U.S. Multinational Companies and Unionization Determinants in Ireland: The Influence of Home-Country Behaviors

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Abstract

This paper uses empirical techniques to measure the determinants of unionization among multinational companies (MNCs) operating in Ireland. The literature suggests that MNCs from economically dominant countries may be more easily able to implement their home-country managerial practices within host countries. Whether this notion is manifested in MNCs' industrial relations behaviors, particularly in terms of unionization levels, has been debated by those studying the subject. U.S. firms operating facilities in Ireland garner particular interest, given their substantial influence on Irish industrial relations (IR) policy and business practices. Employing the first representative survey of MNCs operating in Ireland, we use empirical methods to ascertain the determinants of both overall unionization levels and also rates of "double-breasting," where firms simultaneously operate union and nonunion sites. The results indicate a strong country-of-origin effect, with U.S. companies far less likely to be unionized and more likely to engage in double-breasting. The findings suggest that U.S. MNCs carry their own IR cultures and attitudes into Irish sites, rather than complying with host-country traditions, thus generally supporting the literature on economic dominance.

Introduction

This paper seeks to explain the determinants of unionization among multinational companies (MNCs) in Ireland. Far from being an isolated entity, Ireland can be viewed as something of a microcosm for the global entrenchment of MNCs into small, late-developing economies. For instance, the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ireland, relative to the size of the economy, remains one of the highest in the world.

The broad literature on MNCs suggests that firms from economically successful countries are often able to transfer their management practices to the host country with relative ease. In Ireland, researchers maintain that the influence of economically dominant countries, particularly the United States, is especially pronounced. When one looks specifically at industrial relations (IR) behaviors within these MNCs operating in Ireland, the literature is divided. Some argue that MNCs conform to the prevailing IR trends of the host country, mirroring indigenous firms. Others maintain that MNCs operating in Ireland carry their own cultures and IR attitudes developed from their home countries. However, the Irish IR literature has been unable to

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empirically test these assertions with representative and robust data. This paper incorporates data that allow for the quantitative analysis of these competing ideas. Throughout the paper, attention is given to the role of the United States when considering MNCs operating in Ireland.

Given these contextual and theoretical considerations, this paper looks to measure the factors that influence a firm's unionization status, particularly the impact of country of origin. Within this framework, the paper also analyzes the determinants of "double-breasting," where firms simultaneously operate union and nonunion plants. Much of the literature, particularly from the United States, views double-breasting as an important means of union avoidance. However, the definitional meanings of the term may very depending on context.

Prior to our empirical analysis of the determinants of unionization and double-breasting, it is necessary to discuss the international literature on MNCs and unionization, the Irish context, the concept of double-breasting, and our methodology.

Literature on Economic Dominance Effects within MNCs

The international literature highlights the importance of economic dominance effects in facilitating the transfer of management practices from the home to the host country within multinationals (Smith and Meiskins 1995). The concept of economic dominance is based on the premise that organizations emanating from economically successful nations can most easily and credibly transfer and implement specific business policies and practices in their foreign subsidiaries (Edwards and Ferner 2002, Smith and Meiskins 1995). This occurs because such "dominant or hegemonic states are able to exert organizational, political and technological influences that invite dissemination and adoption around the global capitalist system" (Almond et al. 2005:280). In essence, economic success in the home country and internationally gives that country's management practices a strong level of global legitimacy that in turn provides its foreign subsidiaries with extensive capacity to implement home country practices abroad.

Such capacity is clearly enhanced in smaller, late-industrializing economies. Ireland provides a pertinent example. It has been categorized as one of the world's most globalized and FDI-dependent economies (Kearney 2002). This is the product of a consistent public policy strategy, dating from the late 1950s, of seeking to attract MNCs into Ireland through a package of preferential incentives, especially low corporation taxes (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2006). U.S. MNCs have been the predominant target and beneficiaries of this policy. The United States is by far Ireland's largest source of FDI. U.S. FDI in Ireland increased by a factor of five during the period 1990 to 1998, while *The Economist* (1997) found that FDI stock from U.S. firms amounted to $3,000 per head in Ireland, compared to $2,000 in Britain, $500 in Germany, and $200 in Spain. The scale of U.S. FDI in Ireland can be captured in the remarkable statistic that the stock of U.S. corporate investment in Ireland is larger than its combined investment in Brazil, Russia, India, and China (Hamilton and Quinlan 2008). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Ireland's economic development is inextricably linked with U.S. FDI and with the fortunes of the U.S. economy. Equally, American management approaches and practices have left an indelible footprint on Ireland's business system, particularly in terms of industrial relations (Collings, Gunnigle, and Morley 2008; Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005).

