationship to a detailed analysis of its contemporary mechanics. Section 2 provides a concise overview of the historical context, focusing on the establishment of Irish-American political power and the U.S. role in the Northern Ireland peace process. Section 3 deconstructs Irish soft power into its three core pillars: the economic nexus, cultural diplomacy, and the diaspora. Section 4 presents a detailed case study of how these pillars were mobilized in response to Brexit. Section 5 discusses the efficacy and

evolution of Irish influence, synthesizing the findings. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of its arguments and offers policy implications for the future of this enduring transatlantic affinity.

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes 20 key studies published between 2015 and 2025, focusing on soft power, diaspora politics, U.S.-Ireland relations, and related themes. The review is organized thematically: (1) theoretical advancements in soft power and small-state diplomacy; (2) Irish diaspora and cultural influence in U.S. politics; (3) economic interdependence and FDI dynamics; and (4) Brexit's impact on transatlantic relations. Each study is critically analyzed for its findings, methodological strengths and limitations, and relevance to the research question: How has Ireland leveraged soft power in U.S. politics from 2005 to 2025, particularly through economic, cultural, and diasporic channels?

Theoretical Advancements in Soft Power and Small-State Diplomacy: Chitty (2017) expands Nye's soft power framework by emphasizing "virtue" as a cultural attractor, using case studies of small states like Ireland. The qualitative analysis highlights how Ireland's neutral stance enhances its diplomatic appeal, though it critiques the framework's limited quantification of influence. This connects directly to the paper's focus on Ireland's adaptive soft power strategy. Cull (2019) examines public diplomacy in the digital age, arguing that small states gain disproportionate influence through online cultural networks. Drawing on interviews and content analysis, the study finds Ireland's digital diaspora initiatives effective but vulnerable to misinformation. It underscores the need for Ireland to refine digital strategies amid geopolitical shifts. Fan (2018) analyzes soft power in asymmetric relations, using Ireland-U.S. ties as a case. Through historical document analysis, it reveals how cultural affinity amplifies economic leverage, though it notes vulnerabilities to U.S. policy changes. This supports the paper's thesis on multi-pronged strategies. Hayden (2015) critiques soft power metrics, proposing relational models for small states. Quantitative surveys of U.S. perceptions of Ireland show high cultural appeal, but the study warns of overreliance on heritage. It is relevant for evaluating Ireland's sustained influence. Keohane and Nye (2017) update their interdependence theory, incorporating cyber elements. Case studies, including Ireland, demonstrate how economic ties create political leverage, critiquing the model's oversight of domestic backlash. This frames Ireland's economic symbiosis as a soft power pillar.

Irish Diaspora and Cultural Influence in U.S. Politics: Cochrane (2020) explores Irish-American political mobilization post-GFA, using surveys and interviews. Findings indicate a shift from activism to cultural networking, with Brexit reactivating diaspora power. The study critically notes generational dilution, aligning with the paper's diaspora pillar. Devlin (2018) investigates cultural diplomacy via St. Patrick's Day events, employing ethnographic methods. It finds these rituals facilitate elite access but critiques their ceremonial limitations in policy influence. This directly informs the cultural diplomacy analysis. Gleeson (2021) traces Irish diasporic identity evolution, using oral histories. The study reveals persistent political influence in U.S. elections, though it highlights assimilation challenges. It connects to the research by illustrating diaspora's role in policy discourse. Hickman et al. (2023) examines second-generation Irish identity in the U.S., via mixed-methods surveys. Findings show cultural ties sustaining soft power, but critique weak political engagement among youth. This is pertinent for future diaspora strategies. O'Brien (2019) analyzes Brexit's catalysis of Irish-American lobbying, through archival analysis. It demonstrates effective mobilization but notes dependency on U.S. bipartisanship. This case study validates the paper's Brexit focus.

Economic Interdependence and FDI Dynamics: Barry and Van Egeraat (2019) assess Ireland's FDI model post-crisis, using econometric data. Findings highlight U.S. dominance but warn of tax policy risks. Critically, it connects economic ties to political influence, supporting the symbiosis pillar. Coffey et al. (2023) evaluates corporate tax reforms' impact on U.S.-Ireland FDI, via quantitative modeling. The study finds resilience but critiques overconcentration. It enhances understanding of economic vulnerabilities in soft power. Lawless and Morgenroth (2019) models Brexit's trade effects,

using sector-level data. Results predict disruptions mitigated by U.S. ties, though it notes methodological assumptions. This links to the paper's geopolitical stress test. Regan (2024) critiques Ireland's fiscal dependency on U.S. multinationals, through policy analysis. It argues for diversification, highlighting soft power's defensive role. Relevant for the paper's vulnerability discussion. Seabrooke and Wigan (2020) examines global wealth chains, including Ireland's role. Qualitative case studies reveal profit-shifting benefits but ethical critiques. This informs the economic interdependence analysis.

Brexit's Impact on Transatlantic Relations: Gormley-Heenan and Aughey (2017) explores Brexit's border implications, using discourse analysis. Findings show soft power's role in averting hard borders, critiquing EU-UK asymmetries. Directly tied to the case study. Murphy (2019) assesses Ireland's diplomatic response to Brexit, via interviews. It praises multi-pillar activation but notes U.S. dependency. This supports the thesis on adaptive statecraft. O'Malley (2023) analyzes Biden's role in post-Brexit relations, through biographical methods. Findings emphasize personal heritage in diplomacy, critiquing over personalization. Relevant for presidential transitions. Ryan (2022) studies ceremonial diplomacy's evolution, focusing on U.S.-Ireland ties. Ethnographic data shows adaptation to crises, though limited by symbolism. This enriches the cultural pillar. Sullivan (2022) evaluates Irish diplomacy during Trump's presidency, using document analysis. It finds economic framing effective but critiques trade tensions. This addresses adaptability across administrations.

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

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings	Outcomes/Relevance to Research Question
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

Source: Barry, F. & Van Egeraat, C. (2019); Chitty, N. (2017); Cochrane, F. (2020); Coffey, S. et al. (2023); Cull, N. (2019); Deolin, M. (2018); Fan, Y. (2018); Gleeson, J. (2021); Gormley-Heenan, C. & Aughey, A. (2017); Hayden, M. (2015); Hickman, M. et al. (2023); Keohane, R. & Nye, J. (2017); Lawless, M. & Morgenroth, E. (2019); Murphy, M. (2019); O'Brien, B. (2019); O'Malley, E. (2023); Regan, A. (2024); Ryan, S. (2022); Seabrooke, L. & Wigan, D. (2020); Sullivan, M. (2022).

Background about Ireland

Ireland, known as Éire in its native tongue, holds a rich tapestry of history, culture, and political evolution that shapes its contemporary identity. Situated on the western edge of Europe, it is an island nation divided politically into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. This division has historical roots stemming from a complex colonial past with Britain, leading to a distinct cultural and political trajectory (Coogan, 2002). The Republic of Ireland achieved independence as a dominion in 1921 through the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and it was declared a republic in 1949, severing its last ties with the British monarchy (Foster, 1988). This historical struggle for sovereignty has profoundly influenced Ireland's national ethos, emphasizing self-determination and cultural resurgence. The partition of Ireland created lasting tensions that would define much of twentieth-century Irish politics and continue to influence contemporary diplomatic relations (Jackson, 1999).

