



THE SOFT POWER 30

A Global Ranking of Soft Power

2019

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PORTLAND

Portland is a strategic communications consultancy working with governments, businesses, foundations, and non-governmental organisations to shape their stories and communicate them effectively to global audiences.

USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) was established in 2003 as a partnership between the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California. It is a research, analysis, and professional education organisation dedicated to furthering the study and practice of global public engagement and cultural relations.

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The Soft Power 30

2019 RESULTS



While geopolitical uncertainty and an eroding international order have been the dominant trends since the publication of our last Soft Power 30 report, the importance of soft power as a tool of foreign policy has remained constant. As governments grapple with a volatile international political landscape and look to adjust their foreign policy strategies accordingly, they will need to re-evaluate their current approach to generating and leveraging soft power. The first step will be establishing a clear account of their current soft power resources. From the outset of The Soft Power 30 series, we have sought to provide useful insights and practical guidance to do exactly that: identify and measure the sources of soft power.

In addressing the measurement challenge, our mission has been to bring structure to the complexity of soft power's diverse and numerous sources. At the same time, we have endeavoured to set our research in the global political context of the day. In 2019, that context sees us continuing towards a multipolar and interdependent world, albeit one held together by a creaking system of rules and norms. Power has become more diffuse, moving not just from West to East, but also away from governments, as more non-state actors play larger roles in driving global affairs. Greater interdependence – driven by the forces of globalisation, the digital revolution, and even climate change – is now testing the limits of the global governance structures that facilitate cooperation and manage conflict.

Globalisation and technology are experiencing an intense backlash as political movements rail against international flows of trade, capital, and people, and scrutinise technology's role in our lives. While greater interdependence has created both challenges and opportunities, the erosion of the rules-based international order adds a new dimension of hazards and risks.

Indeed, from 2018 to 2019, the central foreign policy debate has moved on from concern over the possible collapse of the rules-based international order to how governments should respond as that collapse unfolds. This 2019 Soft Power 30 report begins with a contextual analysis of the current state of global geopolitics. Reviewing how this debate on the global order has moved on, we consider the different types of foreign policy responses being put forward by leading foreign policy thinkers, and outline their implications for soft power.

 UPWARD MOVER	 DOWNWARD MOVER	 NO MOVER
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In setting this year's Soft Power 30 report in such a grave context, we hope to return discussion on soft power to its conceptual roots and definition as a critical foreign policy tool used to align values, norms, objectives, and ultimately action through attraction and persuasion. Moreover, we need to concentrate minds on the importance of soft power in protecting core national interests, maintaining regional pockets of order, and – eventually – overhauling the structures of the global order such that they are fit for purpose. The ability to bring soft power to bear in these efforts will be a tremendous advantage to countries that are determined to shape the future of global affairs.

Fundamental to deploying soft power is a clear and accurate measurement of a nation's soft power resources. This is the aim of The Soft Power 30 index – the world's most comprehensive comparative assessment of global soft power. The index combines objective data and international polling to build what Professor Joseph Nye has described as "the clearest picture of global soft power to date".

As ever, the strength of The Soft Power 30 index lies in combining objective and subjective data. For 2019, we have again worked with Alligator Research to generate newly-commissioned polling data from 25 countries. The polling is designed to gauge the appeal of countries according to key soft power assets and touchpoints. Our polling surveys audiences in every region of the globe. We asked respondents to rate countries based on seven categories including culture, cuisine, and foreign policy, among others.

The 2019 Soft Power 30 report reflects much of the global political change that has unfolded since July 2018. This year we see the further erosion of American soft power under the banner of "America First"; Europe building on its soft power gains from 2018, led by a resurgent France; and perhaps the start of a more precipitous fall in British soft power as it grapples with the domestic political chaos of Brexit. Asia's soft power rise has levelled out – for now. Having been on a clear upward march over the last three years, the Asian countries in the top 30 – China, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea – put in a mixed performance. The Asian four, however, do now sit in a better position, viewed in aggregate, than they did in our inaugural 2015 rankings.



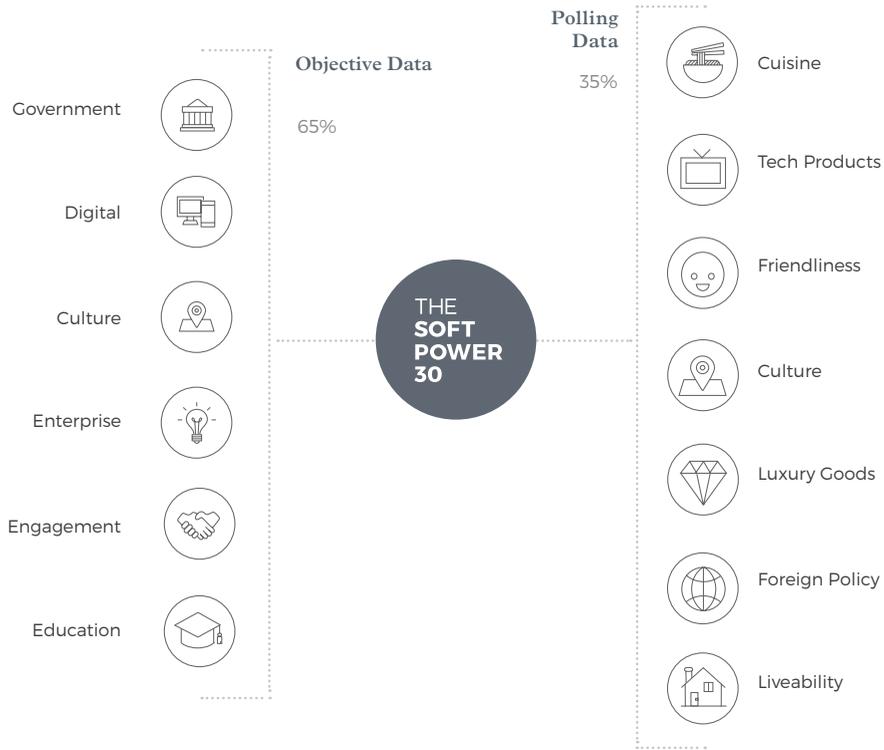


Figure 1 - The Soft Power 30 framework

In this fifth edition of The Soft Power 30, we have updated The Asia Soft Power 10, first produced in 2018, by pulling out the ten top-performing Asian countries from our full data set of 60 nations.

With the aim of delivering greater practical insights on soft power, public diplomacy, and digital engagement, this year’s report draws on our continued partnership with the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) – the world’s first academic institution dedicated to the field. The Center has a longstanding track record of bringing academic rigour to the discipline of public diplomacy and translating cutting-edge research into actionable insights for diplomats and policymakers. Contributions from CPD faculty and adjuncts included in this report provide a window into the latest thinking on soft power and digital diplomacy from academia. Additional contributions from experts and practitioners working in the public, private, and third sectors provide a range of useful perspectives on the state of soft power today.

The report concludes with a final reflection on the key lessons and trends from the 2019 index, and a look to the year ahead.



1.0 Introduction

When the first Soft Power 30 report was launched in July 2015, we argued that a rapid change in the nature of global power and influence was underway. But few — and certainly not us — could have predicted how drastically the global geopolitical context would change in just four years. Not since the fall of the Iron Curtain has change been so swift or overwhelming.

The publication of this fifth edition of The Soft Power 30 gives us the chance to reflect on the changes that have taken place and better understand the forces and circumstances that are shaping international politics. It also gives us the opportunity to examine the role of soft power in driving global change and pursuing national interest. This look back at our previous editions underscores that the ability to use attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives continues to be as important as ever despite the radically different international political context.

In the inaugural Soft Power 30 report, we pointed to the megatrends of power shifting from West to East, the rising influence of non-state actors¹, the digital revolution, and mass urbanisation as the key drivers of rapid change in global affairs². But despite this disruption, and even pricing in the major international challenges of the day, the prevailing political winds of 2015 were considerably more manageable, predictable, and favourable than those of the present.

The UK, for example, looked like the stable, open, globally-engaged, and well-networked state that it was assessed to be as it topped the 2015 Soft Power 30 rankings. In 2015, Britain was seemingly custom-built for success in the world of early 21st Century foreign affairs. Uniquely, it held

World events timeline August 2018 - August 2019

IMPACT KEY

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Global
- Regional
- National

2018

August



03.08.2018

Zimbabwean election: Amid allegations of vote-rigging, incumbent President Emmerson Mnangagwa is declared the winner of Zimbabwe's presidential election



23.08.2018

US-China trade war: The US imposes tariffs on \$16 billion of imports from China and China immediately responds with its own revised tariffs

(and at publication continues to hold) membership to more premier international clubs than any other state. Moreover, the UK operated with a relatively clear sense of positive global purpose.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Obama administration was building up to a foreign policy crescendo: negotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal), finalising the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade bloc, and backing the landmark Paris Climate Agreement. By mid-2015, it certainly looked as though President Obama was going to leave America's foreign policy agenda, and its relative global position of power, in a better place than he had found it in 2009³.

As the Obama administration approached the end of its second term in 2016, its string of diplomatic initiatives had come to fruition. Lifted by an improved performance in The Soft Power 30 international polling data, the US topped the rankings of the second edition. Published one week before the UK's referendum on EU membership, the 2016 report captured a snapshot in time prior to the onset of a tumultuous period of global political and economic uncertainty that continues to be felt around the world. Such is the impact of that political disruption that the very survival of the rules-based international order is now a central point of debate amongst foreign policy scholars, commentators, and practitioners.

Before the reality of Brexit began to sink in, and "America First" came to define US foreign policy, the continued stability of the international rules-based order was an occasional – but certainly minority – concern. Yet only a few short months into 2017, foreign policy thinkers around the world were consumed by debate over whether it had already reached breaking point. As the consequences of Brexit and "America First" came into sharper relief, the 2017 Soft Power 30 rankings registered an immediate change to the status quo. The US slipped from first to third, while France, bolstered by an energetic, newly-elected President,

September

18.09.2018

Inter-Korean summit: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un greets South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang at the start of a three-day summit

24.09.2018

US-China trade war: US tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese imports come into effect along with retaliatory tariffs by China on \$60 billion of US imports

30.09.2018

Macedonian renaming referendum: A referendum held in the Republic of Macedonia on whether to change the country's name in order to join NATO and the EU passes with 91.5%

Emmanuel Macron, jumped four places to the top of the rankings. The UK managed to hold onto its position in second place, but with a diminished performance in the international polling.

With the Trump administration's foreign policy agenda in full swing, the 2018 Soft Power 30 report set the context for last year's rankings by examining the clearest threats to the rules-based liberal international order. We identified three, with the first being the rise of populist-nationalism in Western democracies, and the potential for isolationist, nationalist, and protectionist policies that often arise under such regimes. The second and inter-linked threat was the United States abandoning its traditional role as the guarantor of the rules-based system and the pre-eminent champion of multilateralism. The third was the risk, given the heightened uncertainty, of rising powers challenging and overturning the existing international order. Each of these threats remains a major disruptive force today.

Given this context, it was not surprising that the 2018 Soft Power 30 index reported a further fall in America's relative soft power standing, from third to fourth place in the rankings. More unpredictably given the all-consuming Brexit process, the UK managed to regain the top spot from France.

Two main factors contributed to this slightly curious result. First, the UK had yet to leave the EU by mid-2018, so the objective data in the index registered no substantive change. Secondly, the UK's performance across the international polling recovered from a low in 2017. At the same time, France's 2018 polling performance fell from its 2017 high. This was enough to push the UK ahead of France in the overall rankings, albeit by a very thin margin. But ultimately, the big take-away from the 2018 Soft Power 30 was the continued decline of American soft power.





What's past is prologue

While the 2015 and 2016 Soft Power 30 reports looked at the state of global soft power before the shocks to the system hit, the 2017 and 2018 editions attempted to understand the consequences of those shocks. A look over the last twelve to fourteen months in foreign affairs provides useful context for this year's study.

"International affairs seem trapped in a period of confusion, disruption, and uncertainty."

A quick look at 2019 reveals a largely unaltered trend-line. International affairs seem trapped in a period of confusion, disruption, and uncertainty. Traditional, rock-solid alliances look fragile. The growth of multilateralism, as a guiding principle for foreign policy, has stalled.

Zero-sum, nationalist-driven policies are on the rise. In

short, the global geopolitical context that coalesced in 2017 and calcified in 2018, remains in place for the foreseeable future. In this context, as John Ikenberry has recently argued, the rules-based international order is in crisis⁴.



17.11.2018

Gilets Jaunes protests: The Yellow Vests movement begins in France, protesting against the high cost of living, rising fuel prices and youth unemployment



26.11.2018

Martial law in Ukraine: A Presidential decree introduces martial law in ten Ukrainian regions following a naval incident between the Russian Federal Security Service and Ukrainian Navy



07.12.2018

Global internet usage: The International Telecommunication Union announces that over half of the world's population is now using the internet



22.12.2018

US government shutdown: The US government begins its longest shutdown in history after President Donald Trump and Democratic politicians hit an impasse over funding for the US-Mexico border wall

December

While the concept of the “international order” might sound like the theoretical concern of university lecture halls, its constituent parts are practical, tangible, and quantifiable. These encompass the combined set of rules, norms, values, institutions, security agreements, treaties, and other mechanisms that foster collaboration and help resolve disputes between states⁵. A breakdown in the global order — in parts or in whole — translates directly into less security, prosperity, and development for all countries.

So how can leaders and foreign policymakers respond to this new volatile context? International relations thinkers have started to develop answers to this question, moving from analysis of how and why the global order is under threat of collapse and toward how to operate in this new environment. Whether their ambitions are to keep the global order together or simply survive the turbulent seas ahead, governments need to review their current approaches and — in all likelihood — start to think about strategies to respond accordingly. As possible foreign policy responses to a crumbling world order accumulate, we can structure the emerging strategies into three broad types.

The first, and by far the most cautious, can be termed “retrenchment”. The work of noted realist foreign policy scholar, Stephen M. Walt, best outlines what this strategy would look like in practice. In a recent essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Walt makes the case that now is the time for the US to return to its historical norm of a grand strategy of defensive realism and off-shore balancing. In practice, this means that the US would pull back military assets and vastly reduce its security commitments around the globe. It would also mean reining in global ambitions and letting regions beyond America’s immediate locale look after their own affairs. It would require a different approach to assessing and managing the risks associated with potential global flashpoints, calibrating for a more laissez-faire stance. Ultimately, the US would be stepping back from a traditional position of leadership on major international issues.

But this does not mean total disengagement from the outside world. As Walt argues: “A return to off-shore balancing should also be accompanied by a major effort to rebuild and professionalise the US diplomatic corps...the State Department must develop, refine, and update its diplomatic doctrine — the ways the United States can use noncoercive means of influence⁶”.



Though he maintains a focus on American foreign policy, one can imagine how retrenchment would apply to other major global powers. Namely, a massive reduction in international commitments in both security and development aid terms, and a rejection of anything approaching a values-driven foreign policy. Were the US and other major powers to pursue a retrenchment approach, it would likely lead to a prolonged period of worldwide instability and further erosion of the global order before a new equilibrium is eventually reached. But in reducing its military commitments around the world, the US — and its traditional partners — would have to rely on “noncoercive” tools of influence, namely soft power, all the more. In a retrenchment scenario, there would be less engagement between countries. Deploying soft power in a retrenchment-dominated world, would require an exceptionally deft touch.

The second strategic response to a global order in crisis, “consolidation”, is slightly more ambitious than retrenchment, though it still walks a decidedly conservative line. Recognising that the international order “is under attack like never before”, Jennifer Lind and William Wohlforth make the case that leading states can best shore up the liberal international order by consolidating the gains made in recent decades⁷. According to Lind and Wohlforth, expansion of the “liberal” international order has been the guiding foreign policy principle for the US and other leading liberal states since the end of the Cold War. While we should not discount earlier successes, given the current state of play, the results of the expansionist approach have been mixed. As the realist scholar John Mearsheimer has argued, liberal states carry a bias towards expansion and democracy promotion. This expansionist mindset tends to lead to policies that pursue liberal hegemony — often espousing regime change — which can carry tremendous costs for questionable returns⁸.

The central tenet of the consolidation approach is that liberal states need to shift to an internally-focused mindset that prioritises protecting the status quo and tacks away from expansion⁹. It can be thought of as a multilateral extension of Richard Haass’s argument that effective foreign policy requires one’s own country to be in good working order¹⁰. In Europe, this approach would mean even closer cooperation amongst European Union allies to shore up the regional structures that facilitate collaboration, boost prosperity, and provide security. In Southeast Asia, it could take the form of deeper integration and security cooperation between members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.



26.02.2019

India-Pakistan conflict:
The Indian Airforce conducts airstrikes against the Pakistani town of Balakot, marking the beginning of the latest India-Pakistan standoff

March



10.03.2019

Ethiopian Airlines crash: Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crashes near Addis Ababa, killing 157, the second Boeing 737 Max to crash in five months



15.03.2019

Christchurch shooting: 51 killed during attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand



19.03.2019

Final Soviet-era leader resigns: First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the last remaining Soviet-era leader, resigns

The third, and most ambitious, strategy for responding to the current crisis in the international order is to double-down on efforts to reinforce and promote liberalism and multilateralism. This approach could best be described as “expansive reinforcement”. This could take a number of forms, but it would need to combine domestic and international efforts from the leading nations that uphold the current liberal international order. At home, given the state of politics in a number of Western countries, a revival of the liberal international order would require putting in place policies to encourage tolerance, media literacy, critical thinking, and respect for human rights. Some academics have pointed to investing more in higher education and expanding access to universities as the best way to inoculate against populism, nationalism, and racism¹¹. Abroad, doubling-down would require a two-pronged approach. First, it would mean leading liberal states working more effectively in concert for an aggressive containment of illiberal states that are challenging the international order. The second prong would entail ramping up efforts to bring a greater number of neutral or transitioning states into the “liberal” fold. This means more democracy-promotion, a stronger human rights agenda, and encouraging political and public sector reforms in transitioning states to bring them in line with liberal principles.

It is well beyond the scope of this report to recommend one of the above strategies over the others. Rather, our intent is to flag that not only has the global geopolitical context changed drastically of late, but also that these changes demand new and appropriate policy responses. In considering how to respond, governments need to bear in mind two important points. First, as Robert Kagan wrote in mid-2018, “things will not be okay. The world crisis is upon us¹²”. As Kagan makes clear, the world is in a very different place — punctuated by greater uncertainty and diminished international order — than it was just a few years ago. The scale of global geopolitical change requires a thorough review of states’ international priorities and strategic approaches to navigate this new context successfully. Second, regardless of whether governments choose retrenchment, consolidation, or expansive reinforcement as their response, soft power has a critical role to play in the execution of all three. Strong alliances and non-coercive means of influence will be critical to executing all three approaches. Soft power is, of course, a decisive factor in alliances and influence.



24.03.2019

Special Counsel investigation:
The Special Counsel investigation into US President Donald Trump concludes that there was no US collusion with Russia surrounding the 2016 election

April



02.04.2019

Algerian revolution:
After months of mass protests, the Algerian 'Smile Revolution' sees the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika



11.04.2019

Arrest of Julian Assange:
WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange is arrested in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London following the Ecuadorian government's withdrawal of asylum



15.04.2019

Notre-Dame cathedral fire:
Paris's Notre-Dame Cathedral is partially destroyed by a fire



Small is beautiful

While much of the current foreign policy debate is concerned with the future of the global order, the ability to affect its future direction is beyond the means of all but a handful of large, powerful states. This does not mean, however, that smaller and middle-sized powers cannot play a significant role in shaping global affairs beyond their immediate locales. Indeed, with clarity of purpose and the right capabilities, soft power provides smaller states a means to achieve real impact on the global stage — to punch above their weight.

Understandably, the majority of International Relations research focuses on the foreign policy of the US and a few other large, powerful states. But one of the principle advantages of soft power is that states need not command vast armies nor rely on economic carrots and sticks to drive changes in the behaviour of others and steer outcomes in foreign affairs.



25.04.2019

Kim-Putin talks: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un arrives in Vladivostok for his first talks with President Vladimir Putin as part of a wider summit with Russian leaders



30.04.2019

A new era in Japan: Japan's Reiwa era begins following the abdication of Emperor Akihito

May



10.05.2019

US-China trade war: Imports from China that had been hit with a 10% tariff in September 2018 become subject to a 25% rate

Even in the volatile international political context of today, soft power continues to matter because the major threats facing humankind all require global collaboration and collective action. These threats are not confined to borders. No amount of nationalist fervour or reverence for the primacy of state sovereignty can change the transnational nature of today's most urgent challenges. Effective international collaboration between governments, multilateral institutions, and other non-state actors are essential to guide global progress on development, collective security, public health, and environmental sustainability.

For smaller states that want to make a positive impact on the world stage, soft power provides the optimal means to do so. The leaders and policymakers in smaller states can best do this by focusing on how they can contribute to a functioning and secure "global commons", which can be understood as shared common spaces like the open seas (international waters), open airspace, outer space, and cyberspace¹³. Without reliable, free, and open access to these spaces, the international economic and political order simply cannot function. What keeps the global commons running is the provision of the global public goods that maintain and protect them. These global public goods include environmental protection, regional peace and stability, freedom of navigation, and shared rules of conduct. In a global context, the provision of public goods requires effective multilateral cooperation.

Indeed, a functioning global commons is inextricably linked to addressing the most pressing global challenges of today. These include arresting and mitigating climate change; tackling health pandemics; managing migration through equitable global development and security; building governance regimes for space; and establishing shared codes of conduct for cyberspace and cybersecurity. None of these can be achieved without effective collaboration between states. Soft power gives smaller states — that would never be able to use coercion to affect the behaviour of others — the opportunity to attract other actors to emulate their position and inspire them to take collective action.