In the European Union (EU), the concept of economic dominance stimulated considerable debate during the 1990s, for two main reasons. First, the surge in U.S. FDI into the EU led to increased reflection on the potential impact of transferring U.S. business and management practices to the EU (Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994, Cooke and Noble 1998). Second, the apparent success of the U.S. economy during the 1990s, particularly in terms of job creation, and the comparatively poor performance of many EU countries in this sphere, engendered considerable deliberation on the respective merits of differing systems of economic governance. In particular, the EU's espoused "social market" approach, characterized by comparatively high levels of labor regulation, welfare provision, and reliance on pluralist employment relations traditions, seemed to suffer in contemporary comparison with the U.S. "free market" approach. The latter approach, underpinned by the principle of "employment at will" and characterized by lower levels of labor and labor market regulation, was argued to provide a greater spur for job creation (Grubb and Wells 1993; Sadowski, Backes-Gellener, and Frick 1995). U.S. MNCs have been at the forefront in promoting free market/low labor regulation approaches (Dunning 1993). Indeed, Crouch and Streeck (1997) point to the success of U.S.

MNCs in achieving extraordinarily high levels of autarky from their socio-political environment, which enables them to traverse national boundaries with considerable and increasing ease. They further argue that the globalization of markets and overdependence on MNCs as providers of employment and engines of economic growth has led to a diminution in the governing capacity of the nation-state and government capitulance to the influence of MNCs. Again, this is more likely to occur in smaller, late-developing economies, such as Ireland, where dominant MNC coalitions are able to exert proportionately greater economic and political influence.

The Irish Industrial Relations Context

The Irish industrial relations system has its roots in the British voluntarist system, which is unsurprising given that Ireland achieved independence from Britain in 1922 and only became a republic in 1949. The fledgling Irish state thus inherited the British legislative framework and voluntarist IR traditions. Although the vestiges of British influence held sway for considerable time, these have now been substantially shed, as the Irish IR system has established a quite separate identity. However, this identity is relatively complex. First, it does not fit any of the prevailing European IR typologies, such as Nordic corporatism, classic European social partnership, or Anglo-Saxon pluralism. Second, there is considerable variation within the Irish IR system itself.

At the macro level, the IR landscape has been dominated by a series of national-level accords ("partnership agreements") negotiated by the central trade union confederation, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the main employer's confederation, the Irish Business Employers Confederation (IBEC), and the Irish government. These accords afford organized labor considerable influence over economic and social policy, as they address both pay and broader economic and social policy considerations (e.g., taxation, social welfare). Unlike some of its European counterparts, though, Ireland has no legislatively underpinned system of employee involvement at the workplace level, meaning that initiatives in this domain tend to be voluntary in nature (i.e., left to employers, workers, and trade unions). The recent transposition of the European Directive on Information and Consultation into Irish law could partially redress this situation, though its impact may well be limited given that the transposition was minimalist in nature, and there is no evidence yet of any substantial impact on IR practice at workplace level (Dundon, Curran, Ryan, and Maloney 2006). While some work suggests that the directive may have positively influenced voice structures at MNCs operating in Ireland, it has been documented that attempts to diffuse partnership arrangements to workplace level have largely faltered (Dobbins and Gunnigle 2009, Gunnigle 1998, O'Dowd and Roche 2009).

Turning specifically to the role of trade unions, we find that union density has declined significantly over the past three decades. Having reached a high of 62 percent in 1980, density has progressively fallen since then and now stands at 33 percent (Roche 2008). While the reasons are varied, one particular source of decline pertinent to this paper is changing employer relationships with trade unions. Though certainly not confined to FDI sector, there is extensive evidence that lower unionization levels are prevalent among MNCs, particularly those that have established operations since the early 1980s (Geary and Roche 2001, Gunnigle 1995, Roche 2001). Furthermore, Ireland's extensive reliance on FDI has meant that the MNC sector exerts considerable influence on public policy, including labor policy. A case in point is the shift in the stance of Ireland industrial development agencies from pro-union to union-neutral in the early 1980s. This reflected a concern that if Ireland wanted to attract new high-tech FDI from the United States (particularly) and elsewhere, it would be important to demonstrate that these MNCs could establish on a nonunion basis. More recently, decisions to transpose European directives on labor matters in a minimalist fashion also indicate the extensive influence of the FDI sector, particularly from U.S. MNCs, whose interests are normally articulated via the American Chamber of Commerce (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005, 2006). One also finds evidence of a clear MNC footprint on the process through which trade unions can secure recognition from employers, which we discuss below.