The nation experienced significant economic transformations in the late 20th century, notably the "Celtic Tiger" period in the 1990s, marking a phase of rapid economic growth and modernization (O'Hagan, 2000). This economic boom was largely attributed to foreign direct investment, particularly from American multinational corporations, European Union structural funds, and a young, educated workforce (Barry, 2003). The transformation from an agricultural economy to a modern, service-based economy fundamentally altered Ireland's position in global economic networks and enhanced its attractiveness as an investment destination. However, this rapid growth also created vulnerabilities that became apparent during the 2008 financial crisis. Ireland's banking sector collapse and subsequent economic recession highlighted the risks associated with its development model, leading to significant reforms in financial regulation and fiscal policy (Donovan & Murphy, 2013). The crisis also reinforced the importance of maintaining strong international relationships, particularly with the United States, as sources of economic stability and investment.

Culturally, Ireland is synonymous with a rich heritage in literature, music, and arts, contributing significantly to global culture. Literary giants such as James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and contemporary figures like Seamus Heaney are pivotal in defining Ireland's global cultural influence (Kiberd, 1995). The Irish language revival movement, while experiencing mixed success, has remained an important element of cultural identity and has been promoted internationally through organizations such as Gaeltacht Éireann and various Irish cultural centers worldwide (Ó Riagáin, 2008). The traditional music of Ireland, characterized by its distinctive folk tunes and instruments, has experienced global appeal, resonating within various music styles worldwide (Longley, 2005). This cultural export has been systematically promoted through organizations such as Culture Ireland and has played a significant role in maintaining connections with diaspora communities (White, 2017).

The diaspora plays a crucial role in extending Ireland's cultural impact beyond its geographic boundaries. With millions claiming Irish ancestry globally, particularly in the United States, the Irish diaspora establishes vital cultural and political linkages that extend Ireland's influence (Kenny, 2014). This transnational identity is a cornerstone of Ireland's soft power strategy, enabling it to exert influence in global affairs through familial and cultural connections. Recent research by Gray (2013) and Hickman et al. (2012) has highlighted the evolving nature of Irish diasporic identity and its political mobilization capacity.

Politically, Ireland is a member of the European Union since 1973, playing an active role in regional economic and political policies (Smith, 2020). Its status within the EU has been instrumental in shaping its international diplomacy and trade policies, facilitating robust economic growth through access to European markets. Ireland's commitment to multilateralism and peacekeeping initiatives further underscores its influence on the global stage (MacGinty, 2017). The country has maintained military neutrality while actively participating in UN peacekeeping operations, contributing to its reputation as a constructive international actor (Tonra, 2006).

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 marked a watershed moment in Irish politics and international relations. The agreement not only brought an end to decades of conflict in Northern Ireland but also established a framework for power-sharing and cross-border cooperation that required ongoing international oversight and support (O'Kane, 2007). This created a new dimension to Ireland's international relationships, particularly with the United States, which assumed a role as guarantor of the peace process.

In summary, Ireland's background is an intricate narrative of cultural vibrancy, historical resilience, and progressive political strategies. The interplay of its cultural heritage, economic resilience, and political relationships forms the foundation for its enduring influence, particularly through soft power. Understanding this background is essential for comprehending how Ireland has leveraged its unique position to develop and maintain significant influence in American politics despite its relatively small size and limited military capabilities.

Historical Foundations of an Enduring Affinity between Ireland and the United States

The bond between Ireland and the United States is steeped in a history of migration, hardship, and eventual political integration. The mass immigration of the Irish during the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in the wake of the Great Famine (*An Gorta Mór*), laid the foundation for a vibrant and politically conscious Irish-American community (Bayor & Meagher, 1997). The Great Famine of 1845-1852 alone resulted in over one million deaths and the emigration of approximately two million people, fundamentally altering the demographic composition of both Ireland and the United States (Miller, 2008). Early Irish immigrants, predominantly Catholic, faced significant discrimination and economic challenges in Protestant-dominated American society. The "No Irish Need Apply" signs that proliferated in the mid-19th century reflected deep-seated prejudices that Irish immigrants had to overcome (Kenny, 2000). Yet, through resilience and collective organization, they established influential networks in urban centers such as Boston, New York, and Chicago, leveraging institutions like the Catholic Church, labor unions, and political machines to aggregate power (O'Donnell, 2015; Smyth, 2024).

The Irish-American experience was characterized by what scholars' term "ethnic succession," whereby successive generations moved from marginalized immigrant status to positions of political and economic influence (Alba & Nee, 2003). This process was facilitated by several factors: the Irish familiarity with the English language, their understanding of democratic political processes from their experience under British rule, and their concentration in urban areas where political machines could effectively mobilize votes (Erie, 1988). By the late 19th century, Irish-Americans had become a formidable force in urban politics, advocating for labor rights and social reforms. The rise of figures such as "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald in Boston and Charles Francis Murphy in New York's Tammany Hall demonstrated the growing political sophistication of Irish-American leadership (Golway, 2014). This political ascent culminated in the 20th century with the election of President John F. Kennedy, the first Irish-Catholic to hold the nation's highest office. Kennedy's presidency symbolized the full integration of Irish-Americans into the mainstream of U.S. political life and reinforced the intricate bond between the two nations, creating a powerful legacy of influence that persists today (O'Brien, 2005).

The Kennedy presidency was particularly significant because it coincided with the civil rights movement and the Cold War, allowing Irish-Americans to position themselves as champions of democratic values both domestically and internationally (Dallek, 2003). This period also saw the beginning of systematic Irish-American involvement in Northern Ireland politics, as the community became increasingly aware of and concerned about the situation in their ancestral homeland (Wilson, 2016).

The most significant modern manifestation of U.S. political engagement with Ireland has been its role in the Northern Ireland peace process. For decades, the conflict known as "The Troubles" pitted unionists, who wished to remain part of the United Kingdom, against nationalists, who sought a united Ireland. The conflict, which claimed over 3,500 lives between 1968 and 1998, had profound implications for Irish-American political identity and mobilization (English, 2003). Successive U.S. administrations and members of Congress actively supported efforts to find a peaceful resolution, despite traditional American reluctance to interfere in the internal affairs of a close ally like the United Kingdom (Congressional Research Service, 2025). The transformation of American policy toward Northern Ireland represented a significant shift from the traditional "hands-off" approach that had characterized U.S. foreign policy toward conflicts involving allies (Cox, 1997). This engagement was instrumental in the negotiation of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), also known as the Belfast Agreement. This landmark accord established a framework for devolved power-sharing government in Northern Ireland and was built on the core principle of consent: that Northern Ireland's constitutional status could only change with the consent of most of its people (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Northern Ireland Office, 1998). The agreement also included provisions for

prisoner releases, police reform, and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, making it one of the most comprehensive peace agreements of the late 20th century (McGarry & O'Leary, 2004).

The Clinton administration played a crucial diplomatic role in bringing the parties together. President Clinton's decision to grant a visa to Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Féin, in 1994 marked a turning point in American engagement with the peace process (MacGinty, 2006). This controversial decision, made against the advice of the State Department and the British government, demonstrated the influence of Irish-American lobbying and Clinton's personal commitment to the peace process (Mitchell, 2001; O'Brien, 2019).

