

A Critical Perspective on the Global Soft Power Index



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First - the Report Key Data

1. Issuing Authority: The report is issued by Brand Finance, an organization specialized in consulting and brand valuation for various countries around the world. Founded in 1996 and headquartered in London, the organization annually evaluates over 5,000 brands across different sectors and geographical areas, operating in more than 20 countries.
2. Report Timing: The report was released in February 2024.
3. Language of the Report: The report is published in English.

Second - Report Indicators

According to the report, soft power is defined as the ability of a nation (government and citizens) to influence the preferences and behaviors of various actors on the international stage (countries, companies, communities, and individuals) through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion.

The report is published annually, and this year's index is based on a survey of over 170,000 individuals in more than 100 countries to measure prevailing public perceptions of soft

power in 193 countries. In previous years, it relied on the opinions of global decision-makers and influencers in addition to the general public. The index includes a wide range of indicators represented as follows:

1. **Knowledge:** A country that is well-known to people enjoys greater soft power.
2. **Influence:** The degree of a country's influence in the respondent's country and on the global stage.
3. **Reputation:** The extent to which a country has a strong and positive reputation worldwide.

4. **Perceptions across the Eight Core Soft Power Pillars:** The weights assigned to each metric within the index are based on statistical analysis of how pillar performance impacts reputation and influence. These can be detailed as follows:

- a. Trade and Business: Comprises indicators such as (a strong and stable economy, globally recognized products and brands, ease of doing business within and with it, future growth potential).
- b. International Relations: Comprises indicators such as (influence in diplomatic

● "Global Soft Power Index 2024", Brand Finance, available at:
<https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2024-digital.pdf>, 12 March 2024



circles, cooperation with needy countries, maintaining good relations with other countries).

- c. Education and Science: Comprises indicators such as (leadership in technology and innovation, leadership in science, having a strong educational system, investing in space exploration).
- d. Culture and Heritage: Comprises indicators such as (influence in arts and entertainment, globally distinctive cuisine, great places to visit, leadership in sports, attractive lifestyle, rich heritage).
Governance: Comprises indicators such as (leaders who are globally admired, politically stable with good governance practices, high ethical standards with low corruption, security and safety, respect for law and human rights).
- e. Media and Communication with the Outside World: Comprises indicators such as (closely followed affairs, ease of communication, influential media, trustworthy media).
- f. Sustainable Future: Comprises indicators such as (investing in technology and green energy, sustainable cities and transport, working to protect the environment, supporting global efforts to combat climate change).
- g. Values and People: Comprises indicators such as (trustworthy, generous, friendly, enjoyable, tolerant).

Third: Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online between September 18 and November 8, 2023, on a sample of 172,133 adults aged 18 to 75 from 101 countries. The sample represents the internet-using population in each country.

According to the survey, the sample with access to the internet in developing markets was relatively low, under 85% across all age groups. This led to some bias in the sample toward younger individuals with higher education and income levels. This is considered acceptable, as these groups are more likely to be influenced by soft power and have some knowledge of other countries.

No fieldwork was conducted in Russia for the 2023 and 2024 Global Soft Power Index surveys because it was not possible to conduct a reliable public opinion survey on these topics in Russia. Instead, the 2022 results were used for the model for all metrics in 2023 and were used in 2024 for knowledge, reputation, and influence indicators only.

A random subset of 193 countries was presented to each survey participant, with questions about their familiarity with those countries. If the participant had some knowledge of any of those countries, they were then asked in detail about the 35 attributes that represent the eight core pillars of soft power for that country, in order to gather a detailed assessment of reputation, influence, and perceptions. The survey was conducted in the primary languages of each country, totaling 54 languages worldwide.

This year, new questions were introduced to assess participants' recommendations, measuring their willingness to recommend countries as places to invest in, buy products and services from, work and study in, and visit. The introduction of these recommendation metrics did not affect the annual comparison of the Global Soft Power Index, as the data obtained from these new questions were not included in the index score calculations.

Fourth: Analysis in the Report

1. The Impact of Global Events and Developments on Soft Power

In 2023, global events significantly impacted the soft power of nations. Among the most prominent events were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the escalation of the Ukraine-Russia war, tensions between the United States and China, global warming, and natural disasters. These events contributed to shaping international perceptions and served as a test of the effectiveness of countries' soft power.

The soft power of countries was also influenced by developments in the economic landscape, including rising inflation rates and slow economic growth on one hand, and new artificial intelligence initiatives on the other. AI is now shaping industries and affecting global business dynamics, potentially radically

changing how countries are viewed as they strategically engage with the opportunities and challenges presented by this new technology.

The continuous growth of social media, democratization of news creation, and the stimulation of public discourse have also raised questions about misinformation and interference in news channels. As individuals become more cautious about consuming information, the interaction between skepticism and the surge in content accessibility raises new questions for the global community.

2. Dominance of Economic Power

A strong, stable economy emerged as the main driver of both reputation and influence. “Products and brands loved by the world” and “ease of doing business with” were among the top five attributes for national brands in terms of their importance in shaping a country’s soft power this year.

