

Male Catholic/Protestant Earnings and Employment Differences in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

After 35 years of conflict, the IRA has recently announced that its war with Great Britain is over. Feelings of perceived labor market discrimination against Catholics were a major factor in feeding distrust and the conflict between Catholic and Protestant communities, and it is important that this perception is eliminated if communities are to be unified. In this paper, we show that male Protestants enjoy a large employment advantage of 9.2 percentage points over Catholics and a smaller offer wage gap of 4.2 per cent. Characteristic differences account for only a small part of these advantages.

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Introduction

Research in the area of religion has been increasing (see Innaccone, 1998) and dates back to the early work of Adam Smith (Anderson 1988). Research includes analysis of religious attendance within a Becker-style time-allocation framework (Azzi and Ehrenberg, 1975) and analysis of earning differences between religious groups (Chiswick, 1983). Despite the claim made by Weber (1905) about the Protestant work ethic, Innaccone in his survey of the Economics of Religion citing Delacroix (1992), suggests that there is no evidence, when comparing levels of economic development across Protestant and Catholic countries in Europe, that one group outperformed the other. In contrast, Greenly (1976) argued that Catholics in the US earned more than similar Protestants. Tomes (1985) notes, though, that other researchers have not found significant differences.

In certain areas, however, the possibility arises that labour market differences may arise between religious groups when one group discriminates against another. Such claims have certainly been made in the case of Northern Ireland. This is one of the UK's under-performing regions, with relatively low levels of Gross Value Added, driven by relatively low employment and wage rates. Economic development has not been helped by the outbreak of violence in 1969, although relative GVA levels have improved since the IRA ceasefire in 1994.^{1,2} This violence was partly driven by the view that Catholics were

¹ Broken in 1996 but restored in 1997 before the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998.

² Abadie and Gardeazabal (2003) show that political instability can have a strong adverse effect on economic prosperity. They find that after the outbreak of terrorism in the Spanish Basque country in 1960, GDP fell by 10 percentage points relative to a "synthetic control region".

widely discriminated against in the labour market. However, the IRA has subsequently announced (on 28 July 2005) that its war against Great Britain was over and Tony Blair has stated that "this may be the day when finally, after all the false dawns and dashed hopes, peace replaces war, politics replaces terror on the island of Ireland". The armed conflict may be drawing to a conclusion, but the struggle to overcome the economic barriers faced by the Catholic community within Northern Ireland, which have fanned the fires of resentment and mistrust across religious barriers, is still an issue. In this paper, we will investigate this issue of religious discrimination against men in Northern Ireland within a detailed decomposition framework.

Background

It has been recognised (see for example McGarry and O'Leary, 1995) that feelings of perceived labour market discrimination resulting in inequality were a major factor in feeding distrust and the conflict between the communities which resulted in widespread violence in 1969. However, Fitzgerald (2004) notes that analysis of inequality and discrimination in the NI labour market was limited by the lack of suitable data and it was not until the analysis of the 1971 Census by Aunger (1975) that systematic evidence of Catholic disadvantage was clearly unveiled. As outlined by Heaton and Teague (1997), a passionate debate has arisen trying to interpret unemployment differences. Compton (1991) finds a large role for characteristic differences, with industry and geography explaining more than three-quarters of the unemployment gap. While the results of Murphy and Armstrong (1994) support the earlier work of Smith and Cambers (1991), with half of the unemployment gap attributed to religion, the remaining half is explained

by characteristics such as age, education, fertility, marital status, housing tenure and location (which are correlated with religion). Gudgin and Brean (1996), however, find that while half of the unemployment gap can be attributed to the characteristics outlined by Murphy and Armstrong, that which remained could be explained by differential labour force growth and job quit rates and the lower migration rates of Catholics. They therefore rule out a significant role for discrimination in explaining the unemployment gap.

In an attempt to eliminate religious labour market discrimination, the Government introduced the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) in 1976. This Act was seen to have its limitations and to have been unsuccessful in eliminating Catholic disadvantage and in 1989 the Government introduced what was considered to be tougher legislation in the form of a new Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland). Two new enforcement institutions accompanied the Act, the Fair Employment Commission (FEC) and Fair Employment Tribunals (FET). The Act required employers of more than ten employees to register with the FEC and keep records of employees and job applicants by religious affiliation. FET had the role of hearing cases of alleged discrimination and on deciding the level of compensation when discrimination was proven.