23.05.2019

Indian election: India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, claims a landslide victory in national elections that see the Bharatiya Janata Party increase their significant parliamentary majority



27.05.2019

EU parliamentary elections: European parliamentary election results see a surge in support for smaller parties including green, liberal, and nationalist parties

June



01.06.2019

US-China trade war: China raises its retaliatory tariffs on US exports



03.06.2019

President Trump's state visit: Welcomed by mass protests, US President Trump arrives in the UK for a three-day state visit

Soft power gives smaller states - that would never be able to use coercion to affect the behaviour of others - the opportunity to attract other actors to emulate their position and inspire them to take collective action.

The 2019 Soft Power 30

Readers of the 2018 edition of The Soft Power 30 will recognise a similar, if slightly slimmed-down structure to this year's report. Chapter 2 explains the methodology used to construct our index and derive the country rankings. It also provides updates on methodological changes made from last year. Chapter 3 then reports the 2019 results, and provides an analysis that looks across the top five countries, breaks down the six different sub-indices, and offers a few top-line insights from the international polling data.

With updated data, Chapter 3 also gives the results of the 2019 Asia Soft Power 10, which we introduced in last year's report. This top-ten ranking employs the same methodology as our Soft Power 30 model, arranging the ten best performing Asian countries into a new league table pulled from our full dataset of 60 states. At a time when the centre of global power continues to drift from the Atlantic towards the Pacific, the updated Asia Soft Power 10 reports on the balance of soft power in the region.

Chapter 4 then turns an eye to the dynamic between technology and foreign policy, with a set of essays exploring how digital tools and platforms are changing the nature of diplomacy. These essays draw on the continued partnership between Portland and the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy. As with previous years, USC faculty and adjuncts have contributed several essays to this year's report, all of which are aimed at reinforcing this project's utility for foreign policy practitioners, and capturing the latest developments on the interplay between soft power, technology, and diplomacy.

Finally, the report concludes with a brief reflection on the trends arising from the 2019 index, as well as a look to the year ahead.



06.06.2019

75th anniversary of the D-Day landings: Allied nations mark the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings



06.06.2019

Sudan suspended from African Union: Sudan is suspended from the African Union following the killing of at least 128 peaceful protesters on 3 June by paramilitary forces in Khartoum



07.06.2019

Women's World Cup: The defending US national women's team champions beat the Netherlands to retain the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup



09.06.2019

Hong Kong protests: Over one million people protest in Hong Kong over a proposed bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China

From the outset of this now five-year-old research project, we have sought to establish a clear framework with which to measure the soft power resources of the world's most influential nations. In doing so, our index produces an annual comparative snapshot of the global balance of soft power and assesses the assets of the world's leading countries. As we have said before, the results do not provide a ranking of overall global influence, but rather the potential for influence.

No index, of course, is perfect. But we believe that by combining a broad range of objective data with international polling, The Soft Power 30 is the best available, and most comprehensive, measure of relative soft power. At the individual country level, the index is designed to be a useful framework to highlight relative strengths and weaknesses, offering a potential roadmap for building up soft power resources, as well as leveraging them more effectively.

Last year's report highlighted the growing concern for the future of the liberal international order and detailed the underlying threats driving that concern. Twelve months on, it is clear that the consensus view holds that the international rules-based order is indeed in crisis. Foreign policy circles have already accepted this as a given and moved on to debating appropriate responses to the new eroding global order. As argued above, these responses can take a number of forms along a spectrum of defensive to expansionist. But regardless of what strategies states might pursue, an effective approach to building and leveraging their nation's soft power will be critical to the execution of any chosen strategy.

As ever, the following report aims to provide new and relevant insights to the leaders, diplomats, policymakers, researchers, and non-state actors who are charged with plotting a course through the increasingly volatile seas of global affairs. As the wider international rules-based order continues to erode, the evolving context will demand new responses and approaches to the conduct of foreign policy. It is our hope that the following report will prove useful to those working to deploy soft power in the pursuit of greater international understanding, cooperation, security, and development.



20.06.2019

G20 Summit in Japan:
The 14th G20 Summit is held in Osaka Japan

July



04.07.2019

Iranian tanker seized in Gibraltar: Gibraltar - a British territory - seizes an Iranian tanker on suspicion of transporting oil to Syria, in breach of EU sanctions



16.07.2019

EU leadership change:
Germany's Ursula von der Leyen is elected president of the EU Commission



19.07.2019

British tanker captured in Gulf: The Iranian Navy sieze a British-flagged, Swedish-owned oil tanker in the Gulf



24.07.2019

New British prime minister: Boris Johnson becomes prime minister of the UK after winning the race to become leader of the governing Conservative Party

August



07.08.2019

Singapore Convention on Mediation: The new UN Singapore Convention on Mediation comes into effect for commercial dispute resolution



21.08.2019

Amazon wildfires: Brazil's National Institute for Space Research reports wild fires burning in the Amazon rainforest at a record rate



24.08.2019

G7 Summit in Biarritz, France: France hosts the G7 Summit, widely regarded as a success for French President, Emmanuel Macron

2.0

Methodology of the index

2.1

Objective data

2.2

Subjective data

2.3

Changes, limitations, and shortcomings

With the rules-based international order in erosion, states need to respond and adjust their foreign policy strategies accordingly. Whether that means retrenchment, consolidation, or taking an expansionist approach, soft power will still be a critical component to the execution of strategies. Those states most adept in using soft power to facilitate positive collaboration will be better placed to navigate the rising uncertainty and geopolitical instability of a crumbling global order. If we take the importance of soft power as a given, it leads to the question: how can soft power be deployed effectively? The answer to that question must start with measurement. As we have referenced in our previous reports, Joseph Nye's model for the conversion of soft power into a desired outcome follows five steps¹. As shown in Figure 2, the first step in the process of converting soft power into a desired outcome is identifying the resources that will affect the target(s) in question.

As illustrated by Nye's model for converting soft power, the process must start with a clear account of available resources and an understanding of where they will be effective. It is at this first hurdle – measurement – that most governments stumble. This, however, is understandable as the difficulty of measuring soft power is well-documented².

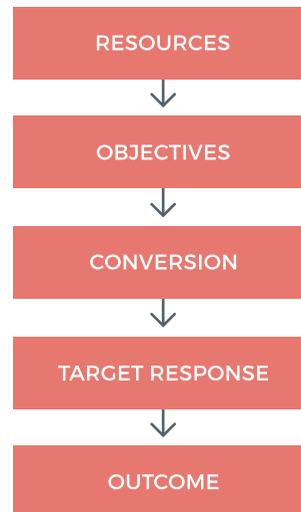


Figure 2 - Soft Power Conversion Process
 Source:
 Nye, J. (2011)
 The Future of Power

In developing the concept nearly three decades ago, Nye underlined three primary sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policy³. Based on a comprehensive review of academic literature on the subject, The Soft Power 30 framework builds on Nye's three key sources of soft power, capturing a comprehensive range of factors that impact on perceptions of a country, and subsequently its soft power resources. The Soft Power 30 index assesses the resources of countries by combining both objective and subjective data. A full list of the metrics included in the index can be found in Appendix A. Additionally, the 2015 Soft Power 30 report contains a longer discussion of how and why the methodology of the index came to be⁴.

2.1 Objective data

The objective data, which is structured into six categories, is drawn from a range of respected and commonly cited third-party sources. Each category effectively functions as an independent sub-index with an individual score and corresponding ranking for each country. Consistent with all previous editions, the six sub-indices are: Culture, Education, Engagement, Digital, Enterprise, and Government. The framework of categories was built on a survey of existing academic literature on soft power. Figure 3 below illustrates the six sub-indices that constitute the objective data of The Soft Power 30 index.

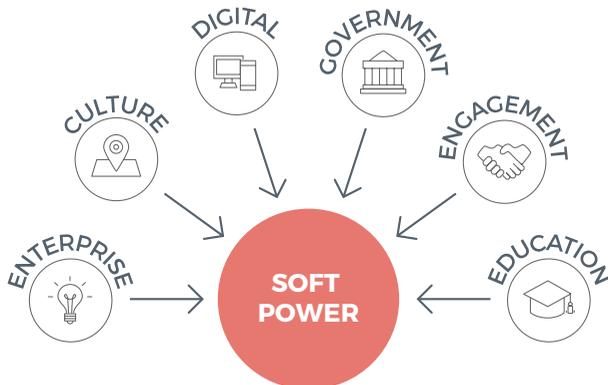


Figure 3 -
The sub-indices

When a country's culture promotes universal values that other nations can readily identify with, it makes them naturally attractive to others⁵. The reach and international cut-through of a country's cultural output is important in building soft power. But mass production does not necessarily lead to mass influence. As a result, the Culture sub-index employs metrics that capture the outputs of both "high" culture like visual

arts and "pop" culture like music and film. The Culture sub-index includes measures like the annual number of international tourist arrivals, music industry exports, and even international sporting success.

The ability of a country to attract international students, or facilitate exchanges, is a powerful tool of public diplomacy that delivers returns well into the long-term. Even for states carrying a history of bilateral animosity, there is a positive effect on perceptions and ties when people study abroad⁶. Prior research on educational exchanges provides empirical evidence that confirms the positive impact on perceptions of a host country when foreign students (having studied in that country) return home⁷. International student exchanges have also been shown to have positive indirect "ripple effects". Returning international students often become third-party advocates for their host country of study⁸. The Education sub-index aims to capture this phenomenon as well as the contribution countries make to global scholarship and the advancement of human knowledge. Metrics in this sub-index include the number of international students in a country, the relative quality of its universities, and the academic output of higher education institutions.

The Engagement sub-index measures a country's foreign policy resources, global diplomatic footprint, and overall contribution to the international community. Essentially it captures the ability of states to engage with international audiences, drive collaboration, and ultimately shape global outcomes. The Engagement sub-index

includes metrics such as the number of embassies/high commissions a country has abroad, membership of multilateral organisations, and overseas development aid contributions.

Though elements relating to the economy may seem more of a hard than soft power concern, the Enterprise sub-index is not a measure of comparative economic power or output. Rather, this sub-index aims to capture the relative attractiveness of a country's economic model in terms of its competitiveness, capacity for innovation, and ability to foster enterprise and commerce. Indeed, the structural economic attributes of a given country can have a significant impact on its soft power. These attributes, like ease of doing business, corruption levels, and capacity for innovation, all affect how a country is seen from outside.

The Digital sub-index is a component of growing importance for the measurement of soft power. The ways that technology has transformed everyday life over the last two decades is hard to over-exaggerate. Media, commerce, government, politics, and even people's daily social interaction have all changed with technology. The same can be said of foreign policy, the practice of public diplomacy, and soft power. The inclusion of a Digital sub-index aims to capture the extent to which countries have embraced technology, how well they are connected to the digital world, and their use of digital diplomacy through social media platforms.

The Government sub-index is designed to assess a state's political values, public institutions, and major public policy outcomes. By including metrics on

individual freedoms, human rights, human development, violence in society, and government effectiveness, the Government sub-index gauges the extent to which a country has an attractive model of governance and how effectively it can deliver positive outcomes for its citizens. Potential partners for international collaboration are more likely to be drawn to states with well-functioning systems of government⁹.

2.2 Subjective data

One of the biggest challenges in measuring soft power accurately is its inherently subjective nature. Rather than attempt to design against subjectivity, The Soft Power 30 index embraces it. The inaugural Soft Power 30 index published in 2015 was the first to measure soft power by combining objective data and international polling. As in 2016, we followed the same framework this year, using specially commissioned polling across 25 countries as the subjective data for the index.

As with the construction of our objective data framework, we used an overview of existing academic literature on soft power to develop a survey questionnaire. The polling provides data on international perceptions of countries assessed according to the most common "touch points" through which people interface with foreign countries. The list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

International polling for the index is run across every region of the world. In 2016 we expanded our polling to 25 countries, up from 20, taking our sample size from 7,200 to 10,500. In 2017, the sample size was increased to 11,000. This year, we have made four important changes to the polling. First, we increased the total sample size to 12,500, so every country polled has a sample of 500 respondents. Second, we have decided to make a few substitutions in the countries that are polled for the study. We have done this as we re-assessed the criteria for selecting the countries to be polled. Given its important role in global agenda setting, we chose to include all G20 countries. A few G20 member states had not been included in polling for previous studies. This has meant that we have removed Greece, Nigeria, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates from the list of countries polled. With these countries removed, we then added Canada, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and Thailand. The table below provides the full list of countries polled for the 2019 Soft Power 30.

The samples within each country are nationally representative by age, gender, and region. The full sample is designed for broad coverage of a diverse range

Countries	Region	Sample
Argentina	Latin America	500
Australia	Australasia	500
Brazil	Latin America	500
Canada	North America	500
China	East Asia	500
Egypt	Middle East & North Africa	500
France	Europe	500
Germany	Europe	500
India	South Asia	500
Indonesia	South East Asia	500
Italy	Europe	500
Japan	East Asia	500
Malaysia	South East Asia	500
Mexico	Latin America	500
Poland	Europe	500
Russia	Europe/Asia	500
Saudi Arabia	Middle East & North Africa	500
Spain	Europe	500
South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	500
South Korea	East Asia	500
Sweden	Europe	500
Thailand	South East Asia	500
Turkey	Middle East & North Africa	500
UK	Europe	500
USA	North America	500
TOTAL SAMPLE:		12,500



of cultures, rather than to be precisely representative of global opinion.

The survey consists of a series of questions translated into the main language(s) of each country by native speakers, using an 11-point numeric answering scale (0 to 10) to avoid the risks associated with translating verbal answering scales. Different cultures have been found to have different approaches to answering numeric scales (e.g. tending towards central or extreme scores), but the normalisation of the data mitigates against this.

The following factors were covered in the polling (each rated on a 0-10 scale, where 0 represented a very negative opinion, and 10 represented a very positive opinion):

- Favourability towards foreign countries;
- Perceptions of cuisine of foreign countries;
- Perceptions of how welcoming foreign countries are to tourists;
- Perceptions of technology products of foreign countries;
- Perceptions of luxury goods produced by foreign countries;
- Trust in foreign countries' approach to global affairs;
- Desire to visit foreign countries to live, work, or study;
- Perceptions of foreign countries' contributions to global culture.

These eight metrics were used to develop a regression model, where "favourability towards foreign countries" was the dependent variable, and the remaining

questions were independent variables. This measured the extent to which the remaining perceptions predict favourability towards a country in the dataset. The regression model is used to inform the appropriate weighting of each polling metric.

2.3 Changes, limitations, and shortcomings

For this fifth iteration of The Soft Power 30, only a few small changes have been made from last year's framework. We have followed the same broad methodology and the metrics criteria remain largely the same. In total five changes were made for the 2019 index – four very minor, and one more significant. The first change was simply to update all of our metrics with the most recently available data, and of course, run new polling. The new polling was in the field from 24th July to 2nd August, 2019.

The second change was, as covered above, the change to the countries polled for 2019. Again, we made these changes to make our international polling data more representative of the countries that tend to set the global agenda.

The third change was updating the weighting for the international polling data and objective sub-indices. As with each year, a regression analysis is run on

the polling data against responses for overall favourability of countries. The results of the regression are used to inform the weighting for the polling categories, which captures the key drivers of sentiment toward countries. The weighting for 2019 is shown in Figure 4 below. Likewise, the weighting for the

objective data has been updated from last year and is reported in Figure 5. Each set of weightings is scaled to 100 for ease of comparison.

The fourth change was the removal of two metrics from the index. The first metric removed was Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate from the Education sub-index. As

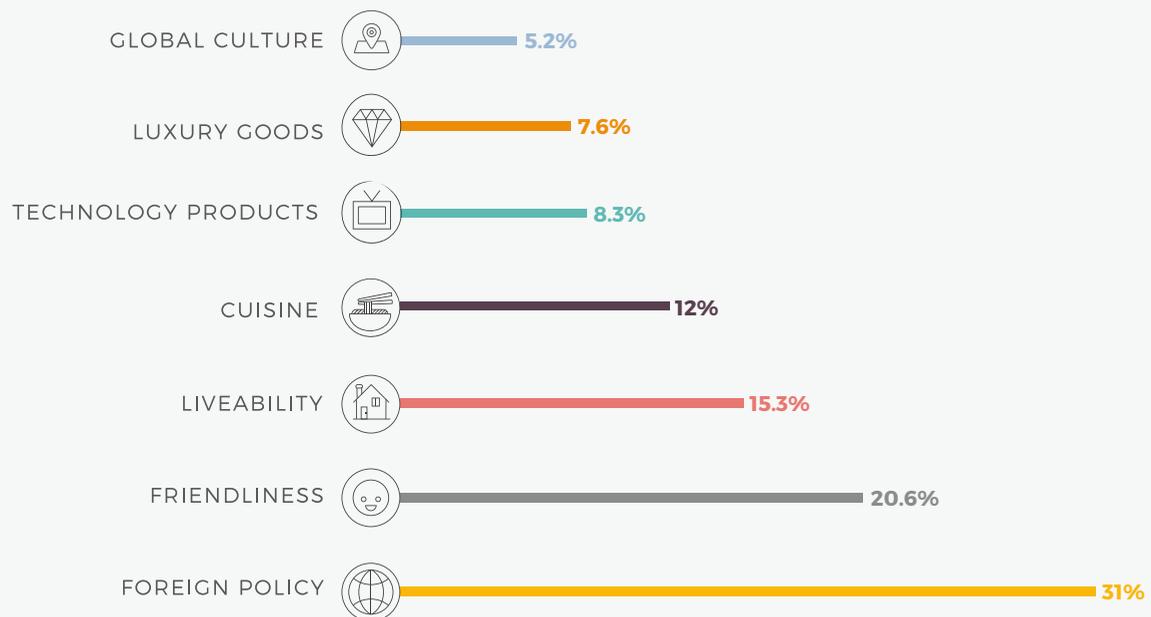


Figure 4 -
Weighting of the polling categories

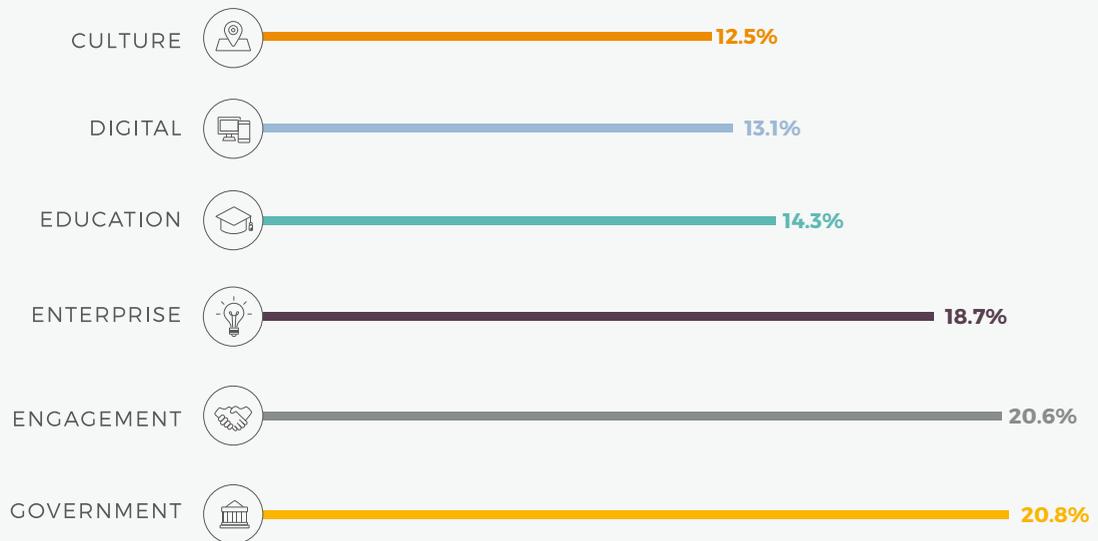


Figure 5 -
Weighting of the objective sub-indices

with every year, a re-evaluation of existing metrics raised questions as to the validity of this metric, i.e. is it measuring what we intend it to? It was judged that this metric was not really capturing relevant information, and thus not having an impact on countries' soft power resources. The second metric that we removed was Mobile Phones per 100 People in the Digital sub-index. Again, this was removed based on questions of validity. Its original inclusion was reasoned on the basis of helping to capture the overall connectivity of countries, but a review of the metrics called that assumption into question. The fifth, and most significant, change was a small shift in the distribution of the overall weighting from objective to subjective data. Previously, the index

was weighted 70 per cent to objective data and 30 per cent to the subjective (international polling) data. This was done, not through a mathematically derived formula, but a decision to prioritise the objective data over subjective. The logic behind this is that the objective data is more relevant to the policy levers that governments could pull to make tangible adjustments that could result in greater (or fewer) stores of soft power. However, two factors led us to re-evaluate this weighting and make a change for 2019. First, compared to our 2015 index, the robustness of our polling has improved. We have increased the number of countries polled and raised the total sample size, which gives us more confidence in the polling data. Second,

the objective data is, admittedly, always based on the prior year's figures, whereas the polling data is more immediately derived, and thus gives a more up-to-date report of global soft power. That being said, the new weighting is not a drastic shift, with 65 per cent weighted to the objective data and 35 per cent now going to the subjective (international polling) data.

As with every composite index, ours is not without its limitations and shortcomings. The subjective nature of soft power makes comparison across all countries difficult. Moreover, the total complexity of the dynamics of inter-state relations – where soft power is brought to bear – cannot be fully rendered by a comparative global index.