This trend explains the continued dominance of the largest global economies such as the United States and China, as well as smaller advanced economies like Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, which continue to hold top positions in the rankings.

3. Continued Progress of Some Countries and Improvement of Others

The report shows the continued advancement of some countries and improvements in the performance of others on the Soft Power Index. The key findings include:

• The United States Leading the Rankings:

The United States, the global superpower, topped the ranking with the highest score ever recorded on the Global Soft Power Index. This demonstrates that soft power is indeed the ultimate power. The U.S. ranked first in knowledge and influence, and secured four of the eight soft power pillars, along with nine out of the 35 country attributes, including “Leader in science,” “Influential in arts and entertainment,” “Globally admired leaders,” “Helping countries in need,” and “Supporting global efforts to combat climate change.”

Despite these strengths, internal security challenges, including gun violence, police

brutality, and involvement in international conflicts, seem to undermine some of the country’s brand perceptions. This is reflected in the continued decline in the “Great place to visit” ranking, as well as “Good relations” with other countries, “Safe and secure,” and “Friendly.”

• The United Kingdom’s Return to Form:

The UK ranked second in the index, maintaining its position among the top three for both knowledge and influence. It also ranked fourth in reputation and continued its dominance in the “Strong education system” and “Respect for law and human rights.” The UK improved its position in the attributes “Ease of communication” and “Trustworthy media,” which have highlighted its strong universities, constitution, policies, and press for over a decade. These strengths have been successfully promoted through the “Great Britain and Northern Ireland” campaign, one of the longest-running and most impactful national branding and marketing initiatives worldwide.

• China’s Improved Performance:

China improved its global standing, overtaking Germany to reach third place in the Global Soft Power Index. This reflected notable improvements across almost all soft power pillars, showcasing China’s growing global reach.

China’s gains in business, trade, education, and science were key drivers behind this progress. However, there is an urgent need to focus on enhancing admiration, as China recorded disproportionately low scores in attributes related to people and values, such as “Friendliness” and “Fun,” ranking 122nd in both categories. These areas offer opportunities for improvement in cultural perceptions and social appeal, which, although not major drivers of influence, are crucial for reputation building and form an essential part of soft power.

• Major Countries Leading Their Regions:

Major regional powers like India, Brazil, and South Africa continue to struggle to fully unlock the potential of their soft power. While these countries show high levels in knowledge and influence, particularly within their own regions, they face challenges in building a truly global reputation.



The three countries often perform well in cultural and heritage pillars but face limitations in important areas like business and trade. Despite noticeable increases in their soft power scores this year, these improvements have not translated into significant advances in their rankings. Enhancing their economic concepts could be the quickest way to strengthen their soft power, but these countries may also benefit from focusing on international relations and cultural heritage, inspired by Turkey's successful strategy.

4. Deliberate Approaches Enhance Soft Power

The UAE made the most significant improvement in rankings over the past five editions of the Global Soft Power Index. Although China made considerable gains in soft power this year, the UAE moved up by 8 positions to rank 10th, Saudi Arabia rose 8 places to 18th, Qatar climbed 10 spots to 21st, and Turkey advanced 5 places to 25th. These countries stand out for their conscious efforts to develop their soft power through national branding projects, diplomatic initiatives, and hosting major events.

Particularly in the Gulf states, there has been a strengthening of influence, reputation, and international relations, along with enhanced business and trade credentials. The UAE, for instance, ranked first globally in the key attribute "Strong and stable economy" this year.

5. Hard Power Undermines Soft Power

Countries involved in armed conflicts have seen a decline in their soft power this year. Russia, which dropped three places, reached an unprecedented position of 16th, primarily due to negative perceptions surrounding its aggression against Ukraine. However, there was a slight recovery in its reputation as the war became more entrenched.

Ukraine saw a decline of 7 places in the soft power index, and its influence also dropped by 4 places. This highlights the need to develop innovative ways to achieve strategic objectives in both hard power and soft power arenas. The report also noted that Ukraine's rank of 76th in the reputation index, immediately after Russia, reveals deep global divisions regarding the conflict.

Israel's soft power dropped by five places to its lowest level ever after its invasion of Gaza. Despite widespread international support following Hamas's attacks, the decision to retaliate with full force negatively impacted global perceptions of Israel, with its reputation dropping 18 places to 79th, along with a broader negative effect on the country's brand. Israel's scores in 34 out of 35 attributes fell.

6. Ranking of All UN Member States

The inclusion of 72 new participants this year marked a significant development, as all 193 UN member states were ranked for the first time.

Fifth: Expert Opinions Presented in the Report

1- Introducing a New Metric to Identify the Best National Brands Across All Dimensions

A new metric has been introduced to assess soft power by evaluating participants' willingness to recommend a country as a place for:

- Investment.
- Purchasing products and services.
- Working and studying.
- Visiting as a tourist destination.

This metric highlights the strategic benefits countries can achieve by evaluating global perceptions, aiding in the development of sustainable economic strategies. Analysis revealed that:

- Business and trade are the primary drivers behind investment recommendations.
- Culture and heritage are the key motivators for tourism recommendations.
- Sustainability emerged as a crucial factor across various dimensions, reflecting the growing importance of environmental issues in enhancing a nation's soft power.