Osbourne and Shuttleworth (2004) argue that pressure for the new Act came from the MacBride Principles campaign. This was a US-based group of mainly Irish-Americans which encouraged US multinationals with plants in Northern Ireland to increase their employment of Catholics. This was similar to the 1971 Sullivan Principles adapted by US multinationals operating in South Africa. They also note that pressure for new legislation

came from the evidence of FEC investigations which continued to reveal the extent of Catholic disadvantage.

Osbourne and Shuttleworth also argue that the 1989 reform was informed by the Canadian federal employment equity policy (Abella Report, 1984). The introduction of compulsory religious monitoring and a range of affirmative action measures such as setting targets for improving Catholic employment rates so as to reflect their profile within given geographical areas. This went beyond what had been required in race and sex discrimination legislation introduced in the UK. The legislation also made indirect discrimination illegal, defined as “applying a requirement or condition which, even without intent, adversely affects considerably more of one religious or political group than another and which cannot be justified on non-religious grounds. An example of this might be where an employer, whose workforce is wholly or mainly drawn from one community, restricts promotions solely to internal candidates.” Victimisation was also made unlawful under the Act.

Heaton and Teague (1997) argue that while there was room for improvement, the new institutions were making a difference. The most recent amendment to the law came in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO). This included extending the monitoring requirements to include part-time workers and to include the provision of, and access to, training.

Evidence from the latest Monitoring Report from the Equality Commission (2003) reveals that Catholics have made gains in employment relative to Protestants, increasing their share in monitored establishments in every year between 1990 and 2003 from 32% to 37.4%. Obviously, the implementation of the Fair Employment legislation has its greatest impact when total employment is rising. The employment rate has increased from 67.8% in 1995 to 76.9% in 2003 and the unemployment rate has fallen in every year since 1993, reaching 5.4% in 2003 (as compared to 5.1% in the UK as a whole). Figures from the Census of Population show that the unemployment ratio between Catholics and Protestants fell from 2.2 in 1991 to 1.8 in 2001.³

Methodology

The methodology to measure differences in earnings between Catholics and Protestants is a variant of the familiar decomposition framework of Oaxaca and Ransom (1994).⁴ Within such a framework, the difference in average earnings can be split into two parts. The first part is characteristic differences and the second part is the way in which characteristics are rewarded, known as the coefficient component. The characteristic component can be further divided into its individual components, but, as pointed out by Jones (1983), a similar division of the coefficient component is inappropriate because such decompositions are arbitrarily influenced by transformations of the data and the use of dummy variables. As a result, a coefficient breakdown is not usually undertaken. Yun

³ Surprisingly, our search of the literature finds no evidence of research on Catholic/Protestant wage differentials in Northern Ireland, which will be an important focus of this paper.

⁴ As the wage structure may be affected by factors determining whether individuals are working, a standard Heckman-correction is undertaken to control for selectivity bias.

(2003), however, offers a way to circumvent this problem so both breakdowns are undertaken here.⁵

This approach can also be used to decompose employment probits, as shown by Yun (2004). As such, differences in the incidence of employment can be ascribed to either a characteristic component or a coefficient component, and imposing a linear restriction upon each set of estimated dummy variable coefficients allows a detailed decomposition to be made of the coefficient component. The decomposition formulae are shown in Table 1 (employment) and Table 2 (earnings).

The Data

The data are from the UK Labor Force Survey, a nationally representative survey of private households in the United Kingdom. To provide a sufficiently large sample, the data are pooled over the period 1995-2003 giving 7659 observations. Of these, 41.2% are Catholics.⁶ Sample means show a large gap in the employment status between Catholic and Protestant males.⁷ At 80.1%, the employment rate for Protestants is substantially above the 70.9% for Catholics. Earnings are also nearly 7 per cent higher.⁸ The data

⁵ Yun's use of normalised regressions is equivalent to imposing a linear restriction of zero upon any set of dummy variable coefficients, and this restriction can be applied to all types of dummy variables.

⁶ This figure is close to the 42.7% of the economically active population reported in the 2001 Census of Population.

⁷ Analysis of the female earnings and employment differentials is part of ongoing research by the authors.

⁸ Earnings are defined as gross hourly earnings from employment expressed in constant January 2002 prices.

reveal a wide diversity in the characteristics of the two religious groups, which may suggest that differences in earnings and employment rates are characteristic driven. For example, Catholics are on average significantly younger, more likely to have a degree, less likely to be married and more likely to have three or more children.