However, the index continues to strive toward our overarching objective: to develop an accurate comparative index of nations' soft power resources. It is both our plan and our hope that future versions of this index will continue to improve incrementally in providing an accurate assessment of global soft power. Every year we review our set of metrics, look for ways to refine our objective data set, and try to increase the reach, scope, and sample size of the international polling. We have made some further headway this year and we will aim to continue that effort for future iterations. The growing importance of the digital components of soft power – used for both benevolent

and malevolent ends – is an issue we continue to grapple with and think about in terms of how best to measure. Alas, much more remains to be done on this issue. We recognise that reaching the ultimate goal of a definitive measure of soft power will be a long and iterative process. The work for this fifth iteration of The Soft Power 30 index was undertaken – as ever – in the hopes of making further progress in clearing the first hurdle for the effective use of soft power: measuring resources.



3.0

Results and analysis

3.1

The top five

Essay

American soft power after Trump

3.2

The remaining top ten

Essay

Is soft power enough? A realist's perspective from the "Little Red Dot"

3.3

Breaking down the objective data

3.4

Breaking down the results

Essay

The soft power of government innovation

3.5

The Asia Soft Power 10

Essay

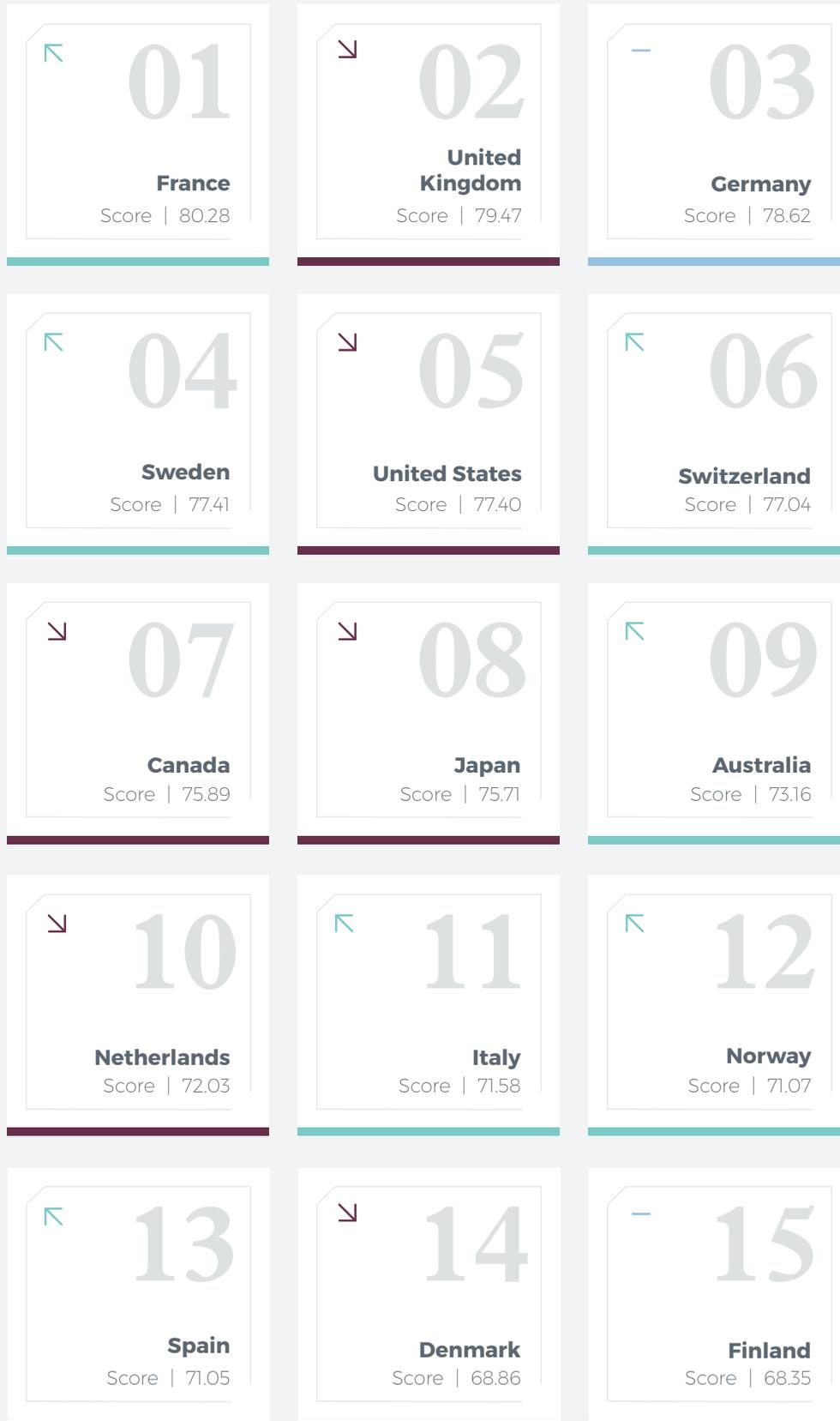
Making (limited) inroads: Why China's Belt and Road struggles to deliver goodwill

Following the normalisation of the data and calculation of each country's score, the 2019 Soft Power 30 index yields this fifth set of rankings. In setting out the latest assessment of the global distribution of soft power assets, the results provide plenty to consider and debate.

For the fifth year running, the countries that constitute the top ten remain the same, but there is significant movement between them. The 2018 results produced a new top-five entrant for the first time. The 2019 results have followed suit and produced another new first-time entrant into the ranks of the top five.

While the constituent countries of the top ten remain the same, the movement within the top three reflects the fluidity of the evolving global geopolitical landscape in which countries operate, and how the balance of soft power resources can shift. The countries occupying the top ten spots have clearly built up a robust set of soft power resources, but the movements in ranking, however small, show there are no certainties in the competition for global influence.

2019 RESULTS



 UPWARD MOVER

 DOWNWARD MOVER

 NO MOVER

 NEW ENTRY

 RE-ENTRY

 16

Austria
Score | 67.98

 17

New Zealand
Score | 67.45

 18

Belgium
Score | 67.17

 19

South Korea
Score | 63.00

 20

Ireland
Score | 62.91

 21

Singapore
Score | 61.51

 22

Portugal
Score | 59.28

 23

Poland
Score | 55.16

 24

Czech Republic
Score | 54.35

 25

Greece
Score | 53.74

 26

Brazil
Score | 51.34

 27

China
Score | 51.25

 28

Hungary
Score | 50.39

 29

Turkey
Score | 49.70

 30

Russian Federation
Score | 48.64

3.1 The top five

For the second year in a row, we see a change in the top five countries of The Soft Power 30. It is a reminder that in a world of heightened uncertainty and the instant spread of news and information through technology, soft power can move as global perceptions evolve and respond to events. This year, the UK loses its top spot to France driven largely by a significant fall in its relative performance in the international polling. Japan, despite making strides in the Culture sub-index, loses favour in the polls, allowing Sweden to break into the top five with strong performances in the Enterprise, Education, and Government sub-indices, as well as global public opinion polling.

FRANCE

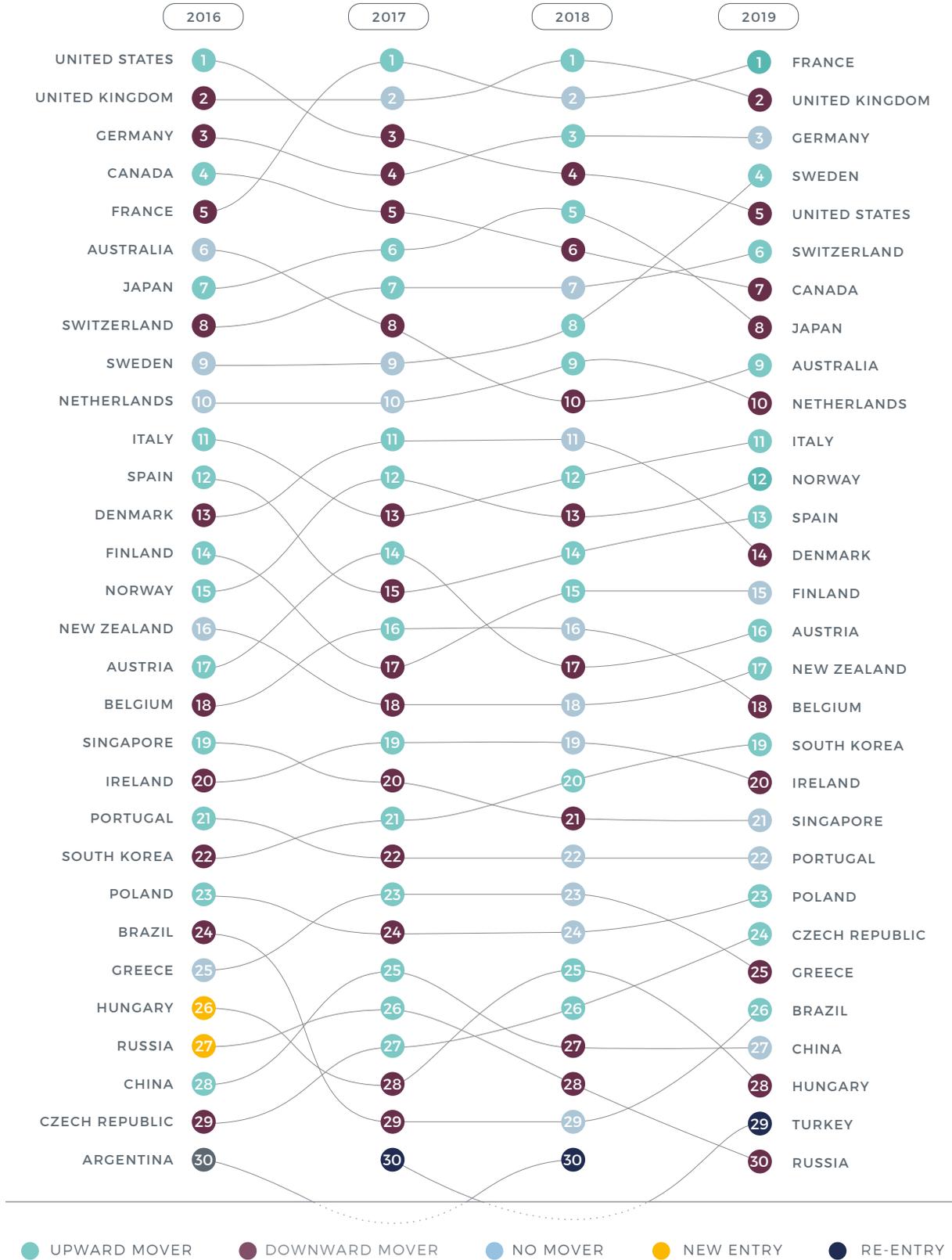
France reclaims its top spot after a mixed year for the French government. Widespread discontent around rising fuel prices and living costs sparked the gilets jaunes protest movement in November last year, which continued into the first quarter of 2019. However, an effort to understand and address the grievances of the movement, typified by his marathon “grand debate” tour of the country, helped President Emmanuel Macron recover in the polls. Despite finishing behind Marine Le Pen’s far-right party in European Union parliamentary elections, President Macron has consolidated a solid base of supporters, and has successfully come through the lowest point of his presidency to date. He has doubtless been strengthened by an economy growing at a faster clip than most large, developed countries. The stabilisation of the political situation at home has since allowed President Macron to return to a leading

role on the international stage, particularly as the host of this year’s G7 Summit.

France’s greatest soft power strengths continue to sit within its global engagement assets. It has a vast diplomatic network, and is unrivalled in its membership of multilateral and international organisations. France also boasts the highest number of diplomatic cultural missions via its extensive Alliance Française network, which will mark its centenary in 2020. Last year’s G7 Summit ended in disarray after the US pulled out of the summit communique. While this year’s summit did not see a communique, President Macron successfully appeased the US over the French tech tax, eased tensions between the US and Iran, and drove his global agenda on climate action. President Macron has always shown a commitment to multilateralism, and his success at the G7 Summit has helped re-establish his position as a strong global leader. With German Chancellor Angela Merkel stepping down by 2021, and the UK’s preoccupation with Brexit, there are real opportunities for France to be the leading force for global progress through cooperation and multilateralism.

France also has a rich cultural offering, with strong performances in the art, film, food, sport, and tourism metrics. France has the highest number of Michelin-starred restaurants in the world, and French cuisine is recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. France is also home to cultural icons including the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, as well as a multitude of museums, galleries, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Louvre

YEAR ON YEAR COMPARISON





remains the most visited museum in the world, so it is no surprise that France boasts the highest number of tourist arrivals in the world. When a devastating fire broke out at the Notre-Dame cathedral in April, there was an outpouring of support from both French citizens and the international community. The global response was a reminder of France's unique position as a touchstone for global culture and heritage, demonstrating the vast extent of France's global cultural resonance. The international appeal of French culture is also evidenced in events such as the Cannes Film Festival, the Tour de France, and Bastille Day, which are followed and celebrated by audiences around the world.

While the mainstays of French soft power have been developed over centuries and will continue to serve France well into the future, the real differentiating factor in France's first place finish for 2019 was its improved performance in the international

polling. France jumped up two spots from fifth in 2018's polling results, to third this year. While we can only speculate as to what caused the jump, we know that how people feel about a given country's foreign policy is the key driver in shaping their overall perceptions of that country. A revived and ambitious President, active again on the global stage, has coincided with France's best polling performance to date. Macron has filled the vacuum of liberal political leadership that has been vacated by Trump's "America First", a UK consumed by Brexit, and a politically weakened German Chancellor. The upshot of this, in soft power terms, is good for France.

UK

The UK slips to second place in the 2019 rankings, after the most politically tumultuous year in decades. Brexit continues to dominate the British headlines, consume the government's bandwidth, and baffle businesses

searching for some semblance of certainty. With a new prime minister, Boris Johnson, at the helm, Brexit battle lines are being drawn between Johnson's cabinet and a parliament set on avoiding a "hard" no-deal Brexit. As Prime Minister Johnson moved into Downing Street and started assembling his cabinet, an unprecedented seventeen ministers either resigned or were sacked. The result has been a government packed with die-hard Leave advocates, committed to leaving with or without a deal on 31 October 2019. At the time of publication, it is impossible to know how Brexit will conclude. Thus, it is hard to fully discern the would-be implications for Britain's global role going forward and its subsequent comparative soft power.

At the time of our data collection exercise and the field work for our international polling, the UK's strong second place ranking is a testament to the depth and durability of its soft power assets. Like France, the UK benefits from well-established soft power assets and it continues to perform well across the Engagement, Culture, Education, and Digital sub-indices. However, the failure to bring about an orderly resolution – one way or the other – to Brexit seems to have caught up with global perceptions of the UK. Comparing year-on-year performance in the polling, the UK fell from sixth in 2018 to tenth in 2019.

The UK's greatest soft power strengths lie in Culture and Education, which – to date – are feeling no ill effects from Brexit. British art, film, music, and sport continue to hold enormous global appeal. British music, in particular, has captured an outsized share of the world's listening, largely credited to

Ed Sheeran. British music has a long history of global influence – consider Britpop and iconic bands such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. After the release of Queen biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody* in November last year, the song returned to the Billboard Hot 100.

Importantly, the success of British pop culture extends to all media, not just music. British television and film have had a strong decade with *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock*, *The Crown*, *Downton Abbey*, and *James Bond* all attracting huge global audiences. Even *Game of Thrones* has been a boon for British tourism, drawing international visitors to previously under-visited corners of Northern Ireland. Tourism in the UK continues to thrive with its abundance of museums, galleries, and theatres, and not just in London.

Despite initial concerns around the impact of Brexit, UK universities have proven resilient with an increase in international student numbers. The UK is home to the second largest number of top universities in the world. Moreover, British-based researchers and academics make a disproportionately large contribution to academic publishing. Earlier this year, the government published a new international education strategy outlining plans to increase student numbers. If the government can deliver on that plan, the UK's soft power strengths in education will continue to be a major asset.

The UK has, however, regressed in the Enterprise sub-index this year. The UK saw a fall in its World Economic Forum Competitiveness Index ranking, a drop in the overall level of Foreign Direct

Investment coming into the British economy, and the high-profile loss of Dyson's headquarters to Singapore. But on the upside, British tech companies secured record high foreign investments last year, and unicorns such as Revolut, Transferwise, and Deliveroo are expanding internationally at pace. While London has typically been the centre of innovation, regions beyond the "Silicon Roundabout" including Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Edinburgh, Bristol, and Leeds, have produced unicorns as well. The UK's current mix of talent, creativity, and deep capital markets all help reinforce the UK's position as a top global market for tech and digital innovation.

Over the past few years, the UK has been pushing the "Global Britain" narrative aggressively, but there are questions as to whether a post-Brexit Britain can really live up to that billing. The sheer amount of bandwidth consumed by Brexit leaves the UK little capacity to make significant headway on other major issues, be they domestic or international.

While Britain's diplomatic network has expanded with fourteen new overseas posts, including a new ASEAN Permanent Mission in Jakarta, overall funding for the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has fallen consistently over the last four decades. There has also been speculation that the Department for International Development may be absorbed into the FCO, which would likely represent a setback in the UK's international development capacity, but also send a signal that the UK cares less about global development than it once did. The resulting impact on Britain's soft power is unlikely to be positive. With the UK still

left in a Brexit limbo (at least at time of publication), it is hard to speculate on the future of British soft power until the defining issue of the day is finally resolved.

GERMANY

Germany holds onto third place in the 2019 Soft Power 30 rankings, sustained by improved performances in the Engagement and Government sub-indices. Germany has long been a driving force in European affairs, and continues to play an important stabilising role within the European Union. However its leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel, no longer holds the unassailable political power she enjoyed before the last election, which has been noticed on the global stage. When her term ends in 2021, Germany, Europe, and the global community as well, will lose one of the most capable, stable, and sensible world leaders of the last generation. As the polling data across all years of The Soft

Power 30 have shown, Germany is among the most trusted and admired countries, as assessed by foreign policy.

Germany's strong performance in the Government sub-index can be credited to a combination of its public sector performance, government accountability, and high levels of public trust in the state. High scores for human development, and individual liberties and rights further buttress Germany's performance in the Government sub-index.

Germany remains widely respected for the high quality of its advanced manufacturing goods, engineering prowess, and continues to be a global leader in high-end automotive and machinery industries. Berlin has also grown into a major European tech and digital hub, which may get a further boost depending on how Brexit plays out.

Chancellor Merkel has long been a net positive for Germany's soft power. However, her reduced political standing at home, combined with less visibility on the global stage, means that Germany receives less of a "Merkel boost" than it did in 2015 and 2016. With a change in leadership in the offing, there is an opportunity to inject new life into Germany's global role. Germany has always positioned itself as a reliable partner and should continue to do so, but it should also look at where and how it can take on a larger international leadership role. The world would doubtless welcome a greater German contribution to the major global challenges of today.

SWEDEN

Sweden makes an impressive leap from eighth in 2018 to fourth this year, overtaking the US (albeit by the slimmest of margins). While the Nordic countries have always performed well in The Soft Power 30, bolstered by formidable performances in



the Government sub-index, it is the first time Sweden, or any Nordic country, has broken into the top five.

Sweden, like its neighbours, is recognised for its exemplary model of governance and high-performing public sector. Strong political values extolling individual freedoms and liberty are matched by high levels of well-being and enviable public service outcomes. Sweden, however, is not immune to the nationalist and xenophobic backlash seen in other Western states. The September 2018 elections produced a hung parliament as the anti-immigration, far-right Sweden Democrats made gains, leaving the country in a political stalemate that lasted for over four months. However, in January this year, the Social Democrats managed to form a broad coalition that froze out the far-right Sweden Democrats party.

On foreign policy, Sweden has shown global commitment to gender equality, after becoming the first country in the world to publicly adopt a “feminist foreign policy” in 2014, and continues to put women’s rights at the centre of its diplomatic agenda. Sweden also shows real global leadership in climate change issues, and plans to cut its carbon emissions to net zero by 2045. Sweden has a relatively small diplomatic network, but its commitment to global environmental challenges has had an outsized impact on the region, and is inspiring activists around the world.

While it has always had a strong record in environmental sustainability, Sweden made international headlines when then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg took a 32-hour train to Davos and criticised

global leaders for lacking commitment to climate policies. Hailed the “Greta Effect”, domestic flight passengers went down, and the #flygskam hashtag emerged. Ms Thunberg shot back into the global limelight in August 2019 when she crossed the Atlantic on a zero-carbon yacht, arriving just in time for the 2019 UN Global Climate Summit. The combination of big symbolic action and tangible policies from the government give Sweden world-class bona fides on environmental leadership.

Sweden’s greatest soft power strength by sub-index is in Enterprise. Welfare states are often met with concerns about productivity growth, but Sweden demonstrates that it is capable of balancing a strong social safety net with driving commerce and innovation. Among global household Swedish names are H&M, IKEA, and Volvo, as well as more recently tech unicorns Spotify, Skype, and gaming company King. Stockholm produces the second-highest number of billion-dollar tech companies per capita in the world, trailing only Silicon Valley. It is also a global leader in digital payments, having developed Swish, a now ubiquitous mobile payments platform. In 2021, Sweden plans to introduce its own digital currency, the e-Krona, on the way to becoming the world’s first cashless society.

Sweden shows real global leadership in climate change issues, and plans to cut its carbon emissions to zero by 2045.

While not many people would immediately recognise or even be able to name Sweden’s prime minister, the country’s ability to show rather than tell;



to do rather than say; to contribute rather than proselytise, has clearly been critical to building up its soft power.

US

US soft power continues its year-on-year decline, falling from first place in 2016 to third, fourth, and now fifth place in the 2019 Soft Power 30 index. President Donald Trump's zero-sum world view and reliance on the hard power of trade tariffs continue to erode its soft power. While no single president can wipe out the wealth of soft power assets that the US has built up over decades, they can still make an impact through rhetoric and policy alone.