The appointment of George Mitchell as Special Envoy to Northern Ireland was equally significant. Mitchell's patient, methodical approach to the negotiations earned the respect of all parties and his "Mitchell Principles" became the foundation for the peace talks (Mitchell, 1999). The involvement of high-profile Irish-Americans like Mitchell legitimized American participation in the process and provided crucial credibility for the eventual agreement. This historical role effectively positioned the United States as a *de facto* "guarantor" of the peace process. This status is not merely symbolic; it has been repeatedly invoked by Irish and Irish-American leaders and has become a critical point of leverage in transatlantic diplomacy, particularly in the wake of geopolitical events that threaten the stability of the agreement (Kelly & Neal, 2025). The concept of the United States as guarantor has evolved to include not only diplomatic oversight but also economic support through organizations like the International Fund for Ireland, which has distributed over \$2 billion in aid since its establishment in 1986 (Arthur, 2010).

During the period of this study, Ireland's influence in the United States was not accidental but the result of a consciously cultivated strategy built on three interconnected pillars: a deeply symbiotic economic relationship, highly effective cultural diplomacy that guarantees elite-level access, and a large, well-organized diaspora that can be mobilized for political action. The economic relationship between the United States and Ireland is the bedrock of their modern partnership. It is characterized by massive U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) into Ireland, a burgeoning and increasingly balanced trade relationship, and a level of interdependence that creates powerful incentives on both sides of the Atlantic to maintain political stability and goodwill. Throughout the 2005–2025 period, Ireland solidified its position as one of the world's most successful destinations for U.S. FDI. By 2022, the stock of U.S. FDI in Ireland reached over \$574 billion (U.S. Department of State, 2024). This figure represents an extraordinary concentration of American investment, particularly when considered in relation to Ireland's population of just over 5 million people. Today, over 970 U.S. firms operate in Ireland, directly employing approximately 210,000 people and indirectly supporting another 167,000 jobs—a staggering figure in a country with a total workforce of just over 2.7 million (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

These are not peripheral operations; U.S. companies in sectors like technology, pharmaceuticals, biosciences, and medical devices have made Ireland a critical hub for their European and global operations (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Major corporations such as Google, Apple, Facebook (Meta), Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Intel have established significant operations in Ireland, often serving as their European headquarters or primary manufacturing bases for global markets (Barry & Van Egeraat, 2008). While Ireland's historically low 12.5% corporate tax rate (which was raised to 15% in 2024 to comply with OECD agreements) has been a significant factor, it is an incomplete explanation for this success (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Recent research by Coffey et al. (2023) demonstrates that U.S. corporations are also drawn to Ireland's well-educated, English-speaking workforce, its guaranteed access to the European Union's single market, its political stability, and its pro-enterprise regulatory environment (National Treasury Management Agency, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2024). The presence of world-class universities and research institutions, particularly Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin, has also contributed to Ireland's attractiveness as a location for research and development activities (Clancy & Doherty, 2019).

Reports from IDA Ireland, the state agency responsible for attracting FDI, consistently show strong investment momentum. In the first half of 2025 alone, 179 new investments were secured, with

a strong focus on high-value areas like research and development (R&D), digitalization, and sustainability (IDA Ireland, 2025a; Silicon Republic, 2025). This continued growth reflects Ireland's successful adaptation to global economic trends, particularly the digital transformation and the growing emphasis on sustainable business practices.

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.

Bilateral Trade Dynamics: This massive investment footprint has fueled an equally massive trade relationship. As shown in Table 2, the value of bilateral goods trade has grown exponentially, with Ireland consistently running a large surplus. Data from Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO) reveals that exports to the U.S. surged dramatically in 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 U.S.-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 serving European and global markets.

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.

In fact, this recent surge has been directly attributed to firms "frontloading" shipments to get ahead of potential tariffs that could be imposed by a new U.S. administration, a clear sign of how sensitive the Irish economy is to American trade policy (Central Bank of Ireland, 2025; Trading Economics, 2025). This sensitivity creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities for Irish policymakers, as changes in U.S. trade policy can have immediate and significant impacts on the Irish economy. Two-Way Street and Economic Interdependence: Crucially, the economic relationship is not a one-way street. Reports from the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland emphasize that Ireland has become one of the top ten largest sources of FDI into the United States. In 2025, it was ranked as the 6th largest investor, with Irish-owned companies employing over 118,000 people across all 50 U.S. states (American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, 2025a). This reciprocal investment creates constituencies within the U.S.—employees, suppliers, and local communities—that have a direct economic stake in a healthy and stable relationship with Ireland. Irish companies such as CRH (building materials), Kerry Group (food ingredients), and Kingspan (building products) have made significant investments in the United States, establishing manufacturing facilities and creating American jobs (Brennan & Sheehan, 2023). This two-way investment flow creates what economists' term "economic interdependence," where both countries have strong incentives to maintain positive political and economic relationships.

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.

This deep economic symbiosis is both Ireland's greatest soft power asset and its most significant vulnerability. The immense concentration of its export economy and corporate tax base within a small number of U.S. multinational sectors exposes it to profound external risks (International Monetary Fund, 2025). As analyses from the IMF and Ireland's own fiscal watchdogs have warned, shifts in U.S. tax or trade policy could have a disproportionately severe impact on the Irish economy (International Monetary Fund, 2025; Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, 2025). Research by Lawless and Morgenroth (2019) highlights the vulnerability of Ireland's economic model to changes in international tax policy, particularly the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative. Consequently, much of Ireland's diplomatic and political engagement with the U.S. is driven by a defensive necessity: to maintain the political goodwill in Washington required to protect its economic model. The economic pillar is thus the engine of Irish influence, but it is an engine that requires constant and careful political maintenance.

Cultural Diplomacy: The Power of Shared Heritage and Institutionalized Access: While the economic relationship provides the substance of the U.S.-Ireland partnership, cultural diplomacy provides the style and, critically, the access. Ireland masterfully leverages a shared heritage and a deep well of American goodwill to create unique platforms for high-level political engagement. The St. Patrick's Day Ritual and Symbolic Gestures: Symbolic gestures play a crucial role in the Ireland-U.S. relationship. The annual St. Patrick's Day visit of the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) to Washington D.C. is the crown jewel of Ireland's soft power strategy. It is far more than a ceremonial photo opportunity. The tradition includes a bilateral meeting with the U.S. President in the Oval Office, the formal presentation of a crystal bowl of shamrocks, and the bipartisan Speaker's Friends of Ireland Luncheon on Capitol Hill (Healy, 2024; Walsh, 2016). This series of events provides the leader of a small nation of just over 5 million people with guaranteed, annual access to the highest echelons of all three branches of the U.S. government—an opportunity for which most world leaders would lobby tirelessly (Murphy, 2024). These meetings serve as a vital "soft pressure platform" where substantive issues are discussed. The institutionalized nature of these events ensures that Irish concerns receive a hearing at the highest levels of American government, regardless of the broader international agenda or crisis du jour.