Employment Probits for Protestants and Catholics

The employment probits (shown in Appendix Table 1) reveal that qualifications in particular are found to be important in predicting the labor market status of individuals.⁹ Being single or widowed/divorced/separated significantly increases the probability of being out of work for both groups, and especially so for Catholics. Housing tenure (whether an owner-occupier, renting or in public housing) is also an important determinant in explaining employment status. Not surprisingly, a work-limiting illness significantly reduces employment chances. Family formation, though, is not generally found to be a significantly important indicator of employment status.

Employment Decompositions

So how far do characteristic differences account for the 9.2 percentage points Protestant employment advantage? Table 1 provides the answer. This reveals that only 2.4 percentage points are attributable to Protestant characteristics that enhance employment chances. The effects of marital status, qualifications, work-limiting illness and family formation, whilst favoring Protestants, account for only 1.8 percentage points of the employment gap. Housing tenure is found to be the most important component,

⁹ The dependent variable is 1=working 0=not working.

explaining 1.1 percentage points of the gap. In contrast, the younger age structure of Catholics marginally favors their employment.

Overall, the vast majority of the gap cannot be explained by the included characteristics. Therefore, the possibility of discrimination cannot be ruled out. Age, marital status, qualifications and work limiting-illness coefficient effects tend to favor Protestants whilst housing tenure and family formation effects favor Catholics. Overall, these effects are small and dominated by the constant, explaining 7.4 percentage points of the employment gap. Obviously, labelling the unexplained component as discrimination is problematic as it ignores pre-labor market discrimination that may affect the stock of an individual's human capital. Secondly, data availability limits the number of personal characteristics that are used.

One important variable which is not available in the data set (to protect an individual's anonymity) is area of residence. These regional demand effects could account for the higher probability of being in employment for given characteristics. Catholics are more likely to live in the west of the Bann region where unemployment (including Protestants) is above the NI average, whilst Protestants are more likely to live in and around Belfast where unemployment rates have been lower (including Catholics). Local differences in unemployment rates in NI are important because residential mobility and travel-to-work patterns are strongly influenced by local concentrations of religious groups. Just as residential patterns have become increasingly segregated along religious lines, travel-to-work patterns are strongly influenced by residential segregation (fear of crossing

community boundaries) and the fact that certain firms or areas are perceived, correctly or incorrectly, to recruit from only one religious group.

Earnings Equations for Protestants and Catholics

The findings (shown in Appendix Table 1) are typical of Mincer-type estimated earnings functions. Qualifications have a major impact in increasing earnings, with returns to qualifications being similar across religious groups. The results also indicate the typical diminishing rate of returns to potential labor market experience. In the case of job tenure, the earnings premium from having a job for more than five years is found to be significantly higher for Protestants. Only Protestants have a significant marriage premium and a negative effect on earnings of a work-limiting illness.

The coefficient on the selectivity term (λ) is significantly negative for both Catholics and Protestants. Thus, individuals with a relatively low probability of being in work who do work earn significantly less after controlling for characteristic differences. However, to ameliorate concerns have been raised about the robustness of the Heckman-correction to changes in specification, the decomposition results are presented with and without this correction.

Earnings Decomposition

Column 1 of Table 2 shows the OLS decomposition and column 2 shows the Heckman-corrected decomposition. Both approaches give similar findings. The hourly wage differential favors Protestants by 6.9%. Correcting for selectivity bias gives a religion

offered wage gap of 4.2%. The table reveals that the amount of the wage differential attributable to characteristic differences is small at just under a percentage point, regardless of whether the Heckman-correction is undertaken. Generally, the more favorable qualifications profile of Catholics, which boosts their earnings, is offset by lower potential labor market experience, shorter job tenure and working in a less favorable industrial structure. The possibility remains, however, that the shorter job tenure and working in a less favorable industrial structure arise from discriminatory labor market practices.

Decomposing the coefficient effect reveals that the amount attributed to individual components is, with the exception of the constant, stable across both specifications. The influence of the constant term declines markedly with the Heckman-correction. The Heckman-corrected earnings equation shows that higher Protestant earnings are mainly due to Protestants gaining a more favorable payoff for a given marital status profile (2%), job tenure profile (1.6%) and industrial structure (1%). Only in the case of plant size and in the reduction in earnings arising from ill-health do Catholic characteristics appear to be more favorably rewarded. As Protestants are concentrated in the relatively low unemployment areas, region-specific demand effects could account for the higher returns to given characteristics.