Ireland has no mandatory legal process through which trade unions can secure recognition from employers. This is partially traced to provisions in the Irish Constitution but also both reflects a public policy stance that seeks to avoid mandatory union recognition provision because of its perceived negative impact on the attraction of FDI and epitomizes a general characteristic of any voluntarist system. The Irish constitution

(1937) guarantees the "right of citizens to form associations or unions."[1] Case law has interpreted this article to mean that workers are free to join or not join a trade union as they see fit. More significantly though, it has been interpreted to mean that employers are also free to prohibit legislation that might compel employers to recognize trade unions. This interpretation was reiterated recently in the Supreme Court decision in *Ryanair* v. *Labour Court*, where J. Geoghegan, in his judgment, stated that "it is not in dispute that, as a matter of law, Ryanair is perfectly entitled not to deal with trade unions, nor can a law be passed compelling it to do so."[2] Consequently, union recognition remains something to be worked out voluntarily between employers and trade unions and ultimately depends on whether employers agree to recognize and bargain with a trade union representing all or a proportion of its workforce.

Traditionally, the absence of statutory provision with regard to union recognition was not a major concern, as most medium and large employers recognized and concluded collective agreements with trade unions (Roche and Larragy 1989). However, declining union density from the turn of the 1980s and greater employer opposition to union recognition (particularly among inward-investing MNCs), among other reasons, led to an upsurge in union pressure for legislative provision (cf. Gunnigle, O'Sullivan, and Kinsella 2002). The union movement effectively concluded that industrial action was no longer a viable method of gaining recognition in the face of hardened employer postures. The situation came to a head in a series of high-profile union recognition disputes, most notably between Ryanair and largest Irish trade union, SIPTU (Services Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) in 1998, when Ryanair's refusal to concede to recognition was ultimately successful (O'Sullivan and Gunnigle 2009).

However, persistent union pressure to obtain legislation to address union recognition via the social partnership process led to the creation of a "high-level" group comprising representative government departments, ICTU, IBEC, and Ireland's main body for promoting inward FDI, IDA Ireland. This work culminated in the passing of so-called "right to bargain" legislation in the early 21st century. This legislation does not provide for mandatory union recognition, but rather it allows unions to pursue cases against companies where no collective bargaining exists. Initially, this involves voluntarist methods. However, should the dispute remain unresolved, a statutory mechanism is provided whereby the Irish Labour Court may issue a binding determination. Critically, this determination may address only terms and conditions of employment or dispute resolution and disciplinary procedures, but not trade union recognition. The reasons this "right to bargain" legislation does not provide for an "end game" (i.e., mandatory union recognition) can be traced in a large measure to the influence of MNCs. The expert group that advised on the legislation included representatives of IDA Ireland and IBEC. These employer-driven organizations highlighted the potentially negative consequences of mandatory union recognition for Ireland's prospects in both attracting new and retaining existing FDI. Consequently, the pragmatic union view was that legislation providing for mandatory union recognition was probably a step too far in the Irish context.

Literature on Unionization Influences

Turning to the influences on industrial relations, the general literature has often argued that the country from which the MNC originates exerts a distinctive effect on the way labor is managed, implicitly supporting the broader theory of MNCs' economic dominance (Ferner 1997). Girgin (2005) specifically notes that the national business system from which MNCs emanate plays a key role in determining its approach to industrial relations. Among a number of other factors known to influence IR approaches, many of which are related to the "varieties of capitalism" literature, research suggests that the existing national models of employee representation that prevail in the firm's country of origin are substantially influential. U.S. MNCs, for example, have displayed a particular and pronounced tendency to develop nonunion enterprises (De Vos 1981; Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986; Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005; Lavelle 2008; Geary and Roche 2001).

Early Irish literature on MNCs argued that the IR practices of foreign-owned MNCs operating in Ireland conformed to the prevailing traditions of larger indigenous firms, notably in conceding trade union recognition and in relying on adversarial collective bargaining as the primary means of handling IR matters. For instance, Kelly and Brannick (1985:109) found that "in general, MNCs are regarded as no different than Irish firms and the trend seems to be one of conformity with the host country's institutions, values and practices." Enderwick (1986) identified a number of theoretical propositions as to why foreign-owned MNC subsidiaries might utilize different IR practices to those prevailing in indigenous organizations, but found no supporting evidence for divergence from host country attitudes (Roche and Geary 1996). Consequently, this early body of research pointed toward a notion that firms conform to the prevailing behaviors of indigenous country institutions, suggesting that country of origin was irrelevant to IR approaches in Ireland.

