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With eight months to Brexit, the UK tops the 2018 *Soft Power 30* Index, while the erosion of American soft power continues

- The UK’s return to the top of the 2018 *Soft Power 30* Index may run counter to expectations, but global public opinion on the UK has bounced back from 2017 lows.
- The UK maintains a remarkably well-balanced set of soft power assets, built on cultural institutions, creative industries, universities, a dynamic tech sector, and a unique array of diplomatic assets (for now at least).
- America’s relative soft power has continued its decline from 2017, precipitated by a significant drop in metrics on governance, and global favourability toward the US, which remains well below pre-2017 levels.
- Japan is leading the charge in the rise of Asian soft power, breaking into the top five for the first time, powered by impressive scores on culture, innovation, and international polling.
- Download the full report at SoftPower30.com.

Thursday 12 July: The fourth edition of the annual *Soft Power 30* Index is launched today by Portland, the strategic communications consultancy, in partnership with the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy.

After holding second place for two consecutive years, the UK has narrowly beaten France to regain the top spot in the 2018 *Soft Power 30* rankings – a position it last held in 2015.

The political and economic turmoil brought on by Brexit has yet to negatively impact the UK’s soft power assets, which are underpinned by world-class universities, the global reach of British culture, and a thriving tech sector.

This year’s top 10 ranking is below:

Rank	Country	Score	2017 Rank
1	UNITED KINGDOM	80.55	2
2	FRANCE	80.14	1
3	GERMANY	78.87	4
4	UNITED STATES	77.80	3
5	JAPAN	76.22	6
6	CANADA	75.70	5
7	SWITZERLAND	74.96	7

The UK’s move up rankings will provide some reassurance despite the

the provide that

uncertainty over future of the UK’s relationship with and its wider role post Brexit –

8	SWEDEN	74.77	9
9	NETHERLANDS	73.79	10
10	AUSTRALIA	72.91	8

the the EU – global Britain

maintains significant soft power resources. All of these will be needed if “Global Britain” is to be more than a slogan.

The UK’s strengths show through in the Engagement, Culture, Education, and Digital sub-indices, of the *Soft Power 30*. Publicly funded institutions like the British Council and BBC World Service complement key non-governmental soft power assets like British art, film, music, fashion, sport, and universities.

Perhaps surprisingly, the international polling data reports that, after a significant dip in 2017, global (and even European) public opinion on the UK is more positive in 2018. Yet, despite the top-place finish, this is hardly a time for British crowing. 2018 could prove to be the high watermark for British soft power. Once out of the EU, the UK’s objectively measured soft power assets will be diminished – most prominently so in the Engagement sub-index. Moreover, should the exit be a chaotic one, it is hard to see global public opinion on the UK remaining buoyant.

After an impressive leap from fifth to first place in 2017, France slips one place to second in the 2018 *Soft Power 30* index, with only a marginally lower score than the UK. Last year, the election of President Emmanuel Macron significantly boosted France’s ranking and he continues to sustain France’s image as a re-energised and globally engaged world power.

America’s relative soft power decline continues into 2018, with the US falling from third to fourth place. Last year, a very sharp decline in global perceptions of the US was reported in the polling data, whereas this year objective metrics have also registered the erosion of American soft power. This was most obvious in the Government sub-index where the US fell from twelfth to sixteenth place. While “America First” is clearly not winning hearts and minds abroad, the soft power assets that exist outside of governmental control, captured in the Education, Culture and Digital sub-indices, continue to be world-beating.

Other key findings of the 2018 *Soft Power 30* Index include:

- Japan continued its multi-year climb up the rankings and pushed Canada out of the top five for the first time. Japan is the only Asian country in the top ten and the only country in the *Soft Power 30* to have moved up the rankings each consecutive year from 2015 to 2018. This year, Japan received a boost by a significant rise in its international polling scores.
- South Korea moved into the top 20, following a politically-charged Olympic Games and the Korean détente.
- China and Russia have both fallen back two positions each from last year’s rankings to 27th and 28th respectively.
- Germany moved up one place to third in this year’s rankings, though polling scores remain below their high watermark from 2016.
- Asian countries are translating economic development into soft power gains over the medium term with improved aggregate rankings for China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore from 2015 to 2018.

Jonathan McClory, Partner at Portland and author of the report said:

“Soft power is a critical foreign policy tool for our age of interdependence and global challenges. It will be of utmost importance for the UK to leverage its well-balanced set of strongpoints in the run-up to Brexit and immediately after. Most European countries have either remained in the same position or have gone up in the rankings which is a strong signal that Europe continues to be a bedrock of global soft power, even though it might be battling internal divisions. The US’ fall down the rankings illustrates how the Trump administration’s protectionist and nationalist approach to foreign policy is detrimental to American soft power. Asia is clearly on the rise, with Japan cracking the top five for the first time, showcasing great potential for the future.”

Joseph Nye, Harvard professor, originator of the term ‘soft power’, and author of the 2015 *Soft Power 30* foreword said:

“In combining both objective metrics and international polling data, The *Soft Power 30* provides a good picture of how changes in policies, as well as wider emerging global trends are affecting the relative distribution of soft power and the comparative ability of countries to attract others. The results of this year’s *Soft Power 30* study show a further erosion of American soft power. Clearly, the Trump administration’s ‘America First’ approach to foreign policy comes at a cost to US global influence.”

Jay Wang, Director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) and an Associate Professor at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism said:

“We are delighted to continue our collaboration on this year’s *Soft Power 30* report. Public diplomacy is more important than ever given the current challenges and opportunities in global affairs. Persuading people through attraction rather than force and coercion makes both moral and economic sense. If we are to maximize the benefits of soft power, we must first fully conceptualize and measure a nation’s soft power presence and influence. *Soft Power 30* represents such an important effort.”

About 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.

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About the 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 organization dedicated to furthering the study and practice of global public engagement and cultural relations. For more information, visit CPD’s website at www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org

About Soft Power 30:

- The *Soft Power 30* is a ranking of the top 30 countries around the world (out of a full data set of 60), based on a composite index that measures and compares the resources that account for a country's soft power. The ranking, that is published once a year, was launched in 2015;
- The index combines both objective data across six categories (Government, Culture, Education, Global Engagement, Enterprise, and Digital) and international polling on seven factors, providing a comprehensive framework for the comparative analysis of soft power;
- The *Soft Power 30* methodology is marked out by three innovative elements that make it the clearest picture to date of global soft power:
 1. The index is the only study of soft power (or country brand/reputation) to combine objective data (collected from a range of reputable sources) with international polling data gathered from nationally representative sample surveys in 25 different countries, which cover every major region of the world;
 2. The index contains digital and digital diplomacy components, including anonymised data from government-run Facebook pages, to create and collect new metrics on countries' 'digital diplomacy' networks;
 3. 75 metrics in total are normalised according to the standard min-max method used for composite index calculation. The normalised data is then used to calculate a single score for each country that allows for an overall ranking of countries by soft power resources.