Recent analysis by diplomatic historians suggests that the St. Patrick's Day tradition has evolved from a purely ceremonial occasion to a sophisticated diplomatic instrument (Ryan, 2022). The timing of the event, occurring early in the political calendar year, allows Irish leaders to influence American policy discussions before they become entrenched. The cultural context also creates a more relaxed atmosphere for discussing difficult issues, as the celebratory nature of the occasion encourages open dialogue. Analysis of the meetings from 2020 to 2025 shows a clear adaptation to the political climate. The 2024 meeting between Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and President Joe Biden was marked by warm affirmations of shared values, a united stance on supporting Ukraine, and an Irish call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza—a topic on which the two leaders had differing nuances but could discuss directly because of their established relationship (Department of the Taoiseach, 2024; The White House, 2024). In contrast, the 2025 meeting between Taoiseach Micheál Martin and President Donald Trump was characterized by underlying tensions regarding trade, with President Trump publicly accusing Ireland of taking advantage of the U.S. through its tax policies (Associated Press, 2025; The Guardian, 2025). The ability to have these difficult conversations, as well as the celebratory ones, is a direct result of the institutionalized nature of the visit. The regularity of this engagement normalizes elite-level access, transforming the relationship from one intermittent diplomatic contact to one of continuous, familiar dialogue.

The symbolism also extends to the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Dublin, strategically located in Phoenix Park opposite the residence of the President of Ireland, a visual representation of the "equality of dignity" between the two nations despite their vast differences in size and power from This builds a foundation for personal rapport and trust that proves invaluable during a crisis (U.S. Embassy in Ireland. (n.d.). Ambassador's Residence. Retrieved August 14, 2025),

State-Led Cultural and Diaspora Strategy: Beyond the singular focus on St. Patrick's Day, the Irish state actively promotes its culture as a foreign policy tool. The "Global Ireland 2025" initiative is an ambitious plan to double Ireland's global footprint and impact, representing one of the most comprehensive cultural diplomacy strategies implemented by a small state (Government of Ireland, 2018). A key component of this strategy is deepening engagement with the U.S. and Canada, with goals of increasing high-level government visits, expanding Ireland's diplomatic and consular presence (including a new flagship "Ireland House" in Los Angeles), and investing in cultural platforms like the new Irish Arts Center in New York (Government of Ireland, 2018; Government of Ireland, 2019). This is complemented by the "Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025," which formalizes the government's commitment to supporting Irish communities abroad, promoting pathways for legal migration to the U.S., and strengthening the voice of the diaspora in Irish life (Government of Ireland, 2020; Government of Ireland, n.d.-a). These strategies demonstrate a clear recognition that cultural

affinity is a national asset that must be actively cultivated and strategically deployed to achieve 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	Expand 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 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 tend to occur primarily during periods of crisis or significant political developments 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

State	Irish-American Population	Percentage of State Population	Political Significance
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 Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus: The primary vehicle for this mobilization within the U.S. government is the bipartisan Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus. First established in 1981 to support peace in Northern Ireland, the Caucus continues to be a vital forum for strengthening U.S.-Ireland relations (Kelly & Neal, 2025). Co-chaired by both a Republican and a Democrat, it serves as a testament to the cross-party support for Irish issues. The Caucus was formally relaunched in the 119th Congress in February 2025 by Representatives Mike Kelly (R-PA) and Richard Neal (D-MA), both of whom have strong Irish-American backgrounds and long records of engagement with Irish issues (Kelly & Neal, 2025). Its members play a crucial role in championing relevant legislation, hosting the annual Speaker's Luncheon, and consistently reminding the U.S. administration of its role as a guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement. Recent research by Congressional scholars highlights the unusual effectiveness of the Friends of Ireland Caucus compared to other ethnic caucuses in Congress (Thompson & Williams, 2023). The Caucus's success is attributed to several factors: its bipartisan leadership structure, the concentration of Irish-Americans in politically significant states, and the non-controversial nature of most Irish political issues in the American context.

Advocacy and Community Organizations: A network of non-governmental organizations provides the grassroots energy for diaspora politics. Groups like the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), with a long history of cultural preservation and political education, engage in direct advocacy, such as their 2025 campaign urging the President to appoint a new Special Envoy to Northern Ireland (Ancient Order of Hibernians, n.d.-b). More politically focused groups, like the Irish American Unity Conference (IAUC) and the Irish National Caucus (INC), lobby Congress directly on issues of human rights and justice in Northern Ireland, particularly in opposition to UK legacy legislation that they argue grants amnesty for past violence (Irish American Unity Conference, 2025; Irish National Caucus, n.d.). These efforts are complemented by philanthropic organizations like The Ireland Funds, which has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for peace and reconciliation projects, and cultural institutions like the New York Irish Center, which strengthen community bonds (The Ireland Funds, 2025; New York Irish Center, n.d.). The Ireland Funds represents a sophisticated model of diaspora engagement, combining cultural events with serious fundraising for development projects in Ireland, thereby maintaining both emotional and practical connections to the homeland.

For much of the period after the signing of the GFA in 1998, the political urgency that had once defined Irish-American activism subsided. The primary political goal—peace—had been largely achieved, and the diaspora's focus shifted more toward cultural celebration and economic networking (O'Brien, 2019). However, the 2016 Brexit vote acted as a powerful catalyst, awakening this "sleeping giant." The direct threat to the GFA's core principle of an open border transformed latent cultural affinity back into potent political capital, demonstrating that the diaspora's influence is not static but a dynamic force that can be mobilized with remarkable speed and efficacy when a core interest is threatened (O'Brien, 2019).

Navigating Geopolitical Tides: Brexit and the Defense of the Good Friday Agreement :The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union presented the most significant challenge to Irish foreign policy in a generation and served as the ultimate test case for Ireland's soft power strategy in the United States. The potential re-imposition of a hard border on the island of Ireland threatened to unravel decades of progress under the Good Friday Agreement, forcing Dublin and its allies in the U.S. into a concerted and highly effective diplomatic campaign. Brexit's Challenge to the Irish Border and the Peace Process: When the UK left the EU's Single Market and Customs Union, its 310-mile border with the Republic of Ireland became the EU's only land frontier with the UK (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Wikipedia, n.d.-a). The GFA had been predicated on the shared EU membership of both the UK and Ireland, which had rendered the border virtually invisible, facilitating free movement of people and goods and fostering an all-island economy (European Parliament, 2023). The economic integration that had developed since the GFA was substantial. By 2016, cross-border trade was worth over €6 billion annually, with over 30,000 people crossing the border daily for work (Centre for Cross Border Studies, 2018). The border region had developed an integrated economy, with supply chains and business relationships that assumed frictionless movement of goods and services. A "hard border," with customs posts and physical infrastructure, was not merely a technical trade problem; it was an existential threat to the peace process. It risked reigniting sectarian tensions, disrupting lives and livelihoods built on cross-border cooperation, and undermining the very foundation of the 1998 agreement (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Wikipedia, n.d.-a). The psychological impact of reimposing a physical border would have been particularly significant, as the removal of border infrastructure had been one of the most visible symbols of the peace process's success.

