

Nov 04, 2016 by *John Worne*

Smoking guns ^[1]

Trunk or boot, hood or bonnet? The United States and United Kingdom have so much in common, but there are differences. And when it comes to 'soft power,' what young people around the world fear might be in your glove compartment may set us apart.

'The right to bear arms' is as American as apple pie. But about the same time you were enshrining it, in the UK we were creating a police force with odd shaped helmets and equipped these 'bobbies' with whistles and quaint balsa wood clubs called 'truncheons'. Two centuries on and those accidents of history have a big impact on whether students around the world feel our two countries are safe places to advance their university education.

A recent international study by the British Council and The Student Room shows that students worldwide believe the UK is the safest place in the world to study – and a big factor in this is in the UK we don't carry guns.

Yes people get shot at where I live – earlier in the year, 200 yards down my street. Yes my local park was taped off as a 'crime scene' yesterday with police cars parked at both ends, but... thankfully guns are still pretty rare in the UK. And this is a real positive in world student perceptions (students from 80+ countries) and is one of the factors which leads them to rank the UK number one as the 'world's safest place to study'

As I tweeted the other day:

@johnworne: UK the 'world's safest place to study': world rates UK top due to diversity, healthcare & the fact we don't carry guns. universityworldnews.com/article.php?st...

Unusually for us, on this measure the UK beats the perennial world 'table-toppers' Canada (Canada always comes top in world popularity polls) and the world's number one student destination the USA. Why? Because it seems we are recognized as a diverse, welcoming multicultural society, offering good healthcare (our beloved NHS) and because respondents know, in the main, we don't carry guns in the UK.

As the results show, the USA need bow to no country in its capacity to create opportunity and assimilate new peoples and cultures. But despite a strong showing overall, the USA does divide international opinion for safety – perhaps because of all those TV cop and 'CSI' dramas we consume worldwide. And it is interesting that a polarizing issue for U.S. politics – 'socialized medicine' (which we in the UK call 'universal healthcare' and for which there is overwhelming national support as per the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony) is recognized as an attractor for the UK by prospective international students.

Accidents of history and 'dividing lines' in politics do influence world opinion these days – 24/7 media and social media ensure that. What people fear you're 'packing in your pocket' and what hits you in that same pocket in funding or buying healthcare may have a real effect on

long-term ability to use the power of attraction. . 'Soft power' is a hard judge.