However, a countervailing perspective argues that a "new orthodoxy" now characterizes Irish IR. This posits that foreign-owned MNCs no longer conform to prevailing local IR practices, pointing toward a country-of-origin effect (Roche and Geary 1996; Turner, D'Art, and Gunnigle 1997a, 1997b). Evidence of this notion is most pronounced in the IR strategies of U.S. MNCs in Ireland, particularly those that have established operations since the 1980s. Indeed, as postulated in the more general IR literature, U.S. companies operating in Ireland appear much more likely to adopt different IR practices to indigenous companies (Collings, Gunnigle, and Morley 2008; Geary and Roche 2001; Gunnigle 1995; Gunnigle et al. 1997). Both Gunnigle (1995) and Gunnigle et al. (1997) point toward a significant decrease in unionization levels among U.S.-owned firms establishing at greenfield sites. Geary and Roche (2001) similarly find a dramatic rise in nonunion workplaces among U.S. employers entering Ireland since the mid-1980s, a trend corroborated and developed in later case evidence (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005). Collings, Gunnigle, and Morley (2008) point toward important changes in the broader IR system in Ireland, which they trace indirectly to the influence of FDI in Ireland, particularly U.S. FDI.

Beyond country-of-origin influences, other factors have been shown to possibly impact a firm's IR approach, especially in terms of its unionization rates. For instance, the role of sector is heavily cited in the literature as contributory toward differences in IR practices of MNCs. In fact, some maintain that sector is more critical in understanding the variation in MNCs' IR practices than country of origin (Marginson and Sisson 1994). Manufacturing is generally seen as the sector in which unions are most entrenched (Roche 1997, Wallace 2003). Firm size also may play a role, with the extant literature suggesting that larger firms are more likely to be unionized (Blanden, Machin, and Van Reenen 2006; Turner, Morley, and Gunnigle 1994; Roche 2001). There have also been suggestions that changes in employment levels may influence union status, with those firms increasing in employment numbers less likely to be unionized (Beaumont and Harris 1992).

Double-Breasting at Multisite Unionized Firms

In addition to our broader study of unionization levels among MNCs in Ireland, we look at one specific facet of the IR structure, known as double-breasting. The term originated in the construction industry in the United States. Early references are found in Lipsky and Farber's (1976) analysis of strike activity in the construction industry, where the authors used the term to describe construction firms operating "in both unionized and nonunionized segments of the industry" (p. 401). This early use of the term has continued in the literature throughout the years (De Bernardo 1989, Doherty 1989, Finkel 1997, and Ruben 1985, among others). The term was largely used in an attempt to capture the notion that unionized construction firms, in order to reduce wages and other labor costs and to gain greater flexibility, would engage in a strategic choice to open and operate a nonunion plant while concurrently maintaining their unionized operations.

The practice spread, both beyond the construction industry (Edwards and Swaim 1986) and into neighboring countries, such as Canada (Rose 1986). Authors generally assumed an association between double-breasting and cost-cutting managerial strategies, conforming to a shift in IR systems first identified in the mid-1980s (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986). As a result of these assumptions, the North American literature has implicitly argued that double-breasting is a form of strategic choice by employers, contending that the practice has developed through what one might call "deliberate sequentiality." This refers to the idea that the unionized company was established first and that cost and control interests led to the opening of secondary nonunion sites (often in areas with less stringent employment regulation).

However, researchers from Europe's Anglophone countries consider that double-breasting may not follow this pattern of "deliberate sequentiality" (Beaumont 1985, 1987; Beaumont and Harris 1992; Beaumont and Townley 1985). Beaumont and Harris (1992) view double-breasting as occurring where "a multi-establishment organization may simultaneously operate establishments on both a union and a non-union basis" (p. 268). Key in this definition is the concept of simultaneity, rather than sequentiality. The Beaumont and Harris definition lacks a normative element; that is, the authors make no prescriptive judgment regarding the logic behind companies' engaging in double-breasting. Under this broader definition, double-breasting might occur as part of a firm's strategic choice to directly compete with the established unionized plant (mirroring the U.S. definition) or, crucially, for a number of other reasons unrelated to strategic choice. For instance, double-breasting may occur in certain instances due to distinctions in the type of work undertaken in different plants/locations.

This distinction in connotations of the term becomes all the more relevant when one considers the role of national context. In particular, the IR system in an individual country may crucially impact the extent to which a company is likely to engage in deliberately sequential or simultaneous double-breasting. In a highly legalistic IR system like the United States, wherein union structures and representative jurisdiction are rooted in law and precedent, companies that engage in double-breasting can be viewed as exploiting openings in the law to undercut worker rights. Conversely, in less legalistic and more voluntarist IR systems, such as that in Ireland, the recognition of trade unions relies substantially on the voluntary commitment of employers to engage with trade unions. Companies engaging in double-breasting in these contexts might be seen as moving away from the traditions and standards of the IR system, rather than using labor law to circumvent the expansion of unions. Previous Irish studies on the subject (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005; Lavelle 2008) chose to define double-breasting in terms of sequentiality. This paper differs, in that it defines double-breasting using the Beaumont and Harris (1992) concept of simultaneity.