The US's fall this year is driven in large part by a poorer performance in the Government sub-index, which sees the US fall from 16th in 2018 to 23rd this year. This is the worst performance for the US across all sub-indices since 2015. The fall comes after the longest federal government shutdown in history at the end of 2018, running into 2019. Americans' trust in government has hit a new low, according to a recent Gallup poll. The US continues to face relatively high homicide rates (for an advanced economy), with over 297 mass shootings in 2019 (at time of writing). Together with an uptick in reports of hate crime, the combined impact does little to lift global perceptions of the US.

In terms of global engagement, President Trump continues to follow an erratic course. The combined effects of the US-China trade war and haphazard use of tariffs on traditional US friends and allies continue to threaten global economic growth, leave major stock markets on edge, and shake the very foundations of

the global trading system and wider rules-based international order.

In addition to the upending of US trade policy orthodoxy, the US continues to show limited interest in dealing with global environmental challenges. President Trump refused to sign last year's G7 communique that called for coordinated action on climate change, and failed to even show up for this year's G7 session on the Amazon rainforest fires and mitigating climate change threats.

Looking beyond the White House, the US still holds some unassailable soft power assets, particularly those that operate independently from the federal government. The US continues to dominate the Culture, Digital, and Education sub-indices, and posts strong performances in the Enterprise sub-index. US culture remains the most pervasive globally – one would be hard-pressed to find a child who has never watched a Disney movie, a teen who has never listened to Taylor Swift, or an adult who has never seen a Hollywood blockbuster. The US is also the most successful nation in combined Olympic competitions, which will likely continue through the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. With the highest number of top universities in the world, boosted by the prestigious global branding of the Ivy League, the US attracts the most international students from around the world, more than double the number of international students in the UK (which hosts the second highest number). The US is home to the most ubiquitous and admired tech companies in the world, including Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Tesla, and Microsoft,

as well as more recent entrants such as Airbnb, Uber, Netflix, and WeWork, which have been transforming the way we live, work, and interact with the world.

For now, the US's education institutions, cultural production, and technological innovation have been resilient to shortcomings identified elsewhere. Yes, American soft power is both deep and broad, but the continued resilience of America's global appeal is far from guaranteed. While The Soft Power 30 index can break down the components of a country's soft power assets, they do not exist in isolation from each other.

Without an overarching, compelling, and positive platform to engage international partners, it follows that people around the world will start asking "why is it we like America again?".



American soft power after Trump

By Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Many subsequent polls have confirmed the findings of the 2017 and 2018 Soft Power 30 reports that American soft power has declined since the beginning of the Trump administration. “America First” may appeal to some Americans, but when applied in a narrow way, people abroad hear it as a demotion. Trump’s tweets have helped him set the global agenda, but they do not produce soft power if they are not attractive to others.

Some in the administration seem to believe that the soft power of attraction is irrelevant: only the hard power of military and economic instruments matters. When Trump’s acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, was budget director, he boasted about a hard power budget that would have slashed funding for the State Department and the US Agency for International Development by nearly 30 per cent. Fortunately, Congress restored some of the funds, but the struggle continues.

As Henry Kissinger once pointed out, international order depends not only on the balance of hard power, but also on perceptions of legitimacy, which depends crucially on soft power, and it becomes more important than ever in an information age. Information revolutions always have profound socioeconomic and political consequences – witness the dramatic effects of Gutenberg’s printing press on Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One can date the current information revolution from the 1960s and the advent of “Moore’s Law”: the number of transistors on a computer chip doubles roughly every two years. A quarter of a century ago, there were about 50 websites in the world; today more than half the world is online, and that will likely grow to 5-6 billion people by 2020. Moreover, the “Internet of Things” will connect tens of billions of devices.

The explosion of information has produced a “paradox of plenty”: an abundance of information leads to scarcity of attention. When the volume of information confronting people becomes overwhelming, it is hard to know what to focus on. Social media algorithms are designed to

compete for attention. Reputation becomes even more important than in the past, and political struggles, informed by social and ideological affinities, often centre on the creation and destruction of credibility. Social media can make false information look more credible if it comes from “friends.” As US Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election showed, this enabled Russia to weaponise American social media.

Reputation has always mattered in world politics, but credibility has become an even more important power resource. Information that appears to be propaganda may not only be scorned, but may also turn out to be counterproductive if it undermines a country’s reputation for credibility – and thus reduces its soft power. Trump is notoriously careless with facts.

Domestic or foreign policies that appear hypocritical, arrogant, or are based on a narrow conception of national interest can undermine soft power.

According to The Washington Post fact checker, in his first two years, Trump averaged nearly seven false or misleading claims each day. He set the global agenda, but the effect on his credibility was devastating. Presidential tweets that proved to be demonstrably false, undercut America’s credibility and reduced its soft power. The effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured by minds changed (as reflected in interviews or polls), not dollars spent or number of messages sent.

Domestic or foreign policies that appear hypocritical, arrogant, indifferent to others’ views, or are based on a narrow conception of national interest can undermine soft power. For example, there was a steep decline in the attractiveness of the US in opinion polls conducted after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In the 1970s, many people around the world objected to the US war in Vietnam, and America’s global standing reflected the unpopularity of that policy. What does this mean for the future of American soft power?

Skeptics argue that such cycles show that soft power does not matter much; countries cooperate out of self-interest. But this argument misses a crucial point: cooperation is a matter of degree, and the degree is affected by attraction or repulsion. Other countries act from their interests, but attraction (or its absence) can produce an enabling or



disabling environment for their choices. For example, when George W. Bush appealed to his friend Vicente Fox for support during the Iraq War, the unpopularity of American policies inhibited Mexican cooperation. Similarly, unattractiveness prevented the Turkish parliament from allowing American troops to cross Turkey to enter Iraq from the North.

Fortunately, a country's soft power depends not only on its official policies, but also on the attractiveness of its civil society. When protesters overseas were marching against American government policy in the Vietnam War, they did not sing the Communist Internationale but often sang "We Shall Overcome", an anthem of the US civil rights movement. Even when Trump's policies are unattractive, many people outside the US remain attracted by American films, science, universities, companies, and foundations. Many people in democracies are also attracted by the resilience of America's independent courts and free press that stand up to presidential power. If Trump erodes the independence of civil society, or the resilience of the checks and balances in the political system, the loss of soft power will be deeper and longer-lasting than what we have seen so far.

As I show in my forthcoming book, "Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump", the current president is not the first to lie or to pursue a myopic conception of America's national interest. Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and George W. Bush had strong negative effects on American soft power, but the country recovered. Given past experience, there is every reason to hope that the US will recover its soft power after Trump. Though global trust in the US has been damaged, a return to more far-sighted policies and better public diplomacy would certainly help in the recovery of that trust. And with it, improve America's relative soft power standing in the future.

3.2 The remaining top ten

Rounding out the top ten are Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Australia, and the Netherlands.

Switzerland moves up into sixth place, its best showing to date. It ranks first in the Government sub-index, and posts strong performances in the Enterprise and Digital sub-indices too. Switzerland improved its position in the polling this year, finishing second to Italy, and leapfrogging Japan and Canada in the process. Improved global perceptions of Switzerland suggest that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "Swiss Touch" campaign may have had a positive impact, though perhaps the core of Switzerland's soft power strength lies in its traditional neutrality. Switzerland is highly trusted around the world, and it seems living by the axiom "do no harm", does well for Swiss soft power.

Canada slips for the third consecutive year to seventh place, driven by poorer performances across all of the sub-indices with the exception of Enterprise and Digital. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faced intense political scrutiny in relation to the SNC-Lavalin case in March, damaging trust in his government and shaking up his cabinet. On the international front, Canada has been dealing with the fallout from the arrest of Huawei Technologies Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou. The high-profile detention soured relations between Canada and China, and has led to a series of tit-for-tat diplomatic manoeuvres. The upshot has been Canada falling in the

international polling from second in 2018 to seventh in 2019.

Japan falls out of the top five to eighth, the result of a slide in its performance in the international polling. However, Japan continues to place highly across the Engagement, Digital, and Enterprise sub-indices, and saw a significant leap up the Culture sub-index, placing it ahead of neighbouring China and South Korea. The Japanese government has had a busy year with the start of the Reiwa era, and as the host of the G20 Summit in June. But it has also been a challenging year for Japan abroad. Relations with South Korea have seen a steady decline with no sign of a resolution in sight. Moreover, the resumption of commercial whaling

by Japan for the first time in 30 years was greeted with wide-spread international criticism. But looking to the near future, the 2019 Rugby World Cup and upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics are two important opportunities to welcome the world and make a positive impact on global perceptions of the country.

Australia climbs one spot from tenth to ninth off the back of a mixed performance in the objective data, but a stronger showing in the international polling. The new Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has yet to fully flesh out and implement a foreign policy vision for Australia under his premiership. Australia has plenty to work with in terms of soft power resources,

but it is not yet clear how they will be deployed by the Morrison government.

The Netherlands falls back to tenth this year, after weaker performances in the Culture, Enterprise, and Digital sub-indices. However, in the Government sub-index for 2019, the Netherlands outperforms the traditionally-strong Nordic countries. Despite the slight drop in overall position, the Netherlands is well-placed going forward. Its attractive economic model, high-performing government, capacity for innovation, world-class universities, and solid contribution on global issues like climate change, development, and water management will continue to safeguard its soft power status.



Is soft power enough? A realist's perspective from the "Little Red Dot"

By Bilahari Kausikan

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

As a "Little Red Dot" in Southeast Asia, Singapore has known since independence the precarious position of small states in a large and dangerous world. As such, we have always had to take a hard-edged, realist view of the world.

Machiavelli notoriously said that it was safer for a prince to be feared than loved. Machiavelli explains his statement by the fact that people may, for one reason or another, change their minds about what they love, but "fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails."

You may or may not agree with his reasoning. But elsewhere, Machiavelli also said that a prince must be capable of acting as a fox, as well as a lion. Getting what you want without overtly brandishing a big stick is surely a form of soft power. Being cunning and strong are complementary.

It is easier to be admired or persuade others to follow you and get your way if you can deter others from acting on whatever contrary thoughts they may harbour. Can there be soft power without hard power? I do not think so. The history of Singapore's foreign policy speaks to the need for a dual approach – one that can deploy soft power (love) in the right context – but also back it up with hard (fear), should love not be enough to win the day.

When one thinks of Singapore, they probably do not think of a major regional military power, but according to the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index, Singapore – home to less than six million people – is Southeast Asia's standout military power. We maintain a two-year national service commitment from all Singaporean men and a reservist system that means Singapore could mobilise over one million military personnel if required. We also ensure Singapore's armed forces are well resourced, with almost 20 per cent of the government's total expenditure going toward defence.



Hard power should not, however, be understood in only military terms. Equally important is the unique organising principle on which independent Singapore is based. We organise ourselves horizontally on the basis of multiracial meritocracy. Singapore is not perfect, but we take the concept seriously. This makes us unique in Southeast Asia where every other country, without exception, is organised vertically on the basis of a formal or informal ethnic and religious hierarchy.

The social cohesion that results from multiracial meritocracy is also hard power. It is the foundation on which all else we have achieved has been built, not the least of which is economic success. The range of options for small countries is never going to be overly broad. But the hard fact is that rich small countries are going to have more options than poor small countries, including the wherewithal to acquire, maintain, and use the advanced defence technology to establish the deterrence that keeps our neighbours honest.

Singapore has worked over decades to build up its hard power capabilities, precisely because we recognise the limits of soft power. It is hardly a perfect concept, both in its clarity and utility. Yet, when analysing or describing international relations we often use some terms

only because we have no others. But their meaning is situational and conditional. "Friend" is one of the most common words used to describe international relationships.

In personal relations, "friend" connotes an emotional connection. It is this emotional connection that lends soft power to a friend in personal life. But in international relations, a "friendly" country is only one whose interests coincide with one's own. Interests change, sometimes very rapidly, and vary from issue to issue and not always in a consistent way.

Would anyone really ascribe soft power to a country whose interests clash with one's own? Strong deterrence makes it easier for other countries to regard their interests as being aligned with ours, or at least to regard differences of interests as tolerable.

Introducing the concept of values does not really get us around the difficulty. Of course, countries whose values are aligned attract each other. That is trite but true because values are just another kind of interest, or another way of describing (or concealing) interests.

In his first parliamentary speech on foreign policy, delivered only months after Singapore became unexpectedly independent, Mr. S. Rajaratnam, Singapore's first foreign minister, made clear that the ultimate goal of our foreign policy was the preservation of the "essential values" on which Singapore was based. This is so for all countries.

It is pretentious nonsense to think – as western-style liberal democracies are accustomed to do – that only some countries practise values-based diplomacy or that only western values exert soft power. Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and even North Korea, no less than the US or Japan or Europe, have their own values. We may not like some values espoused by other countries or find them contrary to our interests, but that is a different matter.

It is entirely possible to accept or admire or seek to emulate some subset of another country's values without having to or wanting to emulate all of them. One may, however grudgingly, acknowledge North Korea's single-minded and successful efforts to preserve autonomy under very difficult circumstances, and even share that value, without wanting to

In international relations, a "friendly" country is only one whose interests coincide with one's own. Interests change, sometimes very rapidly, and vary from issue to issue and not always consistently.

become like North Korea. A country can simultaneously attract and repel; admiration can simultaneously exist with serious reservations.

We may appreciate China's economic success without wanting to emulate other aspects of its Leninist value system or follow Beijing's lead on everything. It is becoming clear that many countries want to benefit from China's Belt and Road Initiative but do not trust China. How are these conflicting impulses to be balanced? And the "Shining City on a Hill" has also always cast a dark shadow. We may admire some aspects of America without wanting to become like America. One of the most persistent delusions of American, and more generally, western foreign policy is the idea that admiring or emulating some western economic values will necessarily lead to admiring or emulating western political values.

Where Singapore has found success in using soft power is in areas where not just values are aligned, but interests. Both at home and abroad, rule of law has been critical to Singapore's development, security, and prosperity. As an open, outward-looking trading nation, Singapore depends on clear, enforced rules when it comes to trade, navigation, finance, and dispute resolution. Singapore played an outsized role in delivering the United Nation's Convention on the Laws of the Sea - a foundational agreement on which global trade and logistics rely. We are a country that works. Singapore's strong rule of law, predictable and stable system of government, and business-friendly regulation have all helped it attract international companies, foreign investment, and global talent.

There is nothing particularly new about the concept of soft power. Power has throughout history enticed. Throughout history, power on its own has also never been enough.

Machiavelli qualified his comments about it being safer to be feared than loved, by observing that it was difficult for a prince to unite both love and fear in his person. It was only when a choice could not be avoided, that preference be given to the latter and even then, the prince "ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred".

Surely that is good advice for all countries, both large and small.

3.3

Breaking down the objective data



GOVERNMENT

The Government sub-index includes metrics that capture political values such as freedom, human rights, democracy, and equality. It also includes measures of government effectiveness and broad metrics on citizen outcomes like Human Development Index scores. Nordic and Northern European countries regularly top global rankings for government effectiveness, human development, and the protection of civil rights. This year, Switzerland takes the top spot in the Government sub-index, followed closely by the Netherlands and Norway.



ENGAGEMENT

The Engagement sub-index measures the reach of countries' diplomatic networks and their commitment to international development and environmental challenges. France continues to top the Engagement sub-index, with its extensive embassy network and the highest number of memberships to multilateral organisations. Germany overtakes the UK this year to come in second. The three countries have taken a strong lead in climate action, and are among the top ODA donors. However, the impact of structural changes to the UK's Department for International Development and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office amidst Brexit remain to be seen.



EDUCATION

The Education sub-index focuses primarily on higher education, with metrics on the quality of universities, their ability to attract international students, and contributions to academic research publishing. The US continues to dominate the Education sub-index, with more than double the number of top universities and international students compared to the UK and Germany, and as one of the top contributors to academic research publications. The UK returns to second place after falling behind Germany in 2018. Despite concerns around the impact of Brexit, the UK saw an increase in the number of international students, and remains home to the second highest number of global top universities.





DIGITAL

The Digital sub-index comprises a mix of metrics that capture a country's digital connectivity, the effectiveness of government online services, and the use of digital diplomacy. The US retains its top spot, as American tech giants expand their global influence, and President Trump commands an unrivalled international social media following. Canada, the UK, and France follow behind with strong performances in digital governance and digital diplomacy metrics. South Korea takes fifth place, with the fastest internet connection in the world.



CULTURE

The Culture sub-index measures the quality, international reach, and appeal of a country's cultural production. The US tops the Culture sub-index, outperforming other countries across art, film, music, sport, and tourism. Boosted by Hollywood, and more recently media groups such as Netflix, American culture has achieved tremendous global reach. The UK follows closely behind, helped by the global success of the British music industry and football leagues. France, home to the most visited museum, maintains third place with the highest numbers of tourist arrivals and Michelin-starred restaurants, while Japan makes an impressive jump from fourteenth to sixth.



ENTERPRISE

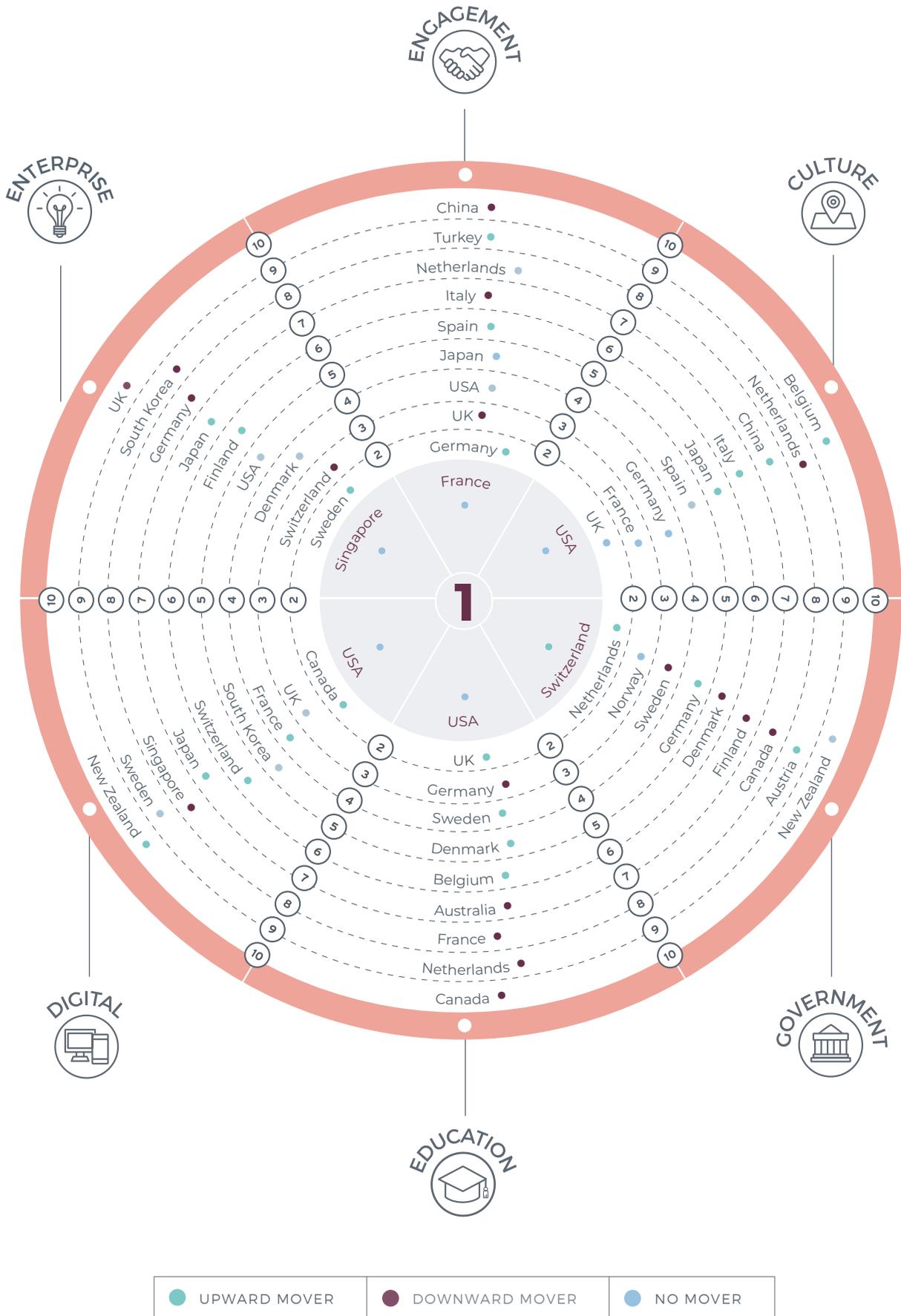
The Enterprise sub-index aims to capture the attractiveness of a country's business model, its capacity for innovation, and its regulatory framework. Singapore tops the sub-index for the fourth year in a row, maintaining its lead on Switzerland. The city-state, known for its economic competitiveness and favourable business environment, is also an important hub for the growing Southeast Asian economy, making it an ideal headquarter location for global giants and start-ups. Singapore also performs well in innovation measures, with high rates of R&D spending and high-tech exports.



3.4

Breaking down the results

Comparing the top ten countries across the six sub-indices, the graphic opposite offers a greater level of detail into where the top performers in the index derive their soft power resources.



The soft power of government innovation

By Adrian Brown

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC IMPACT

In 1992, a book was published that arguably remains one of the most influential ever written on public administration. In *Reinventing Government*, journalist David Osborne and city manager Ted Gaebler put forward a powerful argument for why governments were failing and how they needed to be reformed. Their thesis was straightforward. Governments, they argued, were stuck in an outdated, bureaucratic paradigm that prized process over outcomes. Inflexible and hierarchical, bureaucracies had grown to serve their own ends rather than the needs of the citizens they were supposed to be helping. The result was frustration, misallocation of resources, inefficiency, and waste on a vast scale.

