

## Macron's diplomatic manoeuvres and bold global leadership put France back on top of the *Soft Power 30*

Brexit begins to weigh on British soft power, and "America First" sees the United States sink to fifth

- Powered by the resurgent French President Emmanuel Macron on the global stage, France returns to the top of Portland's annual *Soft Power 30* rankings, a position it last held in 2017.
- Brexit finally catches up with Britain, as a year-on-year drop in global public opinion of the UK pushes Britain down the *Soft Power 30* rankings.
- American soft power continues to erode under President Trump. The US falls to fifth, its lowest ranking since the annual *Soft Power 30* study launched in 2015.
- Download the full report at [SoftPower30.com](https://SoftPower30.com)

**Thursday 24 October** - In this year's *Soft Power 30* report, France jumped to the top of the rankings, while the United Kingdom and United States, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively, both fell from their 2018 positions. Germany and Sweden round out the top-five, ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> respectively – the first appearance in the top five for Sweden.

Produced by Portland, the strategic communications consultancy, in partnership with the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy, *The Soft Power 30* is an annual study of comparative soft power, assessing 30 countries around the world through a composite index that combines objective metrics and international polling data.

The results for the top 10 are below:

Rank	Country	Score	2018 Rank
1	FRANCE	80.28	2
2	UNITED KINGDOM	79.47	1
3	GERMANY	78.62	3
4	SWEDEN	77.41	8
5	UNITED STATES	77.40	4
6	SWITZERLAND	77.04	7
7	CANADA	75.89	8
8	JAPAN	75.71	5
9	AUSTRALIA	73.16	10
10	NETHERLANDS	72.03	9

France's global influence is underpinned by long-standing, fundamental soft power resources that have always kept it in the top five of *The Soft Power 30*. Chief among those assets are France's world-leading diplomatic network, its unrivalled presence in multilateral organisations, and the wide appeal of French culture.

Backed by those foundational assets, France put in an improved performance in the international polling component of the 2019 *Soft Power 30*, which lifted the country into its first place finish this year.

Jonathan McClory, creator of *The Soft Power 30*, lead author of the report, and Portland's General Manager for Asia said:

“French President Emmanuel Macron weathered a difficult first half of the year, as France was rocked by wide-spread domestic unrest brought on by the *gilets jaunes* protests. But a recent return to the global stage marked by a series of diplomatic wins – most notably orchestrating the European Union Commission's leadership succession deal and hosting a successful G7 Summit – showed the central role Macron has carved out for France in world affairs. The improvement in global perceptions of France suggests the world likes what it sees in French global leadership.”

Following a surprise first place finish last year, the UK has dropped one place, primarily as a result of a weaker polling performance – a sign that the chaotic Brexit process is beginning to weigh on British soft power.

However, despite the domestic political turmoil, the UK's objectively-assessed soft power assets – both state-backed and privately run – remain strong. Resources such as the British Council and the BBC World Service, internationally recognised brands like the Premier League, and Britain's world-leading creative and tech industries, provide powerful international appeal and help keep “Brand Britain” afloat.

American soft power fell again, its third year-on-year drop in the overall rankings. In addition to international polling scores that remain depressed – compared to its 2016 high – the US returned a significantly weaker performance in the Government category of the index, resulting in America's lowest-ever ranking in *The Soft Power 30*: 5<sup>th</sup> place.

Joseph Nye, Harvard professor, originator of the term “soft power”, and *Soft Power 30* contributor said:

“Many subsequent polls have echoed the findings of 2017 and 2018, and now the 2019 *Soft Power 30* confirms 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. Domestic or foreign policies that appear hypocritical, arrogant, or narrowly self-interested undermine soft power, as we see in the US falling further down this year's rankings.”

Interestingly, Sweden has broken into the top five for the first time, which helped produce the most Europe-heavy top five to date, with most European countries included in the index showing

an improved year-on-year performance. In Asia, Japan showed the most dramatic change, falling three spots to the 8<sup>th</sup> place, after having broken into the top five last year. However, if Japan is able to take full advantage of international platforms, such as the Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, the 2020 index will see the country rise in the rankings once again.

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:

“A nation’s soft power is significant, both politically and economically. Its practices, however, are being upended by profound and rapid changes in the wider society. Our contributions to this year’s report really put a focus on how digital platforms and technology are changing, and will transform, the world of diplomacy and soft power.”

## 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 organisation 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](http://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org)

## About *The Soft Power 30*:

Please find more information on Portland’s full rankings at [SoftPower30.com](http://SoftPower30.com).