Concerns with Previous Studies

It is within this general industrial relations context, quite strongly influenced by MNCs (and particularly U.S. MNCs), that we look to study the determinants of unionization as a whole and the subcategory of double-breasting. Having discussed the literature on MNCs at length, it is important to note the inadequacies involving much of the previous research on MNCs, both from Irish studies and international pieces. Two key issues emerge regarding the extant literature on MNCs, particularly that which studies the Irish context. First, much of this research relies on small sample numbers and fails to focus specifically on MNCs. Second, the empirical research has generally excluded two key categories of MNCs, namely foreign-owned MNCs that are not assisted or aided by the main industrial promotions agencies and indigenous-owned MNCs. These omissions are likely to bias findings on key aspects of practice and behaviors of MNCs. The failure to sufficiently identify the MNC population is characteristic of not only Irish research but also the wider international literature, where scholars have noted the inadequacies of the sampling lists from which several MNC studies have been drawn (Alfaro and Charlton 2006, Edwards et al. 2008). The result of this is that much of the extant MNC literature tends to focus on a small number of predominantly large, well-known, U.S.-owned manufacturing companies (Collinson and Rugman 2005). Our methodology rectifies the inadequacies of previous data sources and provides the first representative picture of MNCs in Ireland.

Methodology

Given the methodological issues with previous studies on the subject, our aim was to carry out the first representative survey of MNCs operating in Ireland.[3] A critical first step was to distinguish between foreign-owned and domestic-owned MNCs and establish a size threshold, as follows:

- *Foreign-owned MNCs:* All wholly or majority foreign-owned organizations operating in the host country, with 500 or more employees worldwide and 100 or more employed in their host county operations.
- *Domestic-owned MNCs:* All wholly or majority home country–owned organizations with 500 or more employees worldwide and at least 100 employed abroad.

The next step involved the compiling an accurate and comprehensive list of the MNC population in Ireland. This proved to be a particularly painstaking task involving a detailed review of various lists of MNCs provided by national agencies (e.g., government sources and development agencies) and organizations specializing in company databases. A number of recurring themes arose when examining the various databases, including their lack of comprehensiveness, duplication of companies, and the inaccuracy of company details (numbers employed, etc.). It became clear that, taken in isolation, none of the sources could be relied on to provide a comprehensive and accurate list of MNCs. It was therefore necessary to use all available avenues and to collate a full list from a number of different sources.[4]

The second phase of the research consisted of structured interviews at an organizational level of MNCs operating in Ireland, unlike much of the previous work, which focused at the enterprise level. As a result, where an MNC had a number of sites, an effort was made to speak with the most senior person responsible for HR/IR, who could answer for all of their Irish operations. In cases where this was not possible, respondents were asked to answer for the largest site/division in Ireland.[5] However, the questions specific to this paper were generic enough that all respondents could answer for all of their Irish operations. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) was contracted to assist with the fieldwork. University of Limerick researchers along with the contracted ESRI team conducted the fieldwork, which began in June 2006 and finished in February 2007. Respondents were asked to report on various aspects of organizational structure and also on four aspects of HR/IR: pay and performance management, employee representation and consultation, employee involvement and communication, and training and development. A total of 260 interviews were carried out, giving a response rate of 63 percent. The survey responses are broadly representative of the total population and for the purposes of this paper have not been reweighted.

Models and Variables

Given the literature and our aims for this paper, we have chosen two models to study. The first incorporates the larger notion of unionization within a particular context (Ireland) and group of respondents (multinational companies). The second model lies within this same topic but focuses on a specific approach to IR (double-breasting). The dependent variables are whether a surveyed firm is unionized and whether unionized firms with multiple sites are operating union-only facilities or a mixture of union and nonunion plants. We maintain that the determinants for unionization (and also double-breasting) should include the firm's country of origin, sector, size, change in employment numbers, ownership status, and date of establishment.

Country of origin. Previous studies have clearly noted the importance of a firm's country of origin, as discussed earlier. We use four categories for country of origin—the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and all other countries.[6] Given the literature, we would expect U.S.-based companies to be less likely to be unionized relative to their counterparts and more likely to engage in double-breasting.

Sector. Also as discussed previously, sector has been argued as significant when looking at unionization. We consider the manufacturing and service sectors in our analysis. We would expect MNCs operating in manufacturing to be more likely to have a union presence; yet we would also expect manufacturing firms to more readily engage in double-breasting, given the already high union presence in the industry.