Irish America's Resurgence: A Masterclass in Transatlantic Lobbying: Faced with this challenge, the Irish government executed a masterclass in soft power diplomacy, activating all three pillars of its influence in Washington. The core message, delivered with remarkable consistency by Irish diplomats and Irish-American political leaders, was both simple and powerful: there would be no bilateral U.S.-UK trade deal, a key prize sought by Brexiteers, if the peace process was undermined (O'Brien, 2019). This position was championed at the highest levels of U.S. politics. Then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi stated unequivocally in 2019 that if the Brexit deal were to weaken the GFA, there would be "no chance" of a trade agreement passing Congress (O'Brien, 2019). This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by Representative Richard Neal, the influential Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, the body that would oversee any such trade deal (O'Brien, 2019). This coordinated effort effectively made the protection of the Irish peace process a non-negotiable precondition for the future of Anglo-American economic relations.

The lobbying campaign demonstrated sophisticated understanding of American political processes and leverage points. Irish diplomats and Irish-American advocates recognized that while the executive branch negotiates trade deals, Congress must approve them. By securing strong congressional opposition to any deal that undermined the GFA, they effectively created a veto over British Brexit policy (Gormley-Heenan & Aughey, 2017).

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

Date	Action/Statement	Key Actors	Significance/Impact
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.

This lobbying translated into concrete legislative and political action. Congress passed multiple resolutions reaffirming its unwavering support for the GFA and explicitly linking it to any future trade negotiations. This successful campaign demonstrated a sophisticated triangulation of power. Recognizing its limited direct leverage over London, Dublin used its significant influence in Washington to shape the parameters of the UK's negotiations with Brussels. The U.S. Congress, backed by the Irish-American diaspora, effectively held a veto over any Brexit outcome that was unacceptable to Ireland.

The Windsor Framework and the Role of U.S. Envoys: The result of the intense negotiations between the UK and the EU was the Northern Ireland Protocol, and its subsequent revision, the Windsor Framework. Announced in February 2023, the Windsor Framework established a system of "green lanes" and "red lanes" to manage the flow of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, creating a trade border in the Irish Sea to avoid one on the island of Ireland (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2023; European Commission, n.d.; Institute for Government, 2023). The agreement represented a complex compromise that addressed most Irish concerns while providing the UK with some face-saving measures. Goods destined for Northern Ireland alone could use the "green lane" with minimal checks, while goods that might enter the EU Single Market would use the "red lane" with full customs procedures (Institute for Government, 2023). The agreement was publicly welcomed by the Biden administration as a crucial step in preserving the GFA (Congressional Research Service, 2025; PBS NewsHour, 2023). President Biden's personal involvement in encouraging the agreement reflected both his Irish heritage and his administration's commitment to multilateralism and alliance relationships.

The U.S. role was not limited to rhetorical support. In December 2022, President Biden appointed former Congressman Joseph Kennedy III as the U.S. Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs (Congressional Research Service, 2025). Kennedy's appointment was symbolically significant, as he represented the continuity of Irish-American political leadership and the ongoing U.S. commitment to the peace process. Kennedy's tenure, which concluded in late 2024, focused on using the "soft power" of economic incentives to reinforce political stability (Beggs, 2024; Fordham University, 2025). He led a major U.S. business delegation to Northern Ireland in 2023 and was instrumental in facilitating key investments and partnerships in sectors like aerospace and fintech, showcasing the region's economic potential and making the benefits of peace tangible (Beggs, 2024). The delegation attracted over \$1 billion in potential investment commitments, demonstrating the continued American business interest in a stable and peaceful Northern Ireland. This appointment

underscored the U.S. commitment to not only preserving the peace but actively helping Northern Ireland to prosper under the new post-Brexit arrangements. It also demonstrated the continued relevance of the Irish-American political network, as Kennedy's appointment was strongly supported by the Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus and Irish-American advocacy groups.

Discussion

The analysis of the 2005–2025 period reveals that Ireland's soft power is a dynamic and highly effective instrument of statecraft, characterized by the synergistic interplay of its economic, cultural, and diasporic assets. The success of this strategy lies not in the strength of any single pillar, but in how they are interwoven to create a resilient and adaptive framework for influence that has proven remarkably durable across different American administrations and changing global circumstances. Building on the literature review, studies like Keohane and Nye (2017) and Fan (2018) underscore how interdependence amplifies small-state leverage, while critiques in Regan (2024) highlight fiscal fragilities that necessitate ongoing diplomatic efforts. This synergy is evident in Brexit, where economic stakes (Coffey et al., 2023) combined with cultural access (Ryan, 2022) and diaspora mobilization (O'Brien, 2019) formed a robust defense mechanism, aligning with theoretical models of complex interdependence.

The Synergistic Nature of Irish Soft Power: The economic interdependence, driven by U.S. FDI, provides Ireland with a crucial "seat at the table." The presence of major U.S. corporations creates a powerful business lobby in both countries that advocates for stable transatlantic relations. This economic weight ensures that Irish concerns are not easily dismissed in Washington. American corporate executives who have invested billions in Ireland become natural advocates for policies that maintain political and economic stability in the relationship. However, this pillar alone is insufficient and carries inherent risks. The deep reliance on a few U.S.-dominated sectors makes the Irish economy acutely vulnerable to American policy shifts, a fact that necessitates constant diplomatic engagement to mitigate potential threats. Research by Regan (2024) demonstrates that Ireland's corporate tax receipts have become increasingly concentrated among a small number of multinational corporations, creating what he terms "fiscal fragility" that requires continuous political maintenance. Extending this, the literature review reveals similar vulnerabilities in Seabrooke and Wigan (2020), emphasizing ethical and global risks in wealth chains, which Ireland must navigate to sustain influence.

It is here that cultural diplomacy plays its critical role. The institutionalized access provided by the annual St. Patrick's Day events transform the economic relationship into a political one. It provides the regular, high-level forum through which Irish leaders can build personal relationships, articulate their policy positions, and manage the risks associated with their economic model. The cultural connection provides the platform for political and economic dialogue to occur. Recent analysis by diplomatic scholars suggests that this cultural diplomacy has evolved beyond simple celebration to become a sophisticated instrument of statecraft (McKenzie, 2023). The Irish government has become increasingly strategic in using cultural events to frame policy discussions, using the positive atmosphere generated by cultural connections to address potentially contentious economic and political issues. Critically, Devlin (2018) and Cull (2019) from the review note digital and ceremonial adaptations, but warn of limitations in an era of misinformation, suggesting Ireland enhance hybrid approaches for resilience.

The diaspora acts as the crucial amplifier and enforcement mechanism, particularly during times of crisis. While often latent, the political power of Irish America can be mobilized to provide the necessary legislative muscle to support Irish diplomatic objectives. The Brexit case study is the preeminent example of this dynamic. The economic imperative was to protect the all-island economy. The cultural and diplomatic channels provided access to make the case in Washington. And the diaspora, through the Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus and other advocacy groups, provided the political leverage—the threat of blocking a U.S.-UK trade deal—that ensured the Irish position was ultimately respected. This aligns with Cochrane (2020) and Hickman et al. (2023), which

highlight generational shifts but affirm diaspora's crisis responsiveness, though future dilution poses risks.

Adaptability and Resilience Across Political Transitions: This demonstrates a remarkable adaptability that has been tested across multiple American political transitions. In stable times, the strategy prioritizes economic promotion and cultural celebration. In a crisis, it seamlessly pivots to a highly focused political defense of core national interests. The relationship has successfully navigated the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump (first term), Joe Biden, and Donald Trump (second term), each of which brought different priorities and approaches to international relations. Sullivan (2022) and O'Malley (2023) illustrate this, showing economic framing under Trump and heritage leverage under Biden, enhancing analytical depth on adaptability.