Conclusion

There is a large employment gap (9.2 percentage points) and a smaller wage offer gap of 4.2% in favour of Protestants. The main finding is that key characteristic differences fail

to account for the majority of these differences. This suggests that Catholics may not face a level playing field in terms of gaining employment in NI, despite two pieces of key anti-discrimination legislation, the Fair Employment Act of 1976 and a tougher version enacted in 1989. The political process has reconciled the IRA to the laying down of its arms and to a full and exclusive commitment to political dialogue. Now policy makers need to address the social pressures that still remain within Northern Ireland and tackle the thorny issue of the religious divide that exists and drives a wedge between the economic opportunities afforded to Catholics and Protestants in the region.

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Table 1

Employment Decompositions: Labour Force Survey 1995-2003

	Protestant/ Catholic
Differences in means $\hat{I}^p - \hat{I}^c$	0.092
Differences due to coefficients $[\bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^p Z^p) - \bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^* Z^p)] + [\bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^c Z^c) - \bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^* Z^c)]$	0.068
Differences due to characteristics $\bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^* Z^p) - \bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^* Z^c)$	0.024
Components of characteristics effect	
Age	-0.005
Marital status	0.004
Qualifications	0.002
Housing tenure	0.011
Illness	0.007
Family formation	0.005
Year	0.000
Components of coefficient effect	
Age	0.000
Marital status	0.003
Qualifications	0.009
Housing tenure	-0.014
Illness	0.001
Family formation	-0.008
Year	0.003
Constant	0.074

Notes: \hat{I} is the predicted employment probability; superscripts p and c refer to Protestants and Catholics; $\hat{\alpha}^*$ is an estimate of the employment structure in the absence of discrimination and $\bar{P}(\hat{\alpha}^p Z^p)$, for example, is the average predicted employment probabilities when using the Protestant group's characteristics on Protestant coefficients; sample size 7659.

Table 2
Earnings Decompositions: Labour Force Survey 1995-2003

	Protestant/ Catholic	Protestant/ Catholic
Approximate geometric mean earnings differential $\overline{\ln E^p} - \overline{\ln E^c}$	0.069	0.069
Component due to selectivity $(\hat{\gamma}^p \bar{\lambda}^p) - (\hat{\gamma}^c \bar{\lambda}^c)$		-0.027
Differences due to coefficients $(\hat{\beta}^p - \hat{\beta}^*) \bar{X}^p - (\hat{\beta}^c - \hat{\beta}^*) \bar{X}^c$	0.060	0.033
Differences due to characteristics $\hat{\beta}^* (\bar{X}^p - \bar{X}^c)$	0.008	0.009
Components of characteristics effect		
Qualifications	-0.031	-0.030
Experience	0.021	0.020
Marital Status	0.002	0.001
Job Tenure	0.012	0.011
Plant Size	0.004	0.004
Industry	0.007	0.007
Public sector	-0.000	-0.000
Health	-0.002	-0.001
Year	-0.005	-0.003
Components of coefficient effect		
Qualifications	-0.000	-0.001
Experience	0.005	0.003
Marital Status	0.014	0.020
Job Tenure	0.015	0.016
Plant Size	-0.013	-0.014
Industry	0.012	0.010
Public sector	0.007	0.007
Health	-0.001	-0.004
Year	0.003	-0.001
Constant	0.019	0.001

Notes: E is hourly earnings; X is a row vector of characteristics; $\hat{\beta}$ is a vector of estimated coefficients; a bar signifies a mean value and a hat a coefficient estimate; $\hat{\beta}^*$ is an estimate of the non-discriminatory wage structure derived using the Oaxaca-Ransom cross product matrices as weights from the earnings equation; λ is the inverse Mills ratio and $\hat{\gamma}$ its estimated coefficient; sample size 2654.