Their solution was that government needed reinventing through the adoption of managerial practices from the private sector. A greater focus on outcomes and data would force public sector managers to drive up results and drive out inefficiencies. Championing the customer would ensure services were truly focused on user needs and decentralisation would empower local managers to take the decisions necessary to meet them. Competition for resources, whether through internal markets or the outsourcing of services, would create powerful incentives to improve. In short, governments would be radically repurposed through “the tremendous power of the entrepreneurial process and the force of the free market”.

The soft power garnered by those countries, such as the UK, that were seen to be at the forefront of this movement, was significant. For example, the model of the UK Government’s Delivery Unit, a small group of individuals working at the heart of government to drive forward a small set of priorities, has been replicated globally. I myself worked in the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit for Tony Blair in the early 2000s and almost every week, a different delegation from a foreign government came to visit to learn more about our approach.

But now there is a growing sense that the current models of government, which have achieved important gains over the past 20 or 30 years, have reached the point of diminishing returns. Two challenges with the current model are frequently mentioned.

Firstly, governments are increasingly failing to achieve the outcomes people expect. While health, education, and welfare outcomes have all improved, people's expectations are rising even faster. At the same time, so-called "wicked problems" such as obesity, homelessness, and poverty remain as stubborn as ever.

Secondly, global leaders are facing a crisis of political legitimacy. Trust in government is at a record low in many countries, with large sections of society feeling marginalised and ignored. Too many citizens in too many countries simply do not believe their governments represent them or have their best interests at heart.

At the Centre for Public Impact, we define legitimacy as "the reservoir of support" governments need to achieve impact — meaning these two challenges are interrelated. Disappointing outcomes lead to reduced legitimacy which in turn, make achieving impact all the harder.

Moving forward from here will require more than iterative reform — we need to fundamentally reimagine the role of government. Once again, those nations that are seen to be at the forefront of a transformation that delivers better outcomes for citizens and enhances government legitimacy will be a beacon for others. As other governments seek to understand how it can be done, the international attention and admiration will ultimately accrue as soft power abroad.

So how can we reimagine government to address these dual challenges? While we have yet to see a fully-formed new model, four emerging elements — outlined below — constitute something we have termed The Shared Power Principle.

1. Pushing authority to information. Our government structures are still predominantly hierarchical. This works well in situations where the information to inform those decisions can be easily codified and passed up the hierarchy, but many of the challenges we seek to address are complex and require judgement and local knowledge only accessible in situ. As such, we should explore ways of distributing decision-making rights to those best placed to make those decisions. This means putting real power in the hands of frontline workers, communities, and even citizens and residents.

Buurtzorg, the Dutch home care organisation, provides an interesting case study of what adopting a self-managed approach looks like in practice.

2. Thinking in systems. Our models of change are often linear when the problems we face are complex. If the outcomes we seek are emergent properties of complex systems, then there is no point trying to “manage” or “deliver” them in a traditional sense. Instead, systems thinking helps us to focus on those aspects of the wider context that are likely to lead to better outcomes. For example, the extent to which information sharing and learning are encouraged between different players.

The Centre for Community Child Health in Auckland, New Zealand is challenging the traditional role of evidence by adopting a more experimental, innovation-led approach.

3. Being more human. Managerial reforms in recent years have emphasised technical efficiency but arguably under-invested in the more human side of change. This includes the important role that public service values have to play for those working in our public services as well as the need to take a more human-centred approach to the way we design services. It struck me that whilst everyone in the public sector is expected to have basic Excel skills, it would be more useful if everyone had basic ethnographic skills.

Wigan, a local authority in the UK, has transformed the relationship between the community and the council by adopting a human-centred approach at scale.



4. Opening up accountability. Democratic governments are already far more accountable than most other large organisations thanks to elections and constant public scrutiny. However, it is also clear that many of our current accountability mechanisms, such as multi-year election cycles, are insufficient or even broken. New participatory and deliberative mechanisms, such as citizens' juries, are opening up decision-making and accountability in interesting ways and worth exploring further. In addition, continuing to pursue the aims of open government by making as much of government business as transparent and accessible as possible also helps strengthen accountability and citizen participation.

Ireland used a Citizen's Assembly to explore the contentious issues around abortion and are now embarking on a similar process for climate change.

At the moment though, these experiments tend to be happening at the edges, in small teams, and despite the system rather than because of it. We need to bring them into the mainstream. Could Brexit provide the opportunity for the UK to do just this – and the opportunity to lead government transformation globally once again?

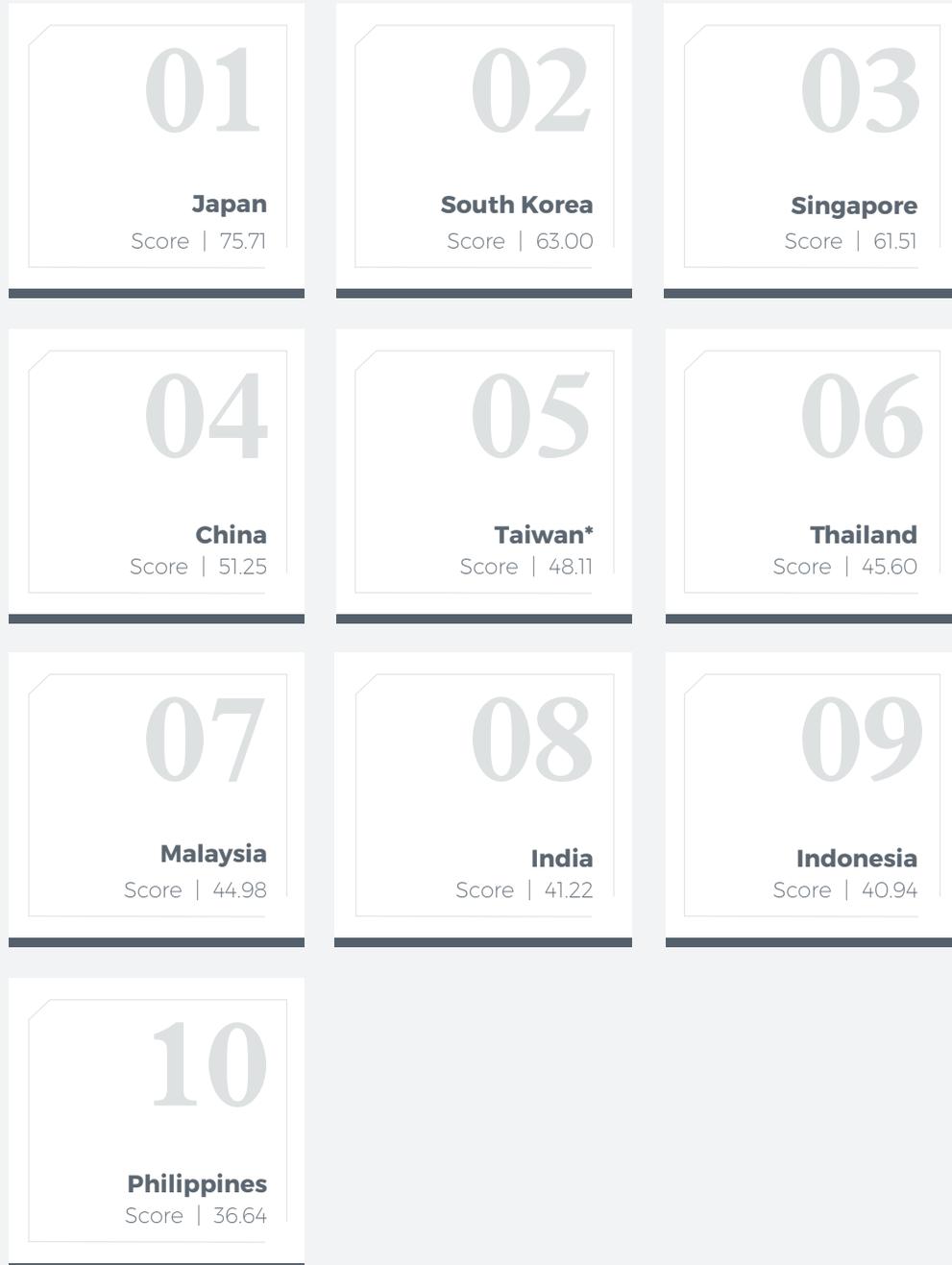
Meeting the dual challenges of effectiveness and legitimacy will likely require some bold steps. Our current model of government (hierarchical, linear, technocratic, closed) has served us well but has run out of road.

Those governments that can drive the next wave of public sector innovation will be seen as leaders and examples for emulation by their international peers. That admiration will give them convening power in government reform and allow them to influence the shape of public policy and administration in the future. The Soft Power 30's research has shown that the Government sub-index of the measurement framework holds the greatest weight among all other categories in determining a country's relative soft power.

Now is the time to reimagine government. Those countries that can lead the way will benefit at home and abroad.

3.5

The Asia Soft Power 10



* Taiwan is a self-governing territory claimed by China

Making (limited) inroads: Why China's Belt and Road struggles to deliver goodwill

By James Crabtree

LEE KUAN YEW SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

Dozens of world leaders flocked to China's second Belt and Road Forum in April this year, hosted in the Sunrise Kempinski, a luxurious golf-ball-shaped hotel next to a lake in Beijing's northern suburbs. Yet although this grand gathering aimed to showcase successes of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its opening actually came at a moment of growing doubt over President Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy venture.

Since launching in 2013, China has ploughed hundreds of billions of dollars into BRI, using infrastructure as a tool to recreate the trading routes that historically criss-crossed Eurasia. The project's architects hoped goodwill would follow, with investment in hard assets helping the country become a soft power giant too.

For all that money, in the year prior to this year's forum it seemed the opposite might be happening. BRI's railway, port, and power projects often left their hosts mired in debt, critics suggested. Recipient nations worried about corruption, as well as the fact that China's mega-projects tended to be built by Chinese workers and run by Chinese state-owned enterprises, creating few jobs for local people or businesses.

As the political backlash over BRI grew, China's leadership faced an alarming question: might BRI in fact be damaging China's standing abroad, rather than enhancing it?

In the sense coined by Harvard's Joseph Nye, countries value soft power because it makes them attractive. Rather than using coercion, national aims can be pushed via a mix of culture, values, and foreign policies — all of which can persuade others to act in ways that advance a given country's own interests.

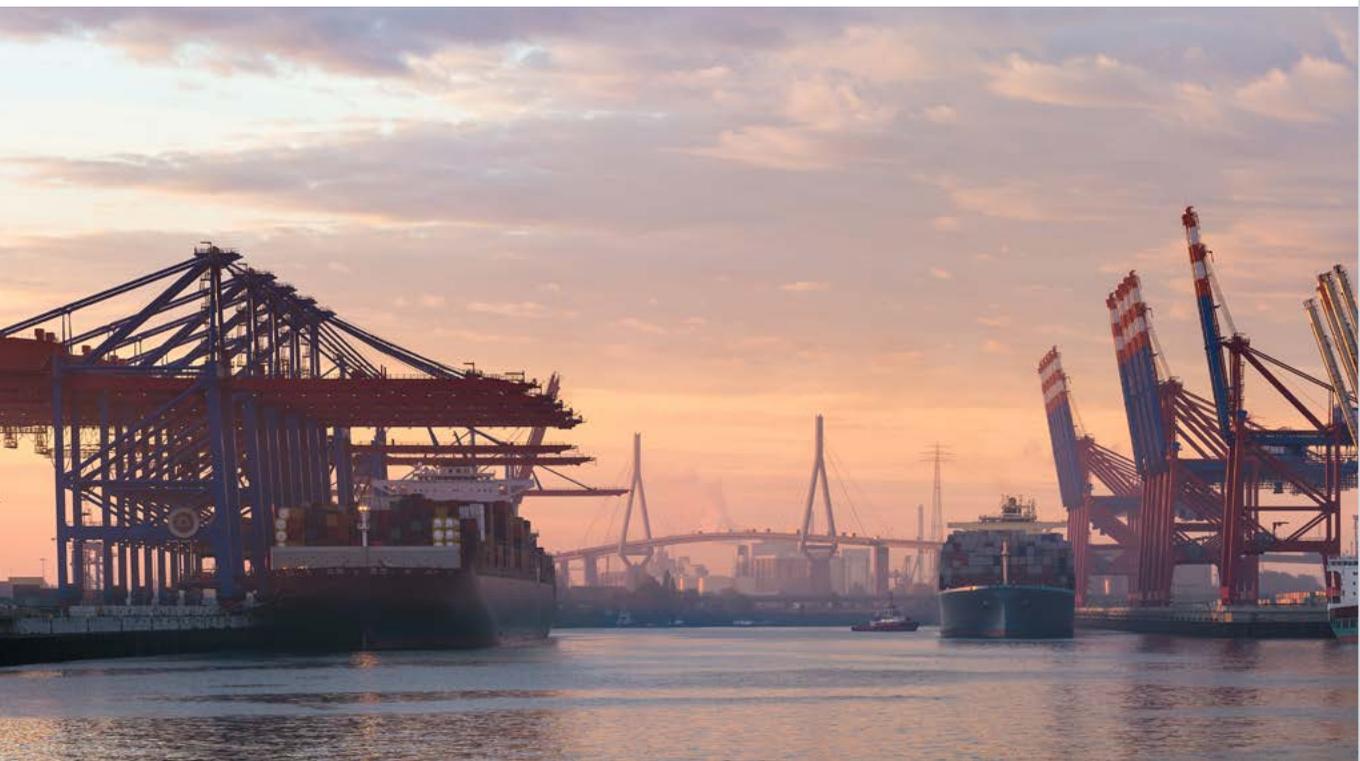
Chinese strategists hope BRI will foster this kind of goodwill in three respects. First, glitzy infrastructure helps position China as a technically-impressive development partner: a nation with its own impressive development record, but also one that is generous and willing to help others.

The scale of BRI's projects then reflect a second factor, namely the successes of China's state-led autocratic model, sometimes dubbed the "Beijing consensus". This in turn helps to build perceptions of Beijing's inevitable rise as Asia's leading power, and one destined to surpass the United States.

Finally, at a deeper cultural level, the idea of building a "new silk road" was designed to awaken a shared cultural and historical memory, linking China to other countries in Asia that did once share the ancient silk road trading routes, and the prosperity they brought.

Although the vast majority of BRI's budgets are spent on infrastructure, its planners did tack on various softer elements, including cultural and "people-to-people" exchanges. Beijing's Tsinghua University even launched a 1-year masters degree about BRI, designed to persuade elites in participant nations about the wisdom of the programme.

At its best this was a powerful combination. Public opinion polls in Pakistan, perhaps the largest recipient of BRI cash, suggest that China



is viewed overwhelmingly positively, in part because of its generous spending. The same is true in others, according to Thomas Trikasih Lembong, an advisor to Indonesia's President Jokowi. "The gravitational pull of China's size and economic capability are virtually irresistible for smaller countries," he said in a recent speech in Singapore.

Yet for all that, BRI's record at building soft power more generally remains mixed. For every country like Pakistan, there are others like Myanmar whose populations remain deeply hostile to Beijing, despite similarly generous levels of Chinese investment.

As well as debt, BRI projects are associated with waste, inefficiency, and cronyism, with contracts controlled by well-connected political insiders. Over recent years, opposition parties in countries like Malaysia and Sri Lanka have won elections in part by accusing their governments of being in China's pocket.

Theorists of soft power also point to the pulling power of culture and ideas, from America's democratic principles to Bollywood movies or K-Pop bands — all hard things to create by state diktat. A few years ago, President Xi suggested that China's "underlying values hold greater appeal than ever before." Yet despite the cultural window dressing, BRI remains at heart a hulking state-directed leviathan, and one that has done little to soften China's harsh international image.

China's infrastructure investments might even take a harder militaristic turn in future, acting as a precursor for the People's Liberation Army.

Add all these doubts together, and in the run up to the second BRI forum, some observers wondered whether BRI might in fact be harming China's reputation. Minxin Pei, a respected Beijing-watcher at Claremont McKenna College, even went as far as to predict that Xi would at first downplay and then eventually abandon his pet plan.

There were few signs of this during April's forum, however, which won positive reviews, both for its line-up of dignitaries and the plethora of new mega deals it unveiled. More than that, the gathering suggested China's leadership had begun to acknowledge some of BRI's perceived shortcomings.

Speaking at the event, Xi announced a range of measures to reform its operation, including new rules to ensure projects did not come at excessive debt or environmental costs. International financial institutions like the World Bank would be invited to participate in projects. BRI's next five years would involve a greater cultural focus, helping to "deepen cooperation in education, science, culture, sports, tourism, health, and archaeology," the Chinese leader said.

Whether any of these changes are actually enacted, and whether they can then begin to deliver on BRI's soft power potential, is harder to judge. China's infrastructure investments might even take a harder, militaristic turn in future, acting as a precursor for the People's Liberation Army. In such a scenario, commercial port investments might morph gradually into extraterritorial Chinese naval bases.

Even if that does not happen, turning BRI into something capable of winning hearts and minds will require far-reaching changes to its model, with the aim of creating a more open, transparent, and ultimately more trustworthy endeavour. But until that does happen, the odds are that BRI will generate less soft power than Chinese leaders will have hoped.

4.0

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It has become cliché to say so, but the impact of digital technology on all aspects of life cannot be overstated. Few interactions and processes today – be they social, commercial, or political, take place in the absence of some digital component. In the context of soft power, this presents both tremendous opportunities, but also daunting challenges for foreign policy and diplomacy.

The following essays and case studies have been commissioned to provide new insights on the latest trends and emerging issues at the intersection of diplomacy and technology. The aim is to help readers get to grips with the changing nature of soft power and diplomacy in a digital first world. Drawing on our partnership with University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy, faculty and adjuncts have contributed the following series of essays. In addition to these essays, two digital diplomacy case studies give a practical account of recent trends in digital communications between governments and global audiences.

Jay Wang, Director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, opens the chapter with an essay that sets up the context of public diplomacy in a digital age. Fadi Chehadé, former Chief Executive Officer of ICANN, then turns to the need for transnational cooperation to develop a new system of digital governance that works for all stakeholders. Kyle Matthews, Executive Director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, looks at the impact of artificial intelligence on diplomacy, information dissemination, and opinion forming. Constance Duncombe, Lecturer in International Relations at Monash University, looks at the role emotions play in the context of digital diplomacy. James Pamment, Senior Lecturer in strategic communications at Lund University, draws on his research on fighting fake news and disinformation. Finally, Katherine Brown, Chief Executive Officer of Global Ties U.S., concludes with a timely reminder that while digital communications are a game changer for diplomacy, the power of people-to-people exchanges, and what Edward R. Murrow called “the last three feet”, remains paramount.

Public diplomacy and our digital future

Jay Wang

USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Given the seemingly inexorable force of technology, diplomacy today can hardly be practised without an element of the digital. When the terms “digital” and “public diplomacy” come together, there are generally two broad meanings. One conversation is familiar to all of us in the field, focusing on how to develop and apply digital capabilities to public diplomacy efforts, commonly referred to as “digital diplomacy.” The other is the road less travelled: what public diplomacy means for advancing the digital economy and society. Both underlie the dynamic intersection where digital technology meets global affairs and public communication. We can call the former “digital for public diplomacy” and the latter “public diplomacy for the digital” to clarify the two related yet different threads of discussion. As technological change continues to accelerate, both domains of practice will challenge and reshape the field of public diplomacy in the years to come.