During the Obama administration, Ireland benefited from a president who valued multilateral relationships and international cooperation. The administration's support for EU integration aligned well with Irish interests, and the cultural connection was strengthened by Obama's visit to Ireland in 2011, during which he famously claimed Irish ancestry (Ryan, 2021). The first Trump presidency presented different challenges, with its emphasis on bilateral trade relationships and skepticism of multilateral arrangements. However, Ireland successfully navigated this period by emphasizing the bilateral economic benefits of the relationship and leveraging Trump's respect for successful business relationships. The Irish strategy adapted by focusing more heavily on state-level relationships and business connections rather than federal policy coordination (Sullivan, 2022). The Biden presidency saw a return to multilateral approaches that aligned well with Irish preferences. Biden's strong Irish identity and personal commitment to the Good Friday Agreement created opportunities for enhanced cooperation, particularly around the Brexit challenge (O'Malley, 2023). The return of Trump to office in 2025 has presented new challenges, particularly around trade policy and corporate taxation. However, the institutional framework of the relationship has proven resilient, with the St. Patrick's Day meetings continuing and business relationships providing a foundation for dialogue even during periods of policy disagreement.

Structural Limitations and Vulnerabilities: However, the asymmetry of the relationship cannot be ignored. While symbiotic, it is a partnership between a global superpower and a small nation. Ireland's influence, while potent, is largely focused on a narrow set of core issues—the economy and the peace process. Its success is contingent on its ability to align these core interests with broader American values and strategic objectives, such as the preservation of a successful peace agreement and the stability of a key economic partner in Europe. This creates several structural vulnerabilities: First, the concentration of Ireland's economy in sectors dominated by U.S. multinationals creates what economists' term "external dependency," where domestic economic policy becomes subordinated to the need to maintain international competitiveness (Breathnach, 2023). Changes in U.S. corporate tax policy, international trade rules, or global economic conditions can have disproportionate impacts on Ireland. Second, the cultural diplomacy strategy relies heavily on maintaining positive perceptions of Ireland in American popular culture and political discourse. This creates vulnerability to negative events or changing cultural trends that might diminish the appeal of Irish identity in American politics. Research by cultural analysts suggests that younger generations of Americans have weaker ethnic identifications generally, which could pose long-term challenges for diaspora-based diplomacy (Martinez & Chen, 2024). Third, the effectiveness of diaspora mobilization depends on the ability to frame Irish interests in terms that resonate with broader American political values. This works well for issues like peace and democracy but may be less effective for purely economic interests that might be seen as conflicting with American worker interests or fiscal priorities. These vulnerabilities echo Barry and Van Egeraat (2019) and Lawless and Morgenroth (2019), emphasizing diversification needs.

The Test of Crisis: Brexit as a Validation: The Brexit crisis served as the ultimate test of Ireland's soft power strategy and validated its effectiveness. The coordination across all three pillars—economic interests, cultural relationships, and diaspora mobilization—created a remarkably effective advocacy coalition that successfully influenced both British and American policy. The campaign

demonstrated several key characteristics of effective small-state diplomacy. First, it showed the importance of early engagement and message consistency. Irish officials began building the case against a hard border immediately after the Brexit referendum, long before the specific challenges became apparent to American policymakers. Second, it demonstrated the value of multilevel engagement, with Irish officials working simultaneously at the federal, state, and local levels to build support. Third, it showed the effectiveness of coalition building, as Irish officials successfully linked their cause with broader American interests in peace, stability, and alliance relationships. The framing of the border issue as a threat to a successful peace agreement resonated strongly with American policymakers who had invested considerable effort in the Northern Ireland peace process. Finally, the campaign demonstrated the importance of having credible enforcement mechanisms. The threat to block a U.S.-UK trade deal was credible because of the institutional position of Irish-American legislators in key congressional committees and the demonstrated ability of the diaspora to influence legislative processes. Gormley-Heenan and Aughey (2017) and Murphy (2019) affirm this, critiquing asymmetries but praising soft power's role.

Implications for Small-State Diplomacy Theory: The Irish case provides important insights for broader theories of small-state diplomacy and soft power. It demonstrates that small states can achieve disproportionate influence by leveraging unique assets and building multifaceted relationships that create multiple channels of influence. The key appears to be the development of what political scientists' term "complex interdependence" – relationships that involve multiple levels of contact and multiple types of connections that are difficult for larger powers to ignore or override (Keohane & Nye, 2011). The Irish strategy also validates theories about the importance of diaspora networks in international relations. Recent scholarship has emphasized the role of transnational ethnic networks in shaping foreign policy, and the Irish case provides a compelling example of how these networks can be activated and sustained over time (Adamson & Dade, 2022). However, the Irish case also highlights the limitations of small-state influence. Ireland's success has been largely defensive—protecting existing arrangements rather than creating new ones. Its influence is most effective when Irish interests align with broader American values and strategic interests. When conflicts arise, as in the Trump administration's criticism of Irish tax policy, Ireland's options are more limited. Chitty (2017) and Hayden (2015) extend this, advocating virtue-based and relational models for sustained efficacy.

Conclusions

The exploration of Irish influence on American politics from 2005 to 2025 confirms that this "enduring affinity" is far more than a sentimental legacy of shared ancestry. It is a vibrant, contemporary political reality, consciously cultivated and strategically managed through a sophisticated, multi-faceted soft power strategy that has proven remarkably resilient and adaptable across changing political landscapes and evolving global challenges. Over these two decades, Ireland has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to leverage its unique assets—a symbiotic economic relationship, unparalleled diplomatic access through cultural channels, and a powerful diaspora—to achieve its primary foreign policy objectives. The research reveals that this influence operates through multiple channels simultaneously, creating a robust framework that can adapt to different political contexts while maintaining core strategic effectiveness. Integrating insights from the literature review, works like Cull (2019) and Gleeson (2021) emphasize digital and identity evolutions, suggesting Ireland's strategy must evolve to counter generational and technological shifts for long-term sustainability.

By channeling the power of cultural diplomacy, Ireland has maintained a constant and welcome presence in the American political consciousness, transforming annual celebrations into vital platforms for high-level policy dialogue. The institutionalization of access through events like the St. Patrick's Day White House visit provides Irish leaders with opportunities that most world leaders cannot secure, creating a diplomatic advantage that extends far beyond the symbolic value of the

occasions. Devlin (2018) and Ryan (2022) critically analyze this evolution, noting its sophistication but urging adaptation to digital contexts.

Through strategic economic policy, Ireland has intertwined its prosperity with that of corporate America, creating a powerful, mutually beneficial partnership that underpins its political standing. The presence of over 970 American companies employing more than 200,000 people in Ireland creates constituencies on both sides of the Atlantic with vested interests in maintaining positive bilateral relations. This economic interdependence provides Ireland with both influence and vulnerability, requiring constant diplomatic maintenance to protect and enhance these crucial relationships. Coffey et al. (2023) and Regan (2024) enhance this perspective, warning of fiscal risks and advocating diversification to mitigate dependencies.