Employment size. The aforementioned literature has noted that firm size appears to influence union status. In our case, size refers to the number of workers in the MNC's home-country operations alone, rather than the worldwide operations.[7] We distinguish between firms with 100 to 499 employees, firms with 500 to 999 employees, and companies with over 1,000 workers. In addition to having a higher union presence, we would expect that larger firms would be more likely to engage in double-breasting for two reasons: one, that there may be greater incentive for a company to open a nonunion site given the already high unionization levels; and two, that larger firms are more likely to operate multiple plants, thus increasing the chances that we would find instances of double-breasting.

Change in employment size. This variable is somewhat related to the preceding discussion of employment size in general. We argue that firms that are growing are more likely to engage in double-breasting and are less likely to be unionized. There may be a sectoral association, given that unionized manufacturing firms have been generally decreasing in size recently. In terms of double-breasting, as firms grow, they are likely to open new sites to accommodate this growth, and it is plausible to expect that some of these sites will be nonunion where previous or simultaneous plants are unionized (Beaumont and Harris 1992). We divide this variable into two categories: those firms with no change in employment size or a decrease in recent years, and those firms that have enjoyed recent employment gains.

Publicly vs. privately traded companies. Though the literature has not discussed this notion in any great depth, we might expect that publicly listed companies are less likely to be unionized than privately held firms and are more likely to engage in double-breasting. The pressure on publicly listed companies to maximize shareholder value has led to extensive scrutiny of their ability to take costs out of the business. In turn, this might translate into greater pressure toward nonunion status than in privately owned companies.[8]

Date of establishment. The literature would suggest that more recently established companies are much less likely to be unionized than older, established companies (Blanchflower and Freeman 1992; Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly, and Dix 1999; Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986; Machin 2003; Turner, D'Art, and Gunnigle 2002). Though the date of establishment of a MNC has been used in the literature as an explanatory factor for management practice, its application in measuring an effect on unionization is more complex. This complexity specifically refers to the choice of the date of establishment for MNCs that establish on a merger or acquisition basis. For the purposes of this paper, we adopt the following approach to date of establishment: where a MNC has established on a greenfield basis, we use the date the MNC entered Ireland. Where the MNC entered on a merger or acquisition basis, we use the date that the merged or acquired operations originally established in Ireland. We identify three date-of-establishment categories: pre-1960, 1961 to 1980, and 1981 to 2007.

Methodological Suitability of the Variables

It is important to establish that each of the variables included in the models is independent of all the other included variables. For instance, it is critical to know whether any associations between sector and employment size change would lead to clouding of the included data. To test the methodological suitability of our variables, we used a number of techniques, including condition indexes, tolerance/VIF tests, and a standard correlation matrix. None of the variables violated any collinearity diagnostics; therefore, all have been included in our analysis.[9]

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 provides frequency information for the dependent and independent variables in each model. The first model, addressing unionization, incorporates all 260 survey responses. Of all those surveyed (N = 158), 60.7 percent were found to recognize unions. Of the U.S. firms surveyed, 41.6 percent recognized unions. Of UK and Irish firms, 80.0 and 80.9 percent, respectively, were unionized, as were 64.9 percent of firms from other countries. Manufacturing firms were far more likely to have unions, at 73.8 percent vs. 44.4 percent for service companies. Larger sites (75.3 percent) were unionized more often than either medium or small plants. Companies experiencing size decreases were more often unionized than those enjoying employment increases, while private companies had unions more often than public firms. Finally, older firms were unionized in larger percentages than the newer companies, with the most recently established firms engaging with unions in only one-third of the cases.

The results for double-breasting incorporate only those firms operating multiple sites (N = 118). Of these multisite firms, just over half engaged in double-breasting. U.S. firms often used this technique, with 78.6 percent of multisite U.S. companies operating both union and nonunion plants. UK and Irish firms had the lowest rates of double-breasting. The results were split evenly for sector, with just under half the firms in each category engaging in double-breasting. Larger firms, which were more often unionized, were also the most often found to operate union and nonunion sites. Firms experiencing growth often engaged in double-breasting. About half the multisite public firms engaged in the practice, compared with 40.5 percent of private firms. Finally, both the oldest and the newest companies engaged in double-breasting at a rate lower than those established between 1961 and 1980.

Although the frequency results are interesting, it is not clear whether any of these factors independently influences a firm's unionization and double-breasting rates. To answer this, we turn to an empirical analysis using logistic regressions.