Digital for public diplomacy

Advancements in digital technology have transformed platforms and tools for communication and engagement. They are turning traditional public diplomacy practices upside down. Doing public diplomacy well these days requires greater familiarity with communication principles and techniques in a rapidly-evolving information landscape. For instance, in both developed and emerging economies, many more people now turn to social networking sites for news and information, bringing about a platform-based media ecosystem that is both fragmented and interlocking¹. In this age of information abundance and mobility, communication attributes, such as transparency, authenticity, exclusivity, and convenience, are elevated to greater prominence. Empowered by digital technology, users now often find themselves in the driver’s seat, signifying a power shift from producers to users; and audiences are now simultaneously communicators. Virtual reality and augmented reality tools are poised to redefine how people experience their worlds. AI and automation are revolutionising communication placements with precise targeting. Indeed, as Silicon Valley shakes up the marketing communication sector through its prowess in data collection and

advanced analytics, digital technology is posing existential threats to a host of traditional players from advertising to public relations². Furthermore, the acceleration of digital technology has dissolved the boundaries between domestic and abroad, making the interaction of national concerns and international engagement ever more dynamic and interdependent. These trends and developments call for not only capacity building for practitioners on the frontlines of public diplomacy in key functional areas of data analytics and storytelling, but also a reexamination and reconfiguration of the operating model as well as analytical frameworks of public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy for the digital

At another level, digital innovation, from the Internet of Things to the sharing economy to automation and the future of work, is also

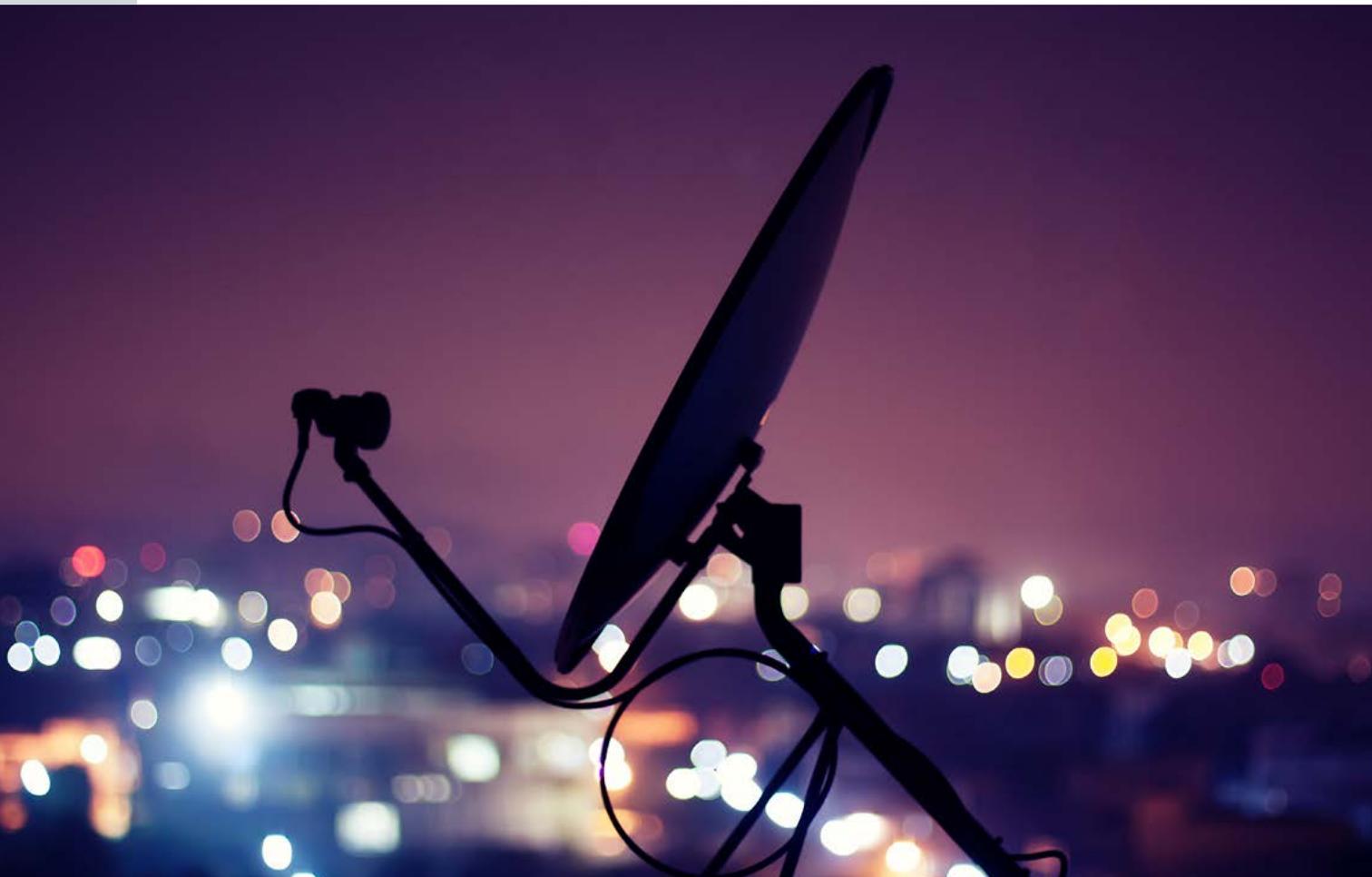


demanding a new set of global public policies to facilitate these technological advances as well as safeguard the rights of the public. Nations and governments have not yet caught up to the fast-changing pace of technology as far as policy-making and policy communication are concerned. Meanwhile, there is a global backlash against tech firms on a range of matters that challenge the business models that made them superstars in the first place. To successfully navigate this fast-moving, ever more complicated, transnational policy arena requires unprecedented international cooperation and cross-sector collaboration³. If public diplomacy is generally understood as a country's efforts to create and maintain relationships with publics in other countries to advance policies and actions, the question then

becomes in what ways public diplomacy may contribute to forging a path forward in expanding the benefits of digital innovation while alleviating the downsides of digital disruption.

The policy challenges concerning digital technology mainly lie in three areas. The first is data governance, from data collection and ownership, to their usage and dissemination. The key debates surrounding data governance centre on data privacy, security, censorship and freedom of speech. The second policy challenge concerns the future of work as a result of the advancements in AI and automation, which are set to reshape the labour market, the skills required of workers and alter the dynamic between employment and leisure. The third policy focal point deals with the concentration and centralisation of power among a few tech firms and the associated debate on anti-trust ramifications.

Two important caveats are worth noting here. One is that these days every company is in varying degrees a “tech company”, given how embedded digital technology has become in any business process. While the public spotlight shines on a few tech giants, these policy matters affect virtually all types of businesses and organisations. Second, contemporary technological disruption is coupled with and indeed compounded by geopolitical disruption, especially in light of the rise of China, which is currently the only country that has created the types of tech giants that can rival those in the United States.



There are no existing regulatory frameworks and tools to adequately address the potentials and practices of digital innovation. As digital technology is increasingly an elemental part of daily life, public concerns about the aforementioned challenges are mounting. And the dystopian vision of digital life, through popular culture, is capturing the imagination of a wider public that is growingly weary of the pace and direction of digital change.

The role of the private sector in public policy-making and communication has evolved over time, yet this role has remained primarily a domestic one. Given current disruptive technologies and the nature of globalisation, businesses must now broaden their policy-making to be transnational in scope. They must develop new capabilities and new partnerships in order to address the growing concerns over digital technology and its social and geopolitical consequences. This policy enterprise involves governments of sovereign states as well as networks of the broader public. For global businesses, public diplomacy principles and tools provide a valuable framework for their international interactions, as they take on aspects of the roles traditionally played by diplomats to navigate the complex international public policy arena. In short, the transnational nature of the digital economy and the urgent necessity of global policy engagement has created a new, yet-to-be-explored, (public) diplomatic space.

As technological advancement and globalisation continue to intensify, so will the interaction between digital technology and public diplomacy. These shifting dynamics engender much uncertainty in state actions and policy priorities. On the one hand, public diplomacy must reinvent itself in the face of transformative technologies to be relevant and impactful. On the other hand, now, more than ever, robust and creative public-private partnerships are critical in maintaining a stable marketplace and world, and diplomatic competencies and tools in modern statecraft are valuable for developing an effective engagement framework for a dynamic, complex global environment. This is an exciting moment for the study and practice of public diplomacy, as the worlds of public diplomacy and digital technology are increasingly and inextricably linked.

As technological advancement and globalisation continue to intensify, so will the interaction between digital technology and public diplomacy.

Everyone at the table: Transnational digital cooperation

Fadi Chehadé

USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY*

If you open any newspaper on any given morning, or any magazine or media source, you will find something in there about the impact of digital on our lives. One could convincingly argue that cyberspace is dead because there is no such separate space anymore. All space has been permeated by the digital revolution, and the power of the internet. This is a fact. Today, we have about 25 to 30 billion things that talk to the internet. By 2030, estimates go anywhere from 1.5 trillion to up to 50 trillion things that will be connected to the internet.

That means our eyes, pacemakers, and possibly other parts of one's physical being, our surroundings, and the physical infrastructure around us will all be linked. A lot of things will be connected to the network. I do not think we are well-prepared for this new reality, but it is coming. Every biological and physical infrastructure will be permeated by the digital fabric.

This evolution is already underway. I see it in the innovation I witness everyday as an entrepreneur and as an AI proponent from the 1980s. As we grapple with the impact of this change, trust is all the more important, yet public trust is diminishing. In fact, various surveys and measures of trust report that public trust in the digital world has started dipping significantly in the last two years. That trend does not show signs of abating.

In many parts of the world, digital has brought the standard of living up in ways we could never have imagined. Some of the applications that we all talk about in East Africa have, according to a UN official, improved the lives of women in East Africa many times over; more than the entire efforts of the United Nations system over the last 50 years. Digital can improve lives, it enables people to advance, to learn, to be educated, it breaks barriers, it does a lot of good things.

But somehow, we must find a new paradigm for cooperation, to ensure that digital tools remain a force for good. Where digital can be used as a malicious force to threaten society, commerce, or security, these forces can be harnessed, and they can be managed.

* This essay is modified from a speech that CPD Advisory Board Fadi Chehadé delivered at the Embassy of Sweden in Washington, D.C. at CPD's Public Diplomacy for the Digital Future event on October 24, 2018.

Digital cooperation

In order to describe how we can together cooperate in this new digital world, I rely on a three-layer model, developed several years ago.

The digital world can be conceptualised as follows:

1. **Infrastructure:** All the networks that enable the digital world;
2. **Logic:** Stability of the internet governed by stakeholders, governments, businesses, and civil societies; and
3. **Economy and Society:** The consumer-level world in which most of us live and work.

In the economic and societal layer, there are no comprehensive systems of governance that are working well today.

There are a small number of ubiquitous platforms that benefit from their popularity. There are a limited number of governments attempting to bring some order to the third layer of Economy and Society, such as the EU with their General Data Protection Regulation proposal, or even Singapore with the Personal Data Protection Act. There are also citizens that are increasingly active in trying to find some semblance of cooperation and organise for their collective voices to be heard. These are the three key stakeholders: **governments, businesses, and the citizenry.** But today, the power between these stakeholders is both contested and fluid, hence the challenge of effective governance in this space.

It used to be that governments controlled law and commerce with very clear jurisdictions to oversee, and their laws and regulations were broadly accepted. When issues or potential disputes began to cross national borders, international organisations were called upon to establish and enforce treaties. The internet was not built around the geopolitical, nation-state borders that were constructed largely in the 19th and 20th centuries. The internet is a transnational resource. It is not an international resource, and it is certainly not a national resource. Governments, as well as multilateral organisations, still have not fully come to terms with this fact. Companies that operate digital platforms are not bound by any geographic boundaries, and cannot be regulated as such.

The internet was not built around the geopolitical nation-state borders that were constructed largely in the 19th and 20th century. The internet is a transnational resource.

This clash is causing the need for new mechanisms that would constitute the cooperation system, to bring these three stakeholders together to agree on how to solve the issues of transnational digital governance. This is not easy. However, unless we collaborate to find a path forward on how these three constituencies, these three stakeholders, can cooperate on the many issues permeating this layer, we have a problem.

UN High-Level Commission

The purpose of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation that UN Secretary-General António Guterres formed in July 2018 was to advance the understanding of cooperation and plot out how it will operate in practice between government, business, and citizens.

The UN does not intend to own this debate exclusively or to dictate its eventual solution, but rather aims to be a convener, enabling all stakeholders, especially in business, civil society, and the citizenry, to come together with governments and agree on a framework for collaboration.

As Professor Anne-Marie Slaughter has said in her books, *New World Order* and *The Chessboard and the Web*, what we need today in this networked age are not vertical models, but rather horizontal networks of cooperation that cut across our vertical, siloed systems of governance that were constructed for a 20th century context, so that people can come together, experts can come together, and practitioners can come together.

We need those experts to come together in a way that is distributed, not centralised, and brings together the people that need to solve the problems. Horizontal networks need a home of sorts, but they must remain bottom-up efforts of experts.

Networks of networks

Finally, there has to be some level of coordination between these networks and platforms, which some of us in the digital and infocomms community call "networks of networks." Again, loosely coupled, nothing top-down, nothing institutional, just frankly like this thing we all love called the internet. Highly distributed, the governance of the internet and the digital space should look like the internet itself.

This new, multipolar, and power-diffused world has implications for the practice of diplomacy. Historically the exclusive territory of governments, diplomacy is no longer the realm of nation-states. For example, I was recently approached by a large, Silicon Valley-based company, asking me to help them recruit ambassadors for their organisation.

Companies are realising that they need to go beyond the standard practices of deploying lobbyists and public policy professionals in a country-by-country manner, and look to a new form of ambassadors – corporate diplomats – that help them practice diplomacy across the world. Businesses, especially those that have transnational platforms and interests, need to develop and recruit talent that can help them navigate the horizontal collaborative models of the future. This is, and will be, distinctly different from the old halls of vertical governance and siloed authority they are used to in national capitals, the UN, and other fora.

Governments need to see the transnational world beyond their immediate borders, and develop the next generation of their diplomats to think differently. They need to deepen their understanding of how to work with companies and platforms.

Finally, citizens and civil society need to find a way to bring each voice into this cooperation system. The internet itself can be a key tool to ensure they are not left out of the rooms where the powerbrokers in government and business are actually making the decisions that will establish the protocols of the future.

The future of transnational digital governance needs to be developed with all three constituencies at the table. Likewise, experts and the institutions that house them – like the Center on Public Diplomacy – should continue to contribute to finding a good path forward for all of us as we learn how to get there.

What we need today in this networked age are not vertical models, but rather horizontal networks of cooperation that cut across our vertical, siloed systems of governance.



With a little help from my friends: Reviving Sri Lankan tourism

PORTLAND CASE STUDY

The Sri Lankan social media landscape has seen some significant swings between highs and lows over the last two years. At times, social media in Sri Lanka has been tarred with one brush on concerns around spreading disinformation and inciting ethnic violence. Shutting down social media platforms had become the immediate reflex reaction from the government to assert control over communications platforms. However, what had been seen as a liability and risk to be managed has become a strong tool during a most challenging time.

On 21 April, Easter Sunday, Sri Lanka witnessed the worst terrorist attack since the end of its long and bloody civil war. Islamist terrorists launched a coordinated attack on churches and luxury hotels across Sri Lanka, killing more than 250 people, including 42 foreign nationals. This resulted in a number of nations advising against visiting Sri Lanka, essentially crippling its crucial tourism industry. The \$4 billion (USD) industry, which accounts for about 5 per cent of Sri Lanka's total economy and almost 12 per cent of the total workforce employment, was in freefall in the aftermath of the attacks.

The government's response was to immediately impose a 10-day nationwide social media ban on platforms including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Having also imposed a similar ban in 2018 following violent riots, there were already growing concerns about the role of social media in Sri Lanka. With the government backlash against social media platforms escalating, the odds of changing tack and collaborating on a campaign to save Sri Lanka's tourism industry seemed vanishingly small. And yet, that is exactly what has come to pass over recent months.

#SriLankaIsSafetoTravel

96 per cent of all active internet users in Sri Lanka hold Facebook accounts, relying on the platform to consume news and stay connected with friends and family around the world. Following a 2018 social media ban, Facebook began working closely with local authorities to promote

What had been seen as a liability and risk to be managed has become a strong tool during a most challenging time.



and improve civic participation by teaching them effective ways to use the platform. Trainings and consultations offered by Facebook to government organisations became a cornerstone in fostering a less adversarial and more collaborative relationship.

In the immediate aftermath of the Easter bombings, resuscitating the tourism industry became a national priority. Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) led on efforts to assure the global community that Sri Lanka was safe to visit. With a digitally savvy population that already had established networks with the ubiquitous Sri Lankan diaspora, it was necessary to leverage these existing connections to get that message across.

MOFA thus developed a digital strategy, coining the hashtag #SriLankalsSafetoTravel to spread the message that Sri Lanka was ready to welcome tourists again. Facebook was chosen as the ideal platform to spread this message, following the effective outreach to civil service organisations. MOFA introduced the hashtag through a series of short video interviews with international travellers reaffirming Sri Lanka's safety.

This was in turn shared via Facebook by embassies and missions spanning Vietnam, Poland and Kuwait. The embedded video posts were well received, generating significant traffic and engagement. As the hashtag became more popular, Sri Lanka's diplomatic network proactively created videos to share on their own official Facebook accounts.

The successful pick up of #SriLankalsSafetoTravel, and the use of embedded videos, allowed government and diplomatic channels to adopt a more informal and personal tone.

Call in the bloggers

The message that Sri Lanka was once again a safe destination was effectively disseminated via formal channels, but informal channels were also needed to reach potential travellers.

In 2017, the Sri Lankan Tourism Bureau (SLTB) organised the inaugural visiting bloggers programme, inviting international bloggers and social media influencers to tour and promote Sri Lanka to a wider audience. The programme was a success, resulting in a combined social media reach of over ten million views. SLTB reached out to this network of bloggers in 2019 for help in spreading the message that Sri Lanka was once again safe for travel. 22 bloggers representing key markets in Europe and America, with a combined social media following of seven million, toured Sri Lanka to help promote the country as a safe, friendly destination. Facebook and Instagram content shared the #SriLankasSafeToTravel hashtag, generating almost five million initial views. The message that Sri Lanka was safe was now no longer just shared by the Sri Lankan Government, it had become a global message intended for a global audience.

Better with friends

A global response from celebrities and social media influencers was an unexpected boost for Sri Lankan tourism and helped create a new Bring a Friend Home (BAFH) campaign.

Cinnamon Hotels was responsible for launching the BAFH campaign, asking Sri Lankans (and expatriate residents of Sri Lanka) to invite friends and family living abroad to visit the country and take advantage of attractive discount packages. Invitations were shared over Facebook and WhatsApp.

Bollywood star and former Miss Sri Lanka Jacqueline Fernandez was the first invited guest to help kick-start the BAFH campaign. A Sri Lankan herself, Ms Fernandez's visit was intended to create much-needed hype around the campaign and push crucial messages around Sri Lanka's safety and attractiveness as a tourist destination. And as an Instagram influencer with more than 32 million followers, Ms Fernandez's involvement generated exceptional engagement around the world.

Following a high-profile launch, it is now up to Sri Lankans to join the effort in inviting friends to their country to help lift the recovering tourism industry.

A friendly reception

Sri Lanka's tourism industry is showing gradual signs of recovery with a strong uptick in winter bookings for 2019. The industry may only have to weather a 10 per cent fall in tourist arrivals in 2019, as opposed to the more than 30 per cent drop that had been forecasted.

Sri Lanka's digital strategy to revive its tourism industry might have been multi-faceted, but the narrative has stayed constant – Sri Lanka is a safe, welcoming and friendly destination. With a clear key message to unite around, Sri Lanka's public and private sector took the initiative to promote critical information through both formal government channels and public-friendly informal channels.

A clear call to action for Sri Lankan citizens made the effort a truly national effort that combined the personal element of friendship with an international digital communications campaign.

Sri Lanka's decision to embrace a digital strategy focused on social media platforms was key. The ability to disseminate concise messages swiftly to a wide audience segment has both up and downsides. Sri Lanka's experience offers lessons for utilising social media platforms effectively, as opposed to policing or restricting them outright.



Short circuit: What will artificial intelligence mean for diplomacy?

Kyle Matthews

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Over the past decade and a half, the rise of new technologies, social media platforms in particular, has transformed the field of diplomacy. Diplomats have new tools at their disposal, and social media now puts global audiences in easy reach of foreign policymakers, allowing governments to reach out to these audiences instantly. They are able to foster an exchange of ideas between individuals and civil society at home and abroad. Social media continues to drive an ongoing evolution of how countries can develop and leverage their soft power.

While social media platforms are easy to use and complement the work of diplomats, they have also become a double-edged sword. When social media was in its infancy, very few experts predicted that these same tools would be used by authoritarian states to launch misinformation campaigns, spy on citizens, harvest personal data, or interfere in the democratic elections of other states. Neither did many anticipate that non-state actors would use these technologies to plan attacks, incite violence online, broadcast propaganda, and brainwash others to engage in violent extremism.

Diplomats are now in a constant cycle of needing to update their ways of working to deal with the evolving challenges that stem from emerging technologies. One such frontier technology, artificial intelligence (AI), is fast starting to reshape our world. It is imperative that diplomats understand the key concepts of AI, how AI will impact diplomacy and international relations, and how it might be deployed for malicious purposes.

Why is this important? Because the AI revolution is happening now. It will continue to reshape most, if not all, industries and professions, including diplomacy. Diplomats need to see AI as a new addition to the wider toolkit that states use to influence other states and non-state actors. AI will permit countries to assert more power in the digital space and influence digital actors.

The AI revolution is happening now. It will continue to reshape most, if not all, industries and professions, including diplomacy.

Diplomats receive regular training on language, culture, negotiation skills, religion, and international law, to name just a few. Going forward, they will need to have a conceptual and practical understanding of AI. Machine learning, algorithms, automation, bots, deepfakes, and machine-driven communications tools (MADCOMS) all need to become part of the diplomat's lexicon.

Information warfare

In the Atlantic Council report "MADCOM Future", Matt Chessen details how MADCOMS, "[t]he integration of AI systems into machine-driven communications tools for use in computational propaganda", are developing at breakneck speeds.

MADCOMS have the potential to produce highly personalised propaganda that will enhance various actors' ability to influence people by tailoring persuasive, distracting, or intimidating messaging. Computational propaganda includes the use of automation, algorithms, and big-data analytics to manipulate public life by spreading disinformation online, producing automated amplification with bots and fake accounts.

This type of AI can extrapolate trends and large-scale patterns of behavior which can be used to influence opinions, choices, and decisions of individuals and the wider society being targeted. It is expected to lead to dynamic content generation, psychometric profiling, and automated video and audio manipulation tools. Massive amounts of online data can be processed to identify people based on their personality, political preferences, religious affiliation, demographic data, and other personal interests.

Falsifying reality: deepfakes

Deepfakes, which are media (video, audio, and images) altered by AI to falsify reality, pose a unique challenge. Their potential impact should not be underestimated. They can be used to exploit or sabotage individual identities, undercut rational decision-making, distort policy debates, manipulate elections, erode trust in institutions, exacerbate social cleavages, generate civil unrest, and disrupt bilateral relations between countries. Imagine the non-consensual computer-generated version of an elected official's face, such as Barack Obama, using a series of pictures that closely matches the original expressions of another person in a video.



This technology can make anyone appear to say or do something that they never said or did, e.g. speaking in derogatory tones towards an ethnic or religious group. These AI-enabled methods that allow the creation of deepfakes are becoming more and more sophisticated, easily accessible, and relatively cheap to produce. They also have the potential to become all-the-more threatening if used by computational propagandists for political manipulation.