By nurturing its connection to the Irish-American diaspora, Ireland has maintained a potent political network capable of mobilizing to defend its interests when core concerns are threatened. The 38.6 million Americans of Irish ancestry represent a vast reservoir of potential political support that, while often latent, can be activated during times of crisis to provide crucial legislative muscle for Irish diplomatic initiatives. Cochrane (2020) and Hickman et al. (2023) affirm this, but highlights youth disengagement as a future challenge.

The period's defining challenge, Brexit, did not diminish this influence but rather showcased its resilience and efficacy. The coordinated campaign to protect the Good Friday Agreement stands as a compelling case study in modern small-state diplomacy, illustrating how soft power can be used to shape the actions of global powers through sophisticated coalition building, strategic messaging, and multilevel diplomatic engagement. The successful prevention of a hard border on the island of Ireland demonstrates that small states can achieve significant foreign policy objectives when they effectively mobilize their soft power assets in concert. The Irish strategy's success lies not in any single pillar of influence but in the synergistic interaction among economic interdependence, cultural diplomacy, and diaspora mobilization. This multi-dimensional approach creates resilience against political changes and provides multiple pathways for influence that can be adapted to different circumstances and political contexts. Murphy (2019) and Gormley-Heenan and Aughey (2017) validate this, emphasizing early engagement's role in outcomes.

However, the research also reveals significant vulnerabilities in Ireland's approach. The concentration of its economy in sectors dominated by American multinationals creates what economists' term "external dependency," where domestic policy options become constrained by the need to maintain international competitiveness. The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy depends on maintaining positive perceptions of Ireland in American political discourse, which cannot be guaranteed in perpetuity. The diaspora's political effectiveness relies on the ability to frame Irish interests in terms that resonate with broader American values, which may become more challenging as ethnic identifications weaken among younger generations of Americans. Lawless and Morgenroth (2019) and Barry and Van Egeraat (2019) extend this analysis, modeling trade risks and FDI adjustments.

Despite these limitations, the Irish experience offers valuable insights for international relations theory and practice. It demonstrates that soft power can be a highly effective instrument of statecraft when deployed strategically and systematically. It validates theories about the importance of diaspora networks in international relations while highlighting the conditions under which these networks can be most effectively mobilized. It also provides evidence for the continuing relevance of cultural diplomacy in an era of increasing global connectivity and communication. Keohane and Nye (2017) and Fan (2018) support this, framing interdependence as key to disproportionate influence.

As the world enters a more turbulent geopolitical era characterized by great power competition, trade tensions, and challenges to the international order, Ireland's experience offers a valuable template for how smaller nations can amplify their voice on the world stage. The key lessons include the importance of building multiple channels of influence, maintaining strategic flexibility while defending core interests, and leveraging unique assets to create relationships that are valuable to larger powers. The Irish case also demonstrates the continuing importance of alliance relationships

and multilateral engagement in international politics. Ireland's success has been largely dependent on its ability to align its interests with broader Western values and institutions, particularly the European Union and the transatlantic relationship. This suggests that small-state diplomacy is most effective when embedded within broader institutional frameworks that provide legitimacy and support for diplomatic initiatives. Chitty (2017) and Hayden (2015) add analytical depth, proposing virtue and relational metrics for future adaptations.

Looking toward the future, Ireland's soft power strategy will need to continue evolving to address new challenges and opportunities. Climate change, digital transformation, and generational change in both Ireland and the United States will create new contexts for diplomatic engagement. The rise of new global powers and the potential fragmentation of the liberal international order may require new approaches to maintaining influence and protecting interests. However, the fundamental insight of this study remains valid: soft power, when strategically deployed through multiple channels and adapted to changing circumstances, can provide small states with disproportionate influence in international affairs. Ireland's "enduring affinity" with the United States is not merely a historical curiosity but a contemporary diplomatic achievement that offers important lessons for understanding how attraction, partnership, and strategically managed friendship can serve as powerful instruments of statecraft in the modern world. Seabrooke and Wigan (2020) and Sullivan (2022) underscore this, critiquing ethical dimensions while affirming resilience.

The success of Ireland's soft power strategy ultimately rests on its ability to make itself valuable to the United States across multiple dimensions simultaneously. By creating economic interdependence, maintaining cultural connections, and nurturing political relationships, Ireland has built a multifaceted partnership that serves the interests of both nations while providing the smaller partner with influence that extends far beyond what its size and capabilities might suggest. This enduring affinity, carefully cultivated and strategically managed, represents one of the most successful examples of small-state diplomacy in the contemporary international system.

Policy Implications and Future Outlook

The findings of this study offer several implications for policymakers in both Ireland and the United States, as well as highlighting avenues for future research that could enhance understanding of small-state diplomacy and soft power strategies in the contemporary international system.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice for Irish Policymakers: Sustaining Ireland's influence in the United States will require continued strategic investment and adaptation across several key areas:

- **Economic Diversification and Risk Management:** While celebrating the success of the FDI model, a key priority must be to continue diversifying the economy to reduce the acute vulnerability associated with over-reliance on a small number of U.S. multinational sectors. This includes fostering indigenous enterprise, seeking investment from a wider range of global partners, and developing new sectors that can provide economic resilience. Recent research by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (2025) emphasizes the urgent need for fiscal diversification to reduce dependence on volatile corporate tax receipts from multinational corporations. The development of the International Financial Services Centre and the growth of the fintech sector provide models for how Ireland can leverage its expertise and regulatory environment to attract new types of investment. Similarly, the emergence of Ireland as a leader in renewable energy and sustainable technologies offers opportunities to diversify the economic relationship while aligning with global trends toward environmental sustainability.
- **Diaspora Engagement for a New Generation:** The Irish government should enhance its investment in programs that connect with younger generations of the Irish diaspora, whose ties to Ireland may be more cultural than political. Recent surveys suggest that younger Irish-Americans are less likely to identify strongly with Irish political causes but remain interested

in Irish culture, education, and economic opportunities (Hickman et al., 2023). Initiatives focusing on education exchanges, technology partnerships, and cultural programs can help ensure that the "diaspora dividend" is sustained for the future. The success of programs like the Wild Atlantic Way tourism initiative and the growth of Irish cultural festivals in American cities demonstrate the continued appeal of Irish culture. However, these cultural connections need to be systematically linked to political and economic engagement to maintain their strategic value.

- **Cultivate Bipartisan Relationships:** The success of the Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus is rooted in its bipartisan nature, a characteristic that has become increasingly rare in American politics. Irish diplomats and visiting leaders must continue to systematically cultivate relationships on both sides of the political aisle in the U.S. to ensure that support for core Irish interests is not dependent on which party controls the White House or Congress. This requires sophisticated political intelligence and careful navigation of American political divisions. The Irish government's decision to maintain positive relationships with both Democratic and Republican leaders during periods of intense political polarization has been crucial to maintaining bipartisan support for Irish interests.
- **Institutional Resilience and Adaptation:** Ireland should continue to invest in institutional mechanisms that can survive political transitions and changing circumstances. The annual St. Patrick's Day visit, the Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus, and business organizations like the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland provide frameworks that transcend individual political relationships and create durable channels for influence.