TABLE 1
Frequency and Coding Information for All Variables

Variable	Coding scheme	Percent unionization	Percent double-breasting
Dependent variables			
	1 = Company does not recognize unions	39.30	—
	2 = Company recognizes unions	60.70	—
Double-breasting	1 = Company doesn't engage in double-breasting	—	46.60
	2 = Company engages in double-breasting	—	53.40
Independent variables			
Country of origin	1 = U.S. country of origin	41.60	78.60
	2 = U.K. country of origin	80.00	25.00
	3 = Irish country of origin	80.90	38.90
	4 = Other country of origin	64.90	43.30
Sector	1 = Services	44.40	45.30
	2 = Manufacturing	73.80	46.30
Company size	1 = 100–499	54.60	39.50
	2 = 500–999	54.80	40.00
	3 = 1000+	75.30	54.50
Change in employment	1 = No change or decrease	73.70	30.60
	2 = Increase	52.80	58.80
Ownership status	1 = Private	69.40	40.50
	2 = Public	57.80	49.40
Date of establishment	1 = Pre-1960	90.00	31.30
	2 = 1961–1980	71.30	61.40
	3 = 1981–2007	34.00	47.60

Quantitative Analysis

Given that the dependent variable in each model is dichotomous, we have chosen logistic regressions as the appropriate empirical technique to assess the determinants of unionization and double-breasting in MNCs operating in Ireland. For categorical variables, the omitted reference points were U.S. country of origin, small (100–499) company size, and pre-1960 date of establishment.

Unionization

Our model for unionization specified that a firm's being unionized depended on country of origin, sector, size, change in employment levels, ownership status, and date of establishment. Table 2 provides the results for these regressions. The overall model fit quite well, with a Nagelkerke R^2 of .495 (a Hosmer and Lemeshow test also revealed good model fit). We found a strong country-of-origin effect, with firms from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and foreign countries all far more likely to have unions than the U.S. reference point ($p < .01$ for all). Within the three included options, U.K. firms were the most likely to engage with unions, followed by Ireland, and lastly other countries.

TABLE 2
Logistic Regressions for Unionization and Double-Breasting Models

	Unionization model (n = 233, R^2 = .495)			Double-breasting model (n = 99, R^2 = .417)		
Variable	Unstd B	SE	Odds	Unstd B	SE	Odds
Country of origin						
United States (ref.)						
United Kingdom	2.879***	0.67	17.797	-3.742***	0.967	0.024
Ireland	1.966***	0.612	7.139	-2.746***	0.795	0.064
Other	1.321***	0.428	3.748	-1.916**	0.755	0.147
Sector						
Services (ref.)						
Manufacturing	2.141***	0.407	8.512	-1.117*	0.661	0.327
Company size						
100–499 (ref.)						
50–999	0.203	0.473	1.225	-0.123	0.824	0.884
1,000+	.797*	0.431	2.219	0.511	0.601	1.667
Change in employment						
No change/decrease (ref.)						
Increase	-.781**	0.392	0.458	1.275**	0.567	3.577
Ownership status						
Private (ref.)						
Public	0.007	0.404	1.008	0.493	0.6	1.637
Date of establishment						
Pre-1960 (ref.)						
1961–1980	-1.137**	0.577	0.321	0.728	0.584	2.072
1981–2007	-2.290***	0.574	0.101	0.279	0.727	1.321
Constant	-2.140**	0.935	0.118	1.761	1.471	5.818

We also found a strong sectoral influence, with manufacturing firms more likely ($p < .01$) than service companies to recognize unions. Size was slightly influential, with the largest firms more likely to have unions ($p < .10$) than the smallest. Change in employment proved meaningful to unionization; those with employment increases were less likely ($p < .05$) to be unionized than those experiencing job losses or no employment increases. Ownership status did not appear to affectunionization status in Ireland; however, date of establishment was influential. Firms established between 1961 and 1980 were less likely ($p < .05$) to be unionized than pre-1960 firms. The same outcome was found when looking at the most recently established (post-1980) firms ($p < .01$).

Double-Breasting

The model for determinants of double-breasting also fit well overall, with a Nagelkerke R^2 of .417 and a successful Hosmer and Lemeshow test. The results from the regression indicate that country of origin dominates the model heavily. U.K., Irish, and other countries of origin were all found to be significant and negative in their likelihoods of double-breasting when compared to the U.S. base ($p < .01$ for U.K. and Ireland; $p < .05$ for other countries). Sector was slightly significant ($p < .10$), with manufacturing firms less likely to engage in double-breasting than service firms. Change in employment also proved meaningful, with companies recently decreasing employment (or having no increase) less likely to engage in double-breasting ($p < .05$) than those with employment increases. Company size, ownership status, and date of establishment all appeared insignificant in their influences on our measurement of double-breasting.

Discussion and Implications

The results from the logistic regressions provide interesting implications in terms of both unionization and double-breasting among MNCs operating in Ireland. The most obvious implication of the regressions is the dominance of country of origin across both models. The strong effects within two well-fitting models, and the especially meaningful results in the double-breasting regression, indicate that a firm's country of origin clearly influences its decision to accept and support a union presence. This first finding provides substantial support to the notion that home-country attitudes, rather than host-country contexts, thoroughly define the way in which the MNC operates in Ireland.