Nefarious actors continue to drive innovation in AI for machine-generated influence of public opinion and sow division. The ongoing diplomatic spat between Canada and Saudi Arabia is a case in point. When the Canadian Embassy in Riyadh issued a statement in Arabic on Twitter calling for the Saudi government to release women's rights activists in the Kingdom, the Canadian government observed that AI-powered bots were quickly deployed to foment societal divisions and encourage "separatist sentiments in Quebec", threatening the country's political stability.

AI models will increasingly be misused to generate fake news and spread malicious disinformation. Sophisticated algorithms are being developed to complement and eventually overtake what actual people are doing. In "The Coming Automation of Propaganda" article for War on The Rocks, Frank Adkins and Shawn Hibbard warned that "recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) may soon enable the automation of much of this work, massively amplifying the disruptive potential of online influence operations."

Former Chief of the Russian General Staff Yuri Baluyevsky said a few years ago that a victory in information warfare "can be much more important

than victory in a classical military conflict, because it is bloodless, yet the impact is overwhelming and can paralyse all of the enemy state's power structures." Russia has a long history of exacerbating divides on fractious social issues by targeting susceptible minority groups. It would be naïve for diplomats to believe AI will not be weaponised by Russia, other authoritarian states, and malicious non-state actors.

Moving forward

We are headed toward a future where machine-driven communications, enabled by AI tools, will dominate the online information environment. Soon, it may be impossible for people to tell whether they are interacting with a human or a robot online.

Authoritarian states, where journalists and civil society organisations have little to no freedom to hold governments accountable for the unethical use of AI, face few constraints in how they use these emerging technologies globally and against democracies. At the same time, AI gives authoritarian states a technological edge in an expanding digital world. At this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, George Soros singled out China's use of AI against its citizens and open societies as a "mortal threat".

Democratic governments are starting to act. Global Affairs Canada has established the Center for International Digital Policy that monitors and responds to the misuse of AI. The Canadian Foreign Service Institute has begun training Canadian diplomats on the impact of AI cluster technologies on diplomacy. The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created the annual "Digital Diplomacy Camp" event, which brings together tech experts and civil society leaders under one roof to share ideas and best practices with Dutch diplomats.

While this is a positive start, diplomats must catch up before it is too late. Democratic and open societies need to empower their diplomats and provide them with additional resources and training on all aspects of AI. Given that the internet is international, it is imperative that countries see the emergence of AI as a global issue, not just a technical one.

4.4

Feeling digital diplomacy: Soft power, emotion, and the future of public diplomacy

Constance Duncombe

MONASH UNIVERSITY

In late April 2019, US President Donald Trump met with Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey in the Oval Office. This followed an earlier tweet in which Trump claimed Twitter was playing “political games”. While President Trump tweeted that they had a “great meeting” and “lots of subjects were discussed regarding their platform, and the world of social media in general”, Trump spent at least a proportion of the time voicing concerns over his declining follower numbers, amidst claims of partisan censorship by Twitter². What this White House meeting with one of the tech giants shows is the power of social media: how necessary it is to enhance the scope and outreach of “the message”, particularly in the promotion of political identity through these platforms. Social media is a valuable tool, for political leaders and diplomats alike. Yet we often overlook why this might be the case, beyond simply the opening of another channel of communication between a state and its domestic and foreign publics. Emotion is key to this increasing digitisation of public diplomacy: we cannot fully understand digital diplomacy without considering the power of emotion in cultivating an identity that underlies public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is fundamentally about developing and handling relationships between a state and its foreign publics. Part of this process involves persuasion, which Joseph Nye has shown is an important component of soft power – the ability to influence foreign publics to accept or agree with the foreign policy agenda of the state in question. Persuasion is not just about building connections through material gain or coercive force, there is also an important emotional component that underlies successful public diplomacy strategies. Such initiatives facilitate sympathetic relations between states and their foreign publics, to the extent that their domestic public support greater cooperation and engagement. The key here is the link between persuasive public diplomacy strategies and identity politics: states employ public diplomacy strategies not only to convince others of a particular policy agenda, but also to persuade them that the identity related to those policies has moral worth and should be recognised in their dealings with others. The mobilisation of identity as part of public diplomacy strategy

is at least in part framed through an emotional context¹³. Soft power is, therefore, intertwined with emotions in ways that we have yet to fully explore.

If public diplomacy sits at the nexus of identity and emotion, so too does digital diplomacy. The communications revolution has greatly enhanced the scope and level of outreach of public diplomacy strategies. Yet there is an important change in conventional public diplomacy strategies, which were far more aligned in practice with state-based communications directed at foreign publics – a form of top-down messaging. The digitisation of communication means that policymakers and diplomats now have to contend with far greater levels of transparency and accountability in their actions, partly because of an increased expectation about openness towards the general public, both domestic and foreign. The potential for greater dialogic practices of communication also introduces a further complication, namely the spread of emotional contagion over social media platforms. Emotions can spread from person to person: fear, joy, anger and sadness, these can all be transferred between individuals, and from individuals to a group. Text-based social media posts, and the images that accompany them, are imbued with an emotional resonance that can influence how people respond to them, and also generate emotional reactions in their own right. This means tweets, Facebook and Weibo posts, or Instagram stories can go beyond the online realm such that individual reactions can be shared between followers or broader online networks, which are then discussed in the offline, “real world” environment. The difficulty here is that if digital diplomacy strategies aim to cultivate a particular emotion

Persuasion is not just about building connections through material gain or coercive force, there is also an important emotional component that underlies successful public diplomacy strategies.

within a community, this is complicated by the nature of social media – wherein the distinction between domestic and foreign publics is effectively obsolete – and the nature of emotions – while one person might feel a certain way, there is no guarantee that others will have the same emotional response.

What does the intersection between social media, identity and emotion mean for the future of public diplomacy? One of the most challenging issues policymakers and diplomats will face is the destabilising effects of digital disinformation¹⁴. Fake news is increasingly difficult to counter, particularly in relation to undermining positive representations of state identity. Even when exposed as propaganda, as a strategic untruth, this does not necessarily mean people will either believe or act on this new information. This is partly because digital disinformation can feel true, especially if we are emotionally invested in believing certain fake news narratives.

While it is a disputed concept, the “backfire effect¹⁵” offers a useful way to explain why those susceptible to believing falsehoods remain unconvinced when presented with evidence that exposes the truth of disinformation. The online spread of conspiracism – the less articulate version of conspiracy theory¹⁶, built on what Jay David Bolter calls “incoherent, often contradictory assertions rather than a consistent story¹⁷” – is another newfound challenge for public diplomacy, one that relies largely on innuendo with no need for explanation. Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum liken this to social validation: “if a lot of people are saying it, it must be true enough¹⁸”. Social media allows for the ease of information communication, and conspiracism thrives in this environment. Users can share texts and images without any verification, with each untruth gaining more attention than the last. The ramping up of anger and outrage feeds into social media algorithms that reward popular posts with more visibility and promotion on those sites¹⁹.



Digital diplomacy will remain a key component of public diplomacy strategies, and will perhaps become an even more powerful foreign policy tool. Yet if we focus too much on analysing networks and algorithms, we overlook the human element – the emotional and ideational components that are part of how we use social media and interact online – and risk falling into the trap of technological determinism. To facilitate effective digital diplomacy, particularly in light of efforts to counter digital disinformation, we need to pay more attention to the complex intersection of social media, emotions, and identity, and the implications this has for the effectiveness of strategic soft power initiatives.



Branding for change: What diplomats can learn from the campaigns for change at the 2019 Women's World Cup

PORTLAND CASE STUDY

While digital campaigns run by government bodies can help to communicate policy positions, drive trade, and encourage tourism, campaigns on global issues that lead to real-world change are exceptionally rare.

As the respected former Ambassador of France to Israel, Gerard Araud, noted: "Diplomacy is working with everybody – including the devil – to reach mediocre and dubious compromises which eventually improve a given situation."

Up to now, the standard playbook calls for deploying well-known celebrity advocates to boost awareness and advocate for coordinated international action on a given challenge. However, the pace of technological change, exponentially expanding online noise, and the expensive campaigning tactics required to influence sceptical and passive audiences, has meant that even well-funded groups and organisations can struggle to execute compelling digital campaigns by themselves.

As we have set out in our previous editions, diplomacy in the digital age is no longer limited to foreign affairs ministries. The rise of digital networks and the shift in power from state to non-state actors has destroyed the old hierarchies when it comes to campaigning. Just look at Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion's impact on the climate debate.

Just as tourism boards and trade offices now take on critical roles in nation branding and projecting of soft power, new actors in the form of non-governmental organisations, grassroots movements, and commercial brands are taking the lead in campaigning for change on major foreign and domestic policy issues.

Women's World Cup 2019

Prior to this summer's 2019 World Cup in France, women's football was caught up in a constellation of disputes over gender parity in pay, equal inclusion, and the importance of professional women's sport.

The objective of football federations and governing bodies involved in the Women's World Cup was to increase uptake of the sport amongst women and girls. For the brands and sponsors involved, the objective matched their own commercial goals. Andrew Champion, Nike's Chief Financial Officer explained: "The women's footwear and apparel market is 1.5 times the size of the men's footwear and apparel market globally. But it accounts for less than [a] quarter of our revenue."

The confluence of priorities amongst these actors provides a new case study on how networks of like-minded individuals, sports organisations, and commercial brands are able to generate the critical mass required not just to mobilise opinion, but to deliver real change. And social media channels have become the key platforms for change.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram play a critical role in connecting communities and building a sense of belonging. @football4women, for example, shares user-generated content of amateur female footballers, and has amassed over 80,000 followers on Instagram.

Social media platforms also provide individuals, sports organisations, and commercial brands the opportunity to interact with fans and consumers on a regular basis, building trust and brand loyalty. Increasingly, organisations and their fans are joining conversations on broader topics, including gender diversity, and platforms such Facebook and Instagram have given them a powerful voice in the global debate.

In advance of the tournament, UEFA's #TimeforAction and #WePlayStrong campaigns set out their strategy to double the number of players in the sport, improve player standards, and increase female representation throughout their organisation. #WePlayStrong's main campaign video, shared on the campaign's Facebook page, has been viewed over eight million times.

The inclusion of a strategic pillar devoted to increasing commercial value outlined how sponsors such as Nike would support the campaign's strategic goals. Through aligning commercial opportunities with the values of the campaign, a partnership was created that allowed both stakeholders to benefit from each other's involvement, while advancing



The creative nous and financial clout provided by partnering commercial organisations helped deliver public engagement through compelling content projected by well-funded, effective campaign platforms.



the cause. Nike's subsequent marketing campaign during the World Cup reflected the values in the UEFA campaign, and as an official #WePlayStrong supporter it was able to amplify the core messages through its creative (marketing) content.

Another example centred on the announcement of the English team's World Cup squad. Using a social media countdown, each member of the squad was announced by major British public figures, including ex-England football star David Beckham, high-profile women's rights activist Emma Watson, and pop icon Ellie Goulding.

The convening power of the English Football Association and its public clout provided the ideal platform for the projection of a powerful narrative around inclusion and the wider value of women's football by British society. The inclusion of establishment figures such as HRH the Duke of Cambridge reinforced buy-in and support from the highest levels of the British state.

In all cases, the campaigns delivered against the three factors digital diplomacy expert Tom Fletcher sets out as being vital for effective digital campaigns: authenticity, purpose, and engagement. This was achieved by coordination across a range of actors who were aligned by a common set of values and leveraged their combined strengths to advocate for specific, tangible outcomes.

Digital platforms are driving global interest in women's sports, which is generating real financial rewards for women athletes, as well as powering social change. Research by video management platform organisation Imagen found that Instagram and Facebook have the highest engagement in women's sports. The FIFA Women's World Cup Facebook page has over 1.1 million likes, while the Instagram page has over 160,000 followers. Official FIFA Women's World Cup social accounts had registered 433 million views gaining almost two million followers throughout the tournament. New revenue streams are being opened up via live streaming platforms such as Facebook Watch, which will contribute significantly to the growth of women sports. And social media clout played a critical role in fuelling this rise.

The creative nous and financial clout provided by partnering commercial organisations helped deliver public engagement through compelling content projected by well-funded, effective campaign platforms. The national teams themselves became the advocates for change, giving the

campaigns a political voice. Putting the players at the fore ensured that the message was more authentic and powerful than it ever could have been coming from government or diplomatic actors. USA Team Captain Alex Morgan has 8 million followers on Instagram and 3.5 million followers on Facebook. Her Instagram post on the World Cup Final received an engagement level of 736,000. The involvement of football associations and other quasi-governmental groups provided a direct route into government policy making processes, thus clearing a path to deliver the change being demanded.

This fracturing, or democratisation, of influence should be viewed as a step forward for the diplomatic community despite the surrender of control and ownership over certain issues it necessitates. As brands and companies become more attuned to the values of their customers and the commercial opportunities provided by heightened awareness, they will offer expertise and campaigning resources in order to align marketing and communications activities with the values of their clients, customers, and stakeholders.

A diplomats' strength rests in their ability to bring together civil society, decision makers, and commercial organisations around a set of values or campaign. By bringing these networks together and providing them with political purpose and access, diplomats can help support and deliver campaigns on their foreign policy priorities. The trick, as noted by Fletcher and others, is then getting out of the way and letting others take the lead. The Women's World Cup social media footprint is a strong testament to doing just that.



4.5 From soft to sharp: Dealing with disinformation and influence campaigns

James Pamment

LUND UNIVERSITY

Back in 1990, Joseph Nye conceptualised power as the “ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not²⁰”. He argued that “the fragmentation of world politics into many different spheres has made power resources less fungible, that is, less transferable from sphere to sphere²¹”. For example, it seemed more difficult by the end of the Cold War to convert military power into trade deals than it was in the age of gunboat diplomacy. Although this was regrettable for the world’s preeminent military force, Nye found solace in the idea that “other instruments such as communications, organisational and institutional skills, and manipulation of interdependence have become important²²”. The grand strategic question for post-Cold War statecraft, therefore, became one of “how holders of power could wield that power to shape or distort patterns of interdependence that cut across national boundaries²³”, by leaning on an array of soft power resources in conjunction with the hard power of military and economic levers.

Marcel Van Herpen argues that many of the activities encompassed within Nye’s view of soft power have been rearticulated by the Kremlin through the lens of an existential threat from the West²⁴. Such an understanding appears emblematic of how authoritarian and underdog powers might view the soft power of foreign states as it radiates into their sovereign territory. Viewed as a zero-sum game, soft power becomes a synonym for foreign intervention: destabilising activities managed centrally by antagonistic states in support of their selfish foreign policy objectives, working through carefully selected proxies based in the country, and threatening sedition via multiple nonconventional attack vectors. For the underdog looking to exert its own asymmetric foreign influence, influence operations are a necessary tactic in a world where force and coercion alone cannot be relied upon to produce foreign policy outcomes. Influence operations are complex interdependence made ugly.

For authoritarian countries, running influence campaigns means scoping for vulnerabilities and exploits in one sector of a foreign society in order to have an impact (or a series of impacts) in another. This relies on a necessarily fluid understanding of the sociocultural conjunctures that link different sectors at different times, as well as the continual testing of unconventional methods that can achieve desired results. Therefore, this corrupted interpretation of soft power is about strategic patience and grasping sudden opportunities, analysing and measuring vulnerabilities, systematic testing, getting lucky, getting things wrong, and then doubling down when a door seems to open. It is a task for the opportunist as much as the master strategist. Digital technologies, and more importantly the social habits around them, have exponentially increased the opportunities for exploiting complex interdependence. Closer interconnectedness between peoples creates more complex interdependence, hence greater opportunities for exerting influence.



Unsurprisingly, since Russia intervened in Crimea and the 2016 US Presidential Election, Western democracies have become increasingly preoccupied with methods for coping with these kinds of challenges. For the past couple of years, my research team at the Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University, has been supporting governments by designing processes to handle different aspects of influence operations. In Sweden, we worked with the Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) to develop a training package for public sector communications professionals for dealing with hostile foreign influence during the 2018 general election and beyond. In the UK, we worked with the Cabinet Office and Foreign & Commonwealth

Office to create a systematic process for monitoring and responding to disinformation for all government departments. In Finland, we worked with the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats on protecting elections. We have been commissioned by a variety of

public and private sector organisations to help them mitigate the effects of influence operations on their work. Our small team has trained thousands of civil servants and seen our methods adopted by dozens of countries and organisations around the world.

In our experience, raising awareness of the risks of influence operations is crucial to developing societal resilience. Good communication between government departments, the private sector (especially tech companies), researchers, and the general public can be a challenge, though major events like elections tend to focus energies and can build sustainable relationships. Open source monitoring techniques and the ability to efficiently de-classify information are also important to developing early warning systems. Perhaps our best advice to organisations at the operational level is to ignore disinformation unless it really presents a critical threat to them. If they do choose to respond, then they need to counteract the intention rather than just rebut the message. These steps may seem small, but getting our own house in order is essential to creating resilience to these kinds of threats.

I mentioned above that authoritarian states sometimes experience Western soft power as an attack on their institutions and political systems; as a form of political interference. The justification for their influence operations in democratic countries is simply that they are giving back what they have received for so many years. If democracy is so vulnerable to interference, they argue, maybe the system is not so robust after all. However, we should be wary of falling into the trap of relativism. Using soft power to attract and persuade, ultimately in support of democracy promotion, is not the same as deliberate efforts to delegitimise, disenfranchise and confuse.



Influence operations are malicious, and their aim is to create disorder so that authoritarian states can extend their spheres of power without a coordinated response from Western states.

Our response should not be to fight fire with fire. Governments should not be relying solely on countermeasures such as reciprocal cyber and hybrid attacks. More importantly, we should double-down on the soft power and good governance that so irritate authoritarian states. We should invest more in public diplomacy, strengthening civil society, media pluralism, people-to-people exchanges, and democracy promotion. Such activities are legitimate forms of influence, whereas spreading disinformation is not. It's time to get clear about where ethical lines, and the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate influence, are drawn. Isolationism in the current context is a cowardly response to the challenge of hybrid threats.

The debate surrounding influence operations shows that soft power is intimately connected to sharp power. Communication is a force multiplier, and if used effectively can generate asymmetrical effects. This is nothing new of course, but what we have seen over the past few years demonstrates that a willing underdog can create a disproportionate impact with relatively low-cost, low-risk efforts to pollute the information environment. Some countries and organisations will be inspired to conduct their own influence operations, perhaps upon targets that lack the resources of major Western democracies, and whose public spheres are all the more susceptible to manipulation. I expect our future discussions of soft power to be increasingly coloured by critical questions of how it can be used to push back on trends of manipulation and illegitimate influence.

We should double-down on the soft power and good governance that irritate authoritarian states.

4.6 Face-time: Building trust in international affairs through exchanges

Katherine Brown

GLOBAL TIES U.S.

As Joseph Nye defined it, soft power is the ability to “entice and attract,” and resultingly, shape the preferences of others. A nation’s soft power rests on its culture, political values, and foreign policies. But the currents running through all three are authenticity and credibility. For one to be attracted to a nation, they have to have trust in it.

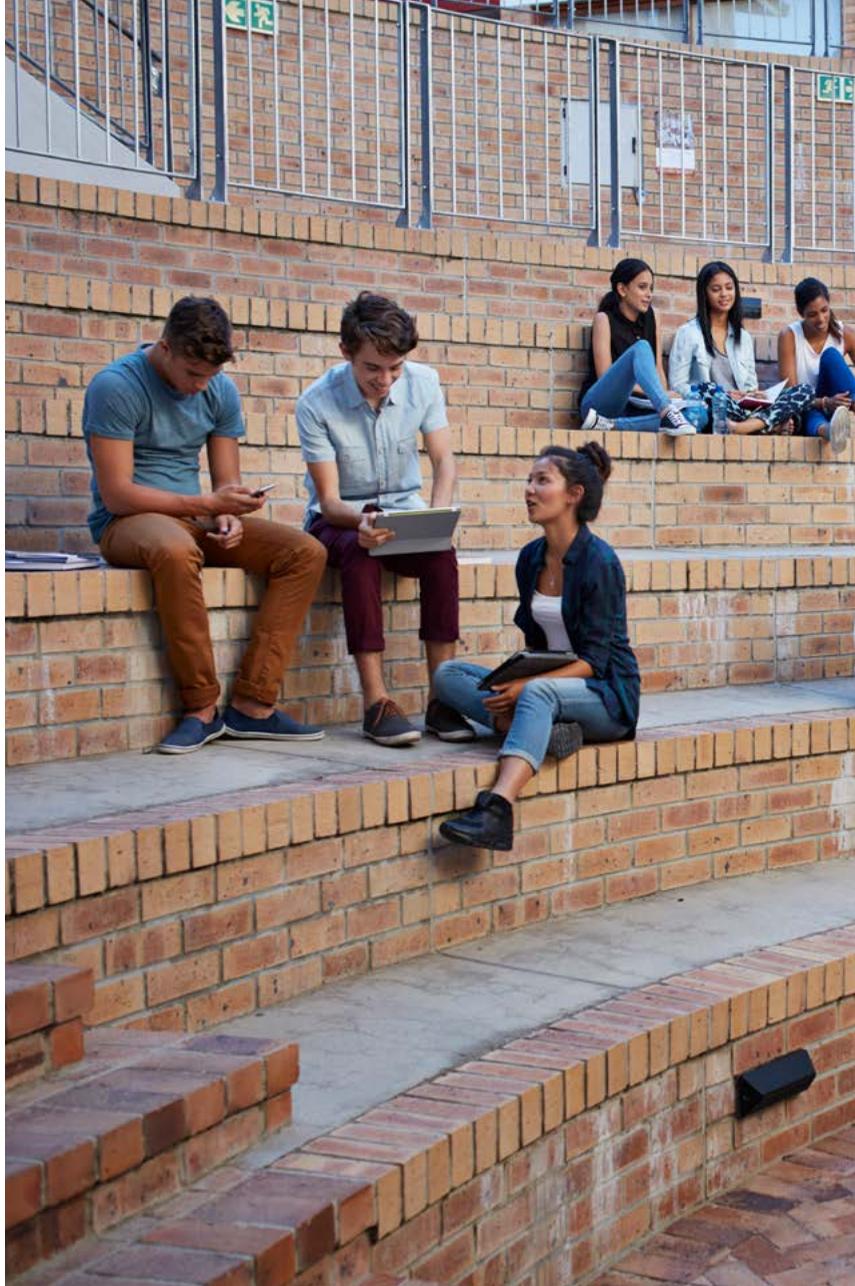
Trust matters because it is the bedrock of all relationships, be they social, commercial, or political. And the conduct of foreign affairs, too, is based on relationships. Negotiations are not simply transactions; they are beholden to decades, if not centuries of history and sociocultural norms, biases, and visceral senses of nationalism. And as the world has become more connected, and more complicated, there are thousands more actors who can affect the outcomes of diplomacy and commerce than ever before. Each has a worldview depending on where they are standing. If one is to deconstruct and transform their idea of a place and a people, and begin to trust them, they have to come into contact with it.