2- The Importance of National Brand Value and Strength

As global economies navigate uncertainties surrounding rising inflation and geopolitical challenges, understanding the value and strength of a national brand has become more vital than ever. A strong national brand acts as a safety net, enabling a country to leverage its strengths across key economic sectors. It paves the way

for positive economic outcomes and serves as a powerful tool for monitoring relationships between nations and their citizens, fostering economic development, and setting long-term strategic goals.

3- The Relationship Between Sustainability and Soft Power

Sustainability encompasses global issues ranging from climate change and ocean pollution to human rights in supply chains spanning multiple countries. Actions related to sustainability have significant potential to shape a country's international reputation and soft power.

The Soft Power Index highlights the intricate connections between sustainability and soft power by evaluating nations under the "Sustainable Future" pillar across four aspects of environmental sustainability:

- Cities and transportation.
- Support for global climate action.
- Green technology and energy.
- Environmental protection.

Furthermore, sustainability is reflected in many attributes of soft power, with nearly half of the traits driving national soft power tied to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) themes.

The ultimate statement on sustainability is "supporting global efforts to combat climate change." However, a disparity exists between public perception and reality, as evidenced by the U.S. ranking first in supporting global climate efforts and the UK ranking fourth, despite both having some of the highest historical carbon emissions contributing to climate change.

4- Soft Power's Role in Trade and Investment Promotion

Strong soft power helps build trust and establish a positive reputation on the global stage, thus enhancing trade, foreign direct investment, and economic influence. Cultural impact can ease market access for companies from a given country, ultimately attracting investors looking to capitalize on the popularity of the nation's cultural exports. Additionally, soft power initiatives, such as educational exchange programs, foster strong interpersonal connections.

5- Renewing Tourism Enhances Soft Power

Tourism serves as a showcase for nations to present their best, welcoming anyone interested in their nature, culture, and music. The concept of "regenerative tourism" represents a progressive approach that goes beyond mere sustainability. It involves actively enhancing destinations and creating a positive net impact, benefiting not only the environment and local communities but also the global image of the country, translating into tangible economic advantages.

Sixth: A Critical Perspective

1. Strengths

- The index is unique, offering a periodic assessment of countries' soft power standings. It provides a detailed understanding of what the world deems most crucial for shaping a country's reputation, influencing investment, trade, work, study, and tourism recommendations.
- The report is highly valuable to visionaries policymakers, strategists, marketers, and leaders serving as a roadmap for understanding soft power. It equips them with the knowledge necessary to excel globally, grow soft power, and design successful strategies to attract investments, trade, and tourism.
- In its latest version, the index is comprehensive, covering all 193 UN-recognized countries.
- The report offers a precise definition of soft power and relies on numerous indicators, adding to its accuracy.
- Conducting the survey in each country's primary languages is a notable strength, enabling citizens to understand and respond clearly to the questions.

2. Weaknesses

- The reliance on public opinion surveys this year based on the views of the general public rather than decision-makers raises concerns. Public perceptions can be influenced by culture and media narratives, introducing potential biases.
- The use of varied terminology in the report creates confusion. For instance, it mentions



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- 193 “states,” defines soft power in terms of “nations” (government and citizens), and describes its methodology as addressing 193 “nation brands.”
- C. Certain criteria are disproportionately emphasized, favoring specific countries. For example, while the report attributes Russia’s declining ranking to its invasion of Ukraine, it notes that domestic challenges in the U.S., such as gun violence and police brutality, and its involvement in international conflicts affected its sub-indices but did not significantly impact its overall soft power ranking.
- D. Some results contradict each other. The report claims hard power undermines soft power, yet it also describes soft power as the ultimate form of power.
- E. Excluding hard power and focusing solely on soft power creates a gap, as a nation’s comprehensive power requires an assessment of both.
- F. No fieldwork was conducted in Russia for the 2023 and 2024 Global Soft Power Index, diminishing its accuracy, particularly given the high weighting for populous countries like Russia.
- G. The sample size of 170,000 people from 101 countries, despite covering 193 countries in the index, raises credibility concerns and suggests potential bias.
- H. Discrepancies exist between the report’s findings and reality. For instance, while the U.S. and UK have some of the highest historical contributions to carbon emissions, the U.S. ranked first, and the UK fourth, in global climate change support efforts.
- I. Relying on internet users as the survey population excludes or underrepresents countries with limited internet access.

Conclusion:

The Global Soft Power Report holds significant international importance, as its index provides a precise understanding of what shapes the reputation and influence of 193 nations. It helps countries identify and develop their soft power to design effective strategies for attracting investments, trade, and tourism.

Despite its immense value, the report has notable shortcomings. These include its reliance on opinion surveys, exclusion of decision-makers, inconsistent terminology, contradictory results, and a relatively small sample size. Additionally, focusing only on internet users and excluding on-ground assessments in some countries limits its representativeness and accuracy.