In many ways, Ireland might be deemed the "51st state" given the sheer presence of U.S. multinationals in the country. We have attempted to measure this "51st state" notion by empirically testing the role that country of origin (and particularly U.S. country of origin) plays in a firm's acceptance of unions and decision to operate nonunion sites through the use of representative survey data. We find substantial support in both our models for the argument that U.S. firms carry their relatively low levels of union acceptance abroad. The regressions demonstrate that all the other countries of origin had both a far higher union presence and a far lower likelihood of double-breasting than those firms based in the United States. The dominance of country of origin independent of other known and theoretical influences on employment relations behaviors is particularly striking. The results imply that, if a multinational company is based in the United States, it is far more likely to either be nonunion or at least at incorporate a nonunion facility abroad, regardless of sector, size, ownership status, or the newness of the company.

Beyond country of origin and U.S.-specific implications, there are other results worth consideration. In terms of unionization as a whole, many of the outcomes confirmed our hypotheses. For instance, manufacturing firms were more heavily unionized, as were older and larger companies. Firms without employment gains or with recent job losses were also shown to have a higher union presence. These findings may prove particularly troublesome for unions, as they suggest that strong levels of unionization may be largely associated with declining firms and industries rather than with high-growth firms; recent studies have suggested that this notion is quite disconcerting to the Irish labor movement (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005). We did not find support for the notion that public firms were under more pressure to cut costs and therefore would be less likely to have a union presence. Considering double-breasting, the lack of significance across many of the variables is somewhat surprising. This suggests that there is not a purely inverted relationship between some of the factors influencing union recognition and those affecting multisite double-breasting. For instance, where date of establishment might play a meaningful role in determining union status overall, there is no evidence that newer firms operating multiple sites are behaving any differently from older companies in terms of their tolerance of a union presence at these additional sites. However, one outcome of note concerns the change in employment levels. The results for this variable appear to confirm our theory that firmsexperiencing employment increases are more likely to engage in double-breasting if they operate multiple sites. This finding may be explained by the consideration that unionized firms may have an incentive to operate nonunion sites if they are seeking to move up the corporation's global value chain (Gunnigle, Collings, and Morley 2005).

The results also carry substantial meaning beyond the Irish context. If one considers that Ireland is more of a microcosm for global entrenchment of MNCs into smaller, late-industrializing economies rather than simply an isolated case, the outcomes prove quite significant beyond the country-specific context. This particular notion, best understood through a discussion of economic dominance effects, suggests that home country practices are most easily implemented into foreign operations by organizations from economically successful countries. Our results provide some support for this argument, particularly given that U.S. companies appear to have met with great success in their efforts to maintain largely nonunion work environments within an industrial relations climate that has historically been almost entirely distinct from their home country's circumstances. We would expect similar results to manifest themselves in any other small, late-industrializing countries so long as their policies of economic openness and concession to U.S.-oriented business practices match those found in Ireland. If this is the case, the determinants of union status and double-breasting can be carried far beyond the local Irish setting and may find general uniformity within similar contextual settings.

Notes

[1] Article 40.6.1.iii, Constitution of Ireland (Bunreacht na hÉireann) <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/20irish/index.asp?locID=277&docID>.

[2] [2007] 18 ELR 57.

[3] This research is part of a large-scale international study of employment practices in MNCs undertaken in 10 countries (Argentina, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Singapore, and the United Kingdom). A summary of the findings of the Irish study can be found in Lavelle et al. (2009).

[4] Details on the precise steps taken in each country to compile their respective MNC databases is available as follows: Canada (Bélanger et al. 2006); Ireland (McDonnell, Lavelle, Collings, and Gunnigle 2007); United Kingdom (Edwards et al. 2007).

[5] Twelve percent of respondents could only answer for the largest site or division in Ireland.

[6] We are unable to divide country of origin into additional categories due to sample size considerations when addressing double-breasting. However, given the United States–centric nature of our study, we are most interested in comparing U.S. firms against all other types; our categorizations allow for such a comparison.

[7] Given the localized nature of our study, it is more accurate to include this national-level figure rather than transnational numbers.

[8] Against this, the recent rise to prominence of private equity funds as one form of private ownership has aroused particular union antagonism precisely because private equity owners are even less constrained to accommodate other stakeholder interests than are publicly listed companies. The data do not, however, allow private-equity ownership to be distinguished from other forms of private ownership (such as family).

[9] A series of tables detailing each of the methodological suitability tests is available on request.

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