This is why international exchange programmes - which can reach actors at all levels of government, media, business, and civil society - between countries are so essential.

In 2012, the British Council, which promotes British culture and English language learning in countries across the globe, delved deeply into the issue of trust in international relations and what it means for the United Kingdom’s role in the world. In their report, “Trust Pays,” they wrote: “The extent to which we can become an outwardly-facing, influential, and prosperous nation will be determined, in no small part, by the quality of our relationships... To extend cooperation beyond the transactional and into a multiplying force requires trust.”

Building that trust does not need to be the exclusive domain of state-to-state relationships, but can also include the myriad of other people-to-people connections and the unofficial, non-government networks that are vital to sustaining trust between people and nations, long after political leaders hand over power and responsibilities to their successors.

People can communicate more holistically in person: social cues are louder, silence is better interpreted, surrounding environments can make points more vivid.

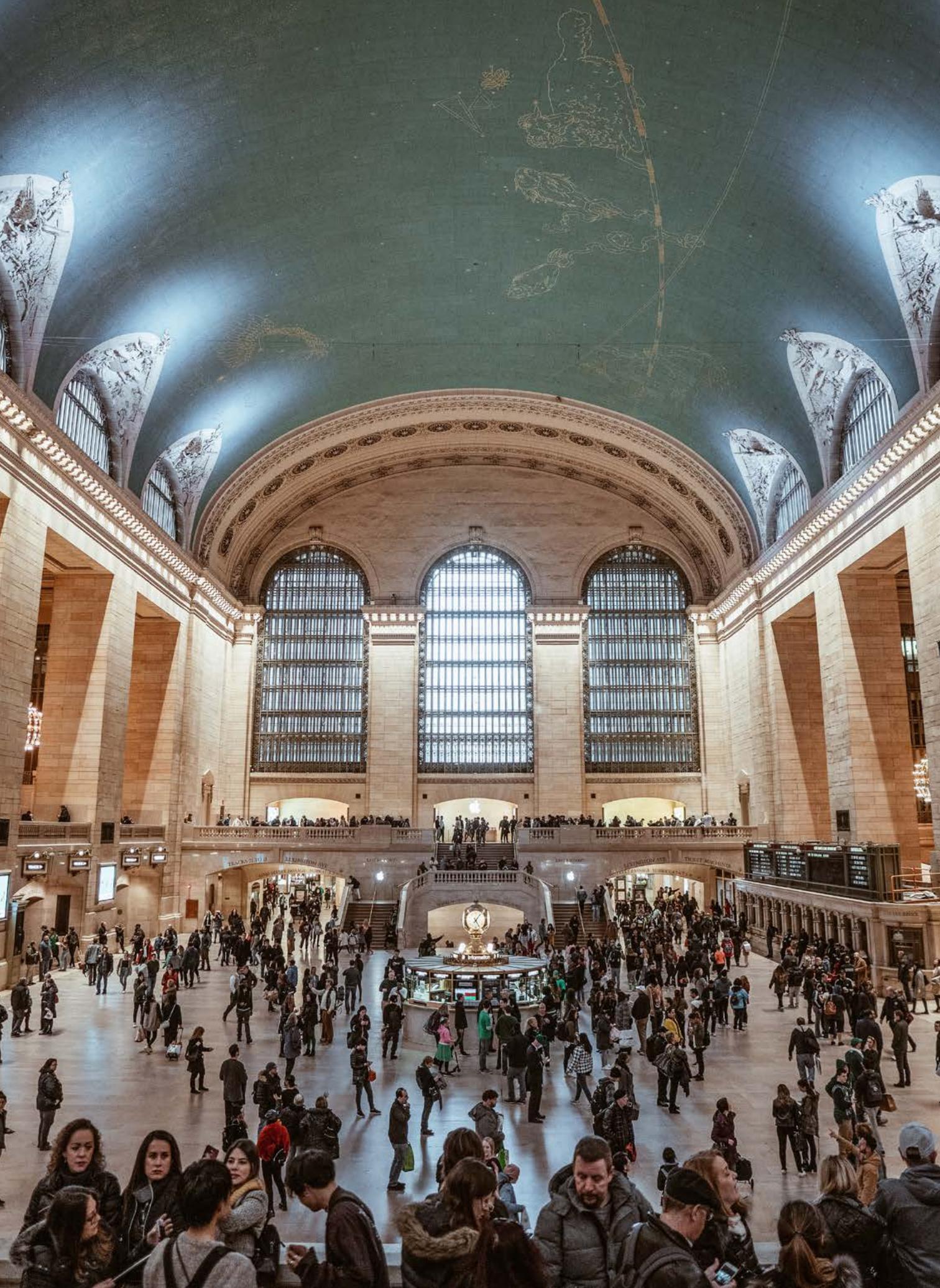


The more face-time those connections have, the more durable the relationships between countries are. In his work on the social psychology of diplomacy, Marcus Coleman found that social, in-person interactions can be incredibly powerful. New technology tools are critical for sharing information, but face-time is critical to building trust. People can communicate more holistically in person: social cues are louder, silence is better interpreted and surrounding environments can make points more vivid. Most importantly, it provides an experience that is likely to stick with you.

Recognising their power, the US government has been funding and facilitating international exchange programmes for decades. There are currently more than six dozen recurring exchange initiatives, with hundreds more ad hoc programmes created each year for the sake of building trust and mutual understanding between foreign citizens and Americans.

The oldest and most foundational exchange programme, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), will celebrate 80 years of continuous operation in 2020. More than 300 current and former heads of state have been participants, in addition to tens of thousands of leaders in business, education, politics, and civil society. For years, through a position mandated by the US Congress to understand the effects of this work, I had the privilege of meeting with alumni of these exchange programmes around the world. Often, they spoke of their surprise of the spirit of American philanthropy and volunteerism, of the strength of civil society and institutions. Thanks to the Global Ties Network – which includes roughly 100 non-profits that serve all 50 states, and dozens more international members – these foreign leaders got to see the US up close as a multidimensional country. Through their interpersonal experiences, they felt authenticity, developed a sense of empathy, and built a relationship with the country. They may still have reservations about aspects of American power or US foreign policy, but they often spoke about believing more in the credibility of American democracy. A nation's communications campaigns, delivered via various tools like social media channels, opinion pieces, and other traditional media hits can help to amplify messages. But they likely won't have this same transformational effect that people-to-people exchanges have.

Trust is essential if there is to be positive outcomes between state and non-state actors alike, as any partner in large efforts for diplomacy, business, and advocacy need to be seen as credible by the other. No alliance can exist without it. Yet, trust and soft power take time to build and to maintain. We can sense it when people trust us and feel it when they do not. Trust, on a personal level, and soft power, in the relations between states, are critical to making progress on the global challenges that affect us all. The trust – and soft power – that accrue from people-to-people exchanges is what makes investing in long-term relationship-building – made possible by international exchange programmes – so valuable. Strong personal relationship across borders can transcend the ups and downs of politics that might occur year-to-year or administration to administration. In the turbulent geopolitical times of today, the stability, strength, and trust generated by international exchanges and face-to-face dialogues are all the more valuable.



5.0

Conclusion and look ahead

5.1

Trends and findings from 2019

5.2

Looking ahead

In 2015, when The Soft Power 30 was first launched, the prevailing geopolitical context was markedly different from that of today. Yet, even in this more volatile, challenging, and zero-sum-oriented world, soft power remains a critical tool of foreign policy and statecraft. From the outset of this annual series, the purpose of The Soft Power 30 research project was to provide a practical analytical framework to measure and compare the soft power resources of the world's leading nations. Alongside this, we wanted to create an annual publication that could delve into related topics around soft power. This has included tracking changes in the global geopolitical context and what they mean for soft power, as well as exploring practical issues around how soft power is measured, generated, and deployed.

In previous reports, we have argued that the ability to leverage soft power effectively would continue to grow in importance. In making these arguments, we have primarily focused on the foreign policy strategies and tactics of individual countries, as they consider the use of soft power to achieve discrete – at times narrow – objectives in a more predictable context. However, given the changes in global politics that have unfolded from mid-2016 to Autumn 2019, the importance of soft power has taken on a new and weightier dimension. As the liberal international order has rapidly slipped from a phase of uncertainty and into a state of crisis, soft power will be critical not just for pursuing one-off foreign policy objectives, but for maintaining pockets of regional order, and for dealing with major transnational challenges. Moreover, countries with a vested interest in upholding the wider international rules-based order will eventually need to find solutions to reviving and reforming it, so that it is fit for purpose in the 21st century. Doing so will require a herculean effort in generating global consensus, aligning values, and marshalling the necessary collective action. All of which rest on soft power's capacity to influence, persuade, and guide.



5.1

Trends and findings from 2019

With annual results that stretch back to 2015, we can now make observations across five data sets, helping us to identify trends in the global distribution of soft power. In reviewing the 2019 Soft Power 30 index, and looking back at previous results, we identified five key findings set out below.

At the very top of the rankings, France's return to the number one spot invites immediate attention, though it should not come as a surprise. Since President Emmanuel Macron's election victory in 2017, France has not placed lower than second in The Soft Power 30, topping the rankings in 2017. With France's return to first place, our first key finding is that the "leadership effect", or in this instance the "Macron effect", on soft power is still very much alive and well.

As reported in the index data, France benefits from a commanding set of soft power assets, and even tops the Engagement sub-index. Moreover, France's soft power assets have a long pedigree. But it is France's recent political leadership that has made the real difference. After an energetic, enthusiastic start to his tenure at the Élysée Palace, President Macron endured a difficult 2018, beset by major challenges on the domestic front.

Indeed, the widespread *gilets jaunes* protests throughout France marked the nadir of Macron's presidency. But after spending the early part of 2019 focused on domestic priorities, the French President has since returned to the global stage and re-established himself as, arguably, the most diplomatically capable world leader in power today.

President Macron marked his return to the fore of global diplomacy at the mid-point of 2019, albeit on relatively familiar turf. When European leaders failed to settle on a succession plan for the top European Union leadership posts at a crucial summit in June, Macron led the effort to change tack and secure an agreement that paved the way for a favourable resolution. Germany's Ursula von der Leyen, and France's Christine Lagarde were given the critical roles of EU Commission President and President of the European Central Bank, respectively. The outcome represented a significant win for Macron, clearing a path for two like-minded, France-friendly, and extremely capable leaders.

Seven weeks after orchestrating the EU leadership succession plan, France's diplomatic machinery pivoted quickly to refocus on hosting the G7 Summit in Biarritz. The smooth process and cordial conclusion of the gathering marked another diplomatic victory for France. True, Biarritz did not achieve an era-defining agreement or deliver a game-changing communique, but given the acrimony on display at recent global summits, Macron's G7 effort can only be described as a success.

That US President Donald Trump publicly praised the Biarritz Summit as "truly successful", and even called President Macron a "spectacular leader", also underlines Macron's singular ability to pursue a liberal, pro-multilateral agenda and still stay in President Trump's favour. President Macron may have even managed to produce a breakthrough in the Iran-US conflict, which has been locked in a downward spiral since the Trump administration pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. Should Macron's surprise announcement of a potential meeting between Presidents Trump and Rouhani materialise, any strides made toward peace should – in part – be credited to Macron's efforts to diffuse the situation.

As we have argued in previous Soft Power 30 reports, political leadership at the top is a major contributing factor to a country's soft power. Macron's return to form on the world stage has coincided with a markedly improved performance in the international polling for France. In 2019, France ranked third in the aggregated polling scores, up from its fifth-place finish last year. This improved performance was a significant factor in pushing France back atop the overall Soft Power 30 rankings.

Staying at the top of the 2019 table, we can see there has been quite a shake-up of the top five places. In this re-ordering, the standout result – beyond France's return to first – is Europe claiming four out of the top five spots. This underlines the second major finding and trend: European soft power is maintaining its relative position of strength. With Sweden nudging the US down to the fifth spot (albeit by the very slimmest of margins), the 2019 rankings report a strong European showing. Looking at the change in overall positions from 2018 to 2019, nine European countries have moved up the table, seven have dropped down, and the remaining three have maintained their ranking. On balance, the 2019 index reports European soft power to be in good health and on an overall upward trajectory.

Looking across the Atlantic to the United States, our third finding is the confirmation of a trend spotted in 2018: the continued erosion of American soft power. The 2019 results show a third consecutive year-on-year drop in America's rank in The Soft Power 30. As we predicted, the framing of US foreign policy as "America First" has had a negative impact on the country's relative soft power.

Another slip down the rankings for the US should not come as a surprise to observers. The Soft Power 30 is one of a number of studies that have reported a fall in global perceptions of the US. A recent Pew study even reported a rise in the number of people abroad that see US power and influence as a threat².

As we posited in last year's report, the Trump administration's shift to an American foreign policy that is transactional and zero-sum in its orientation, communication, and execution – manifested most clearly in American trade policy – has arguably been the critical contributing factor to the erosion of the international rules-based order. Withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the renegotiating of NAFTA (which quickly followed threats of new tariffs on Mexico regardless), the leveraging of steel and aluminium tariffs on friends and allies, and undermining of the World Trade Organization have all had a caustic effect.

As the sole rhetorical pillar of US foreign policy, "America First" has little to offer the outside world. But beyond this zero-sum sloganeering, US soft power is still world-beating in many areas, particularly showing through in the Culture, Education, and Digital sub-indices. The Trump administration is not the first to pursue a foreign policy agenda that weighs on global perceptions of the US. However, as argued by Joseph Nye in his essay for this report, the damage to American soft power may yet be deeper and more long-lasting than what we have seen so far.



The fourth major finding for 2019 is the surprising resilience of British soft power despite the political division and chaos brought on by Brexit. As British politicians test the limits of the UK's unwritten constitution, rip up centuries of political convention, and tear their major political parties asunder, the international reputational damage to the UK has not yet matched the domestic drama currently unfolding. Yes, the UK's 2019 polling performance fell, along with its overall rank. But a second-place finish is a strong showing and illustrates the resilience of the UK's soft power assets in the face of the current bewildering spectacle of British politics.

However, before we give any finality to this observation, it is worth remembering that (at time of publication) the UK remains a member of the European Union. Thus, at least for the objective metrics, Brexit is yet to register. We will not know the full extent of Brexit's impact on British soft power until it actually happens.

The fifth major finding to note is more of a break with a previously identified trend. From 2015 to 2018 the four Asian countries in The Soft Power 30 were (mostly) on an upward trend. But those countries have returned with a mixed performance in 2019. Of the four Asian states in the top 30, 2019 saw one improve (South Korea), one fall back (Japan), and two maintain their 2018 rank (Singapore and China). While it would be extreme to say there has been a reversal in the rise in Asian soft power, the 2019 results suggest a pause. Viewing The Soft Power 30 rankings in aggregate over all five years, it is also important to note that Asian countries are in a better position today than they

were in 2015. Moreover, given the prevailing economic and geopolitical trends, it would be unwise to bet against the long-term rise of Asia's global clout.

5.2 Looking ahead

The results of this fifth Soft Power 30 appear to reflect the major events and geopolitical developments since the publication of our 2018 edition. These latest rankings do not deviate wildly from the 2018 table, but they do demonstrate that the balance of soft power resources responds to changes in policies, events, and global public opinion. There are several big questions for the year ahead, the answers to which will likely set the direction for global soft power going forward. Will we see answers to any of the following: Can the current Brexit limbo be resolved? Is there a possible way out of the US-China trade dispute? What will the outcome of the 2020 US Presidential election be? And finally, will the Asia Pacific region see fiercer competition between states or a move to greater cooperation and accommodation?

As events unfold over the next year, we will report back with our findings on how the global balance of soft power has shifted. At its inception, The Soft Power 30 was designed to function as a living research project, with an ambition to continually improve each iteration. Efforts to do so have primarily focused on expansion – whether polling more countries, increasing sample size, or adding metrics to the objective side of the index. However, more is not always better. This is the first year that refinements have been made to the objective data set by reducing, rather than adding, to the total number of metrics.

6.0

Appendix

6.1

Appendix A – Metrics

6.2

Appendix B – References

6.1 Appendix A – Metrics

Sub-Index	Metric	Data Source
Culture		
	Total number of tourist arrivals	UN World Tourism Organization / World Bank
	Average spend per tourist (total tourism receipts divided by number of tourists)	UN World Tourism Organization / World Bank
	Number of films appearing in major film festivals	Various
	Number of foreign correspondents in the country	Gorkana Media Database / Foreign Correspondent Associations / Various
	Number of UNESCO World Heritage sites	UNESCO Statistics
	Annual museum attendance of global top 100	The Art Newspaper, March 2019
	Size of music market	IFPI Global Music Report 2019
	Number of top 10 albums in foreign countries	IFPI Global Music Report 2019
	Olympic medals (Summer 2016 / Winter 2018)	International Olympic Committee
	FIFA Ranking (Men's)	FIFA/Coca Cola World Rankings
	Quality of national air carrier	Skytrax Airline Equality Review
	Michelin-starred restaurants	Michelin Guide 2019
	Power Language Index (PLI)	Chan, K., Power Language Index, 2016
Digital		
	Facebook followers for heads of state or government (outside of country)	Facebook
	Facebook engagement score for heads of state or government (outside of country)	Facebook
	Facebook followers for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)	Facebook
	Facebook engagement score for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)	Facebook
	Number of internet users per 100 inhabitants	World Bank
	Secure internet servers per 1 million people	World Bank
	Internet bandwidth (thousands Mbps)	International Telecommunication Union
	Government Online Services Index	United Nations E-Government Knowledgebase
	E-participation Index	United Nations E-Government Knowledgebase
	Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people	World Bank

Education

Average of OECD PISA science, maths and reading scores	OECD
Number of top global universities	Times Higher Education (top 200)
Number of academic science journal articles published	World Bank
Number of international students in the country	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
Spending on education as percentage of GDP	World Bank

Engagement

Total overseas development aid	OECD
Overseas development aid / GNI	OECD / World Bank
Number of embassies abroad	Lowy Institute / Embassypages / Various
Number of embassies in the country	Lowy Institute / Embassypages / Various
Number of consulates general abroad	Lowy Institute / Embassypages / Various
Number of permanent missions to multilateral organisations	Lowy Institute / Various
Membership of international organisations	CIA World Fact Book
Asylum seekers per 1,000 people	World Bank / Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Number of diplomatic cultural missions	Various
Number of countries a citizen can visit visa-free	Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index 2019
Size of weekly audience of state broadcaster	Various
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)	Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy (YCELP)

Enterprise

Global patents filed (percentage of GDP)	World Intellectual Property Organization / World Bank
WEF Competitiveness Index	World Economic Forum
Foreign direct investment as percentage of GDP	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Statistics / World Bank / Various
Heritage Economic Freedom Index score	2019 Index of Economic Freedom
Corruption Perceptions Index score	Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2018
R&D spending as percentage of GDP	World Bank
Global Innovation Index score	The Global Innovation Index 2019
Global Talent	Global Talent Competitiveness Index
World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report	World Bank
Unemployment rate as percentage of labour force	World Bank
Hi-tech exports as percentage of manufactured exports	World Bank

Log of business start-up costs as percentage of GNI per capita	World Bank
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Government

Human Development Index score	UNDP Human Development Report
Freedom House Index score	Freedom House
Number of think tanks in the country	McGann, J. (2019), 2018 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report
Gender Equality Index score	UNDP Human Development Report
Economist Democracy Index score	Economist Intelligence Unit
Size of shadow economy as percentage of GDP	Hassan, M & Schneider, F (2016), Size and Development of the Shadow Economies of 157 Countries Worldwide: Updated and New Measures from 1999 to 2013
Homicides per capita	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
World Bank Voice and Accountability Index score	World Bank
Capital punishment carried out in 2018	Amnesty International
Income inequality - gini coefficient	World Bank
World Economic Forum Trust in Government Index score	World Economic Forum
Press Freedom Index score	Reporters Without Borders
World Bank Government Effectiveness score	World Bank
World Bank Good Governance Regulation Quality score	World Bank
World Bank Good Governance Rule of Law score	World Bank
Population well-being	World Happiness Report, United Nations

Polling

Cuisine	International polling
Welcoming to tourists	International polling
Technology products	International polling
Luxury goods	International polling
Trust to do the right thing in global affairs	International polling
Appeal as a place to visit, work, or study	International polling
Contribution to global culture	International polling

6.2

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