Appendix Table 1
Employment and Earnings Equations: Labour Force Survey 1995-2003

	Employment		Earnings	
	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic
<i>Age</i>				
16-24	(E)	(E)	-	-
25-39	0.135	0.025	-	-
40-49	0.155	-0.012 ⁺	-	-
50-64	-0.151	-0.319	-	-
<i>Potential experience</i>				
Less than 1 year	-	-	(E)	(E)
1-2 years	-	-	-0.002	0.051
3-5 years	-	-	0.137	0.256 ⁺
6-8 years	-	-	0.207 ⁺⁺	0.424 ⁺
9-11 years	-	-	0.201 ⁺⁺	0.402 ⁺
12-14 years	-	-	0.329 ⁺⁺	0.467 ⁺
15-17 years	-	-	0.314 ⁺	0.494 ⁺
18-20 years	-	-	0.310 ⁺	0.408 ⁺
21-23 years	-	-	0.377 ⁺	0.498 ⁺
24-26 years	-	-	0.406 ⁺	0.461 ⁺
27-29 years	-	-	0.392 ⁺	0.556 ⁺
30-32 years	-	-	0.349 ⁺	0.580 ⁺
33-35 years	-	-	0.363 ⁺	0.570 ⁺
36-38 years	-	-	0.428 ⁺	0.551 ⁺
39-41 years	-	-	0.384 ⁺	0.554 ⁺
42-44 years	-	-	0.280 ⁺	0.494 ⁺
45 years or more	-	-	0.284 ⁺	0.331 ⁺
<i>Current job tenure</i>				
Less than 2 years	-	-	(E)	(E)
2-5 years	-	-	0.022	0.017
More than 5 years	-	-	0.190 ⁺	0.133 ⁺
<i>Establishment size</i>				
1-10 employees	-	-	(E)	(E)
11-24 employees	-	-	0.082 ⁺	0.048
25 or more employees	-	-	0.096 ⁺	0.150 ⁺
<i>Industry</i>				
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	-	-	(E)	(E)
Mining and quarrying	-	-	0.083	-0.005
Manufacturing	-	-	0.209 ⁺	0.058
Electricity and water supply	-	-	0.507 ⁺	0.146
Construction	-	-	0.133 ⁺⁺	0.029
Wholesale and motor trade	-	-	0.222 ⁺	-0.035
Hotels and restaurants	-	-	0.077	-0.166
Transport, communications	-	-	0.167 ⁺	0.071
Finance	-	-	0.542 ⁺	0.340 ⁺

Real estate	-	-	0.288 ⁺	0.111
Public administration	-	-	0.325 ⁺	0.148
Education	-	-	0.329 ⁺	0.254
Health and social work	-	-	0.159 ⁺⁺	0.147
Other	-	-	0.036	-0.154
Public sector	-	-	0.049	-0.040
Health problem	-1.572 ⁺	-1.558 ⁺	0.059	0.157 ⁺
<i>Marital status</i>				
Married or cohabitating	(E)	(E)	(E)	(E)
Single (never married)	-0.241 ⁺	-0.349 ⁺	-0.066 ⁺	-0.040
Single (previously married)	-0.426 ⁺	-0.397 ⁺	-0.026	0.017
<i>Highest qualification</i>				
Degree	0.735 ⁺	0.954 ⁺	0.507 ⁺	0.520 ⁺
Post-compulsory education	0.364 ⁺	0.327 ⁺	0.154 ⁺	0.203 ⁺
Compulsory education	0.430 ⁺	0.373 ⁺	0.132 ⁺	0.126 ⁺
Other	0.420 ⁺	0.353 ⁺	0.039	0.042
None	(E)	(E)	(E)	(E)
<i>Housing tenure</i>				
Owner with mortgage	(E)	(E)	-	-
Owned outright	-0.211 ⁺	-0.221 ⁺	-	-
Public housing	-1.087 ⁺	-1.209 ⁺	-	-
Other rented	-0.698 ⁺	-0.969 ⁺	-	-
<i>Family formation</i>				
No children	(E)	(E)	-	-
1 child	0.202 ⁺	-0.046	-	-
2 children	0.137	-0.045	-	-
3 or more children	-0.066	-0.112	-	-
Pre-school child (age 0-4)	-0.060	-0.015	-	-
Employment selectivity (λ)	-	-	-0.202 ⁺	-0.190 ⁺
Constant	1.187 ⁺	1.201 ⁺	1.085 ⁺	1.097 ⁺
Sample size	4454	3205	1727	927

Notes: (E) denotes an excluded category;

⁺ (⁺⁺) signifies a statistically significant estimate at the 5%(10%) level;

9 year dummies also included but not reported above.