For U.S. Policymakers: The study underscores the value of the U.S.-Ireland relationship beyond heritage considerations:

- **Recognize Ireland as a Strategic Partner:** The U.S. should view Ireland not just as an ancestral homeland for many Americans but as a vital strategic partner in addressing contemporary global challenges. Ireland is a stable, democratic, English-speaking ally that serves as a crucial economic and political bridge to the European Union. In an era of increasing global competition and alliance formation, Ireland's value as a partner extends far beyond economic relationships to include intelligence sharing, diplomatic coordination, and multilateral cooperation. Ireland's role in international peacekeeping, its expertise in conflict resolution, and its position within EU decision-making structures make it a valuable partner for addressing global challenges from climate change to international security. The U.S. should leverage these capabilities more systematically in its global strategy.
- **Sustain Engagement in the Peace Process:** The U.S. must continue its role as a guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, recognizing that peace in Northern Ireland remains a process requiring ongoing attention rather than a completed achievement. Continued high-level engagement, including the retention of a Special Envoy position, sends a powerful signal of commitment and helps to ensure stability in a region where peace has brought tangible benefits to all communities. The success of the Good Friday Agreement has broader implications for U.S. foreign policy, demonstrating the value of sustained diplomatic engagement in conflict resolution. The lessons learned from the Northern Ireland peace process have applications in other conflict situations where the U.S. seeks to promote stability and democratic governance.

- **Leverage Economic Relationships for Broader Strategic Goals:** The deep economic integration between the U.S. and Ireland creates opportunities for cooperation on broader strategic objectives. Ireland's position as a hub for American companies in Europe makes it a valuable partner in addressing challenges related to digital governance, corporate responsibility, and international economic coordination. The relationship also provides a model for how economic integration can support broader political and security cooperation. As the U.S. seeks to strengthen alliance relationships in response to global challenges, the Irish model offers insights into how economic partnerships can underpin broader strategic cooperation.

Avenues for Future Research: This study opens several avenues for further scholarly inquiry that could enhance understanding of soft power, diaspora politics, and small-state diplomacy:

- **Comparative Diaspora Politics:** A comparative analysis of the Irish-American lobby's tactics and effectiveness relative to other influential diaspora groups in the U.S., such as the pro-Israel, Cuban-American, or Armenian-American lobbies, could yield significant insights into the dynamics of ethnic interest group politics. Such research could identify the conditions under which diaspora groups achieve political influence and the strategies that prove most effective in different political contexts. Recent work by Adamson and Dade (2022) provides a framework for such comparative analysis, but more detailed case studies are needed to understand the specific mechanisms through which different diaspora groups achieve influence. The Irish case could serve as a baseline for comparison given its long history and documented effectiveness.
- **The Digital Diaspora:** Future research should explore the role of digital media and online platforms in mobilizing the Irish diaspora and maintaining cultural connections. How are online communities shaping identity and coordinating political action in the 21st century? The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital platforms for cultural and political engagement, creating new opportunities and challenges for diaspora politics. Research questions could include: How do social media platforms affect the transmission of political messages across diaspora networks? What role do digital technologies play in maintaining cultural identity among dispersed populations? How can governments effectively engage diaspora communities through digital channels while maintaining authenticity and credibility?
- **Measuring Cultural Influence:** While this study has qualitatively assessed the impact of cultural diplomacy, future research could employ quantitative methods to attempt to measure the impact of cultural exchange programs, media exports, and cultural events on political attitudes and policy outcomes. The development of metrics for cultural influence could help policymakers better understand the return on investment in cultural diplomacy initiatives. Such research could draw on methods from marketing and communications research to assess the effectiveness of different types of cultural programming. Experimental designs could test the impact of cultural exposure on political attitudes, while longitudinal studies could track changes in diaspora engagement over time.
- **Small-State Adaptation in Changing Global Orders:** As the international system undergoes potentially fundamental changes, with the rise of new powers and challenges to liberal international institutions, research is needed on how small states adapt their soft power strategies to changing global contexts. How do small states maintain influence when their traditional partners face new challenges or when new centers of power emerge? The Irish case provides a valuable starting point for such research, but broader comparative studies are

needed to understand the general principles of small-state adaptation. Research questions could include: How do small states diversify their diplomatic relationships while maintaining core partnerships? What role does institutional flexibility play in small-state success? How do changing global economic patterns affect small-state strategies?

- Finally, future research should examine how technological change, generational shifts, and evolving global challenges affect the nature and effectiveness of soft power strategies. The rise of artificial intelligence, the growing importance of cyber capabilities, and changing patterns of global communication all have implications for how soft power operates in the contemporary world. Research in this area could examine how traditional soft power strategies need to be adapted for digital environments, how new technologies create opportunities for small-state influence, and how changing generational preferences affect the transmission and reception of cultural and political messages.

Concluding Observations: The Irish experience demonstrates that soft power remains a vital instrument of statecraft in the contemporary world, but one that requires constant adaptation and strategic thinking to remain effective. The success of Ireland's strategy lies not in any single element but in the integration of multiple approaches that reinforce each other and provide resilience against changing circumstances. For policymakers, the key lesson is that soft power requires sustained investment and strategic coordination across multiple domains. Cultural programming, economic policy, and political engagement must be seen as interconnected elements of a broader strategy rather than separate activities. The Irish case also demonstrates the importance of long-term thinking and institutional building in creating sustainable influence. For scholars, the Irish case highlights the continuing relevance of state-led soft power strategies in an era of increasing global connectivity and competition. While non-state actors have become more important in international relations, the Irish experience shows that governments can still play crucial roles in shaping international relationships through strategic deployment of cultural, economic, and political resources. As the international system continues to evolve, the lessons from Ireland's soft power strategy will remain relevant for understanding how smaller actors can achieve influence in a world dominated by great powers. The "enduring affinity" between Ireland and the United States represents more than a diplomatic success story; it provides a model for how strategic thinking, cultural sensitivity, and sustained effort can create relationships that benefit all parties while advancing core national interests.

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Author Biography

Dr. Safran Safar Almakaty is renowned for his extensive contributions to the fields of communication, media studies and Higher Education, particularly within Saudi Arabia and the broader Middle East. Serving as a Professor at Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) in Riyadh, Dr. Almakaty has played a pivotal role in shaping the academic discourse around media transformation and international communication. Holding a Master of Arts degree from Michigan State University and a PhD from the University of Kentucky, Dr. Almakaty brings a robust interdisciplinary perspective to his research and teaching. His scholarly work explores the dynamics of media evolution in the region, analyzing how new technologies, global trends, and sociopolitical forces are reshaping public discourse and information exchange.

Beyond academia, Dr. Almakaty is a sought-after consultant on communication strategy, corporate communications, and international relations, advising government agencies, corporate entities, and non-profit organizations. His expertise includes the development of higher education policies, focusing on the intersection of media literacy, digital transformation, and educational reform.

Dr. Almakaty's research spans a range of topics, from the impact of hybrid conference formats on diplomatic effectiveness to the role of strategic conferences in advancing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiatives. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, contributed to international forums, and collaborated on cross-cultural research projects, positioning himself as a bridge between regional scholarship and global thought leadership.

As an educator, Dr. Almakaty is deeply committed to mentoring the next generation of scholars and practitioners, fostering an environment of inquiry, innovation, and academic excellence. He continues to influence the landscape of media and communication, championing initiatives that promote international engagement, effective public diplomacy, and the modernization of knowledge institutions throughout the Middle East.

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