WORLD SOFT POWER INDEX 2026

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A note on our name

The Indian Strategic Studies Forum was renamed the Indian Strategic Studies Foundation in 2026. Earlier publications, including the World Soft Power Index 2023, were issued under the former name. Both refer to the same institution.

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Disclaimer

This study has been prepared through independent analysis. The findings draw on publicly accessible information, published datasets and the assumptions set out in the methodology section. ISSF accepts no liability should any public source on which the study relies subsequently be determined to be inaccurate.

The analysis presented here does not constitute investment, commercial or policy advice, and ISSF disclaims any liability towards any entity, government or organisation relying on it for such purposes.

The full data architecture, coverage, transformations, aggregation rules and sensitivity tests are set out in the methodology and statistical appendix at the back of this report. Readers assessing the robustness of any individual result should begin there.

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Contents

Foreword

Director's Note

The international system is becoming more contested, but influence is becoming more diffuse. Military power still matters. Economic scale still matters. Yet countries increasingly compete in a parallel arena where the decisive question is not simply who can compel, but who can attract, convene, reassure, inspire and remain relevant in the choices of others.

Soft power now travels through more channels than diplomacy alone. A film industry can shape perceptions before an embassy does. A city can become a country's most recognisable global asset. An airline can convert geography into familiarity. Universities can turn education into lifelong affinity. Diaspora networks can create durable social and commercial bridges. Brands and digital platforms can place a country inside the daily routines of people who may never interact with its government.

The World Soft Power Index 2026 is built around this broader reality. It does not treat soft power as a synonym for governance quality, nor as a popularity contest among states. It asks a more practical question: how effectively does a country convert what it possesses into voluntary attention, preference, access and influence beyond its borders?

This edition therefore gives serious attention to forms of influence that are often undercounted when soft power is measured too narrowly: civilisational familiarity, cultural symbolism, international gateways, transnational networks, trust, destination pull and contemporary commercial ubiquity. These are not interchangeable assets, and countries should not be forced to resemble one another in order to rank well.

The result is intended neither as a league table of virtue nor as a verdict on foreign policy. It is a map of influence. Countries can possess substantial soft power even when they are politically controversial. Others can enjoy strong institutions yet have a narrower international footprint. The value of an index lies in distinguishing those realities rather than collapsing them into a single idea of what a successful state should look like.

No index is the last word on a question this large. This one is published with its rules, its coverage and its limits set out in full, so that readers can examine the construction as readily as the conclusions.

> *Soft power is not merely what a country has. It is what travels, what is recognised and what others choose to engage with.*

Udayan Raj Singh

Director and Head of Operations

Indian Strategic Studies Foundation

PART I

Understanding Soft Power

Eleven short sections on what the index measures, how to read it, and why the route matters more than the ordinal place.

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01
The Ranking at a Glance

The 2026 Top 20

The full 194-country ranking appears later in the report. This opening spread gives the reader the hierarchy first, before the deeper explanation.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
01	United States	92.0	Commercial
02	France	89.8	Core
03	China	88.4	Core
04	Italy	88.2	Cultural
05	United Kingdom	88.0	Core
06	Germany	88.0	Cultural
07	Spain	86.0	Cultural
08	Japan	84.0	Cultural
09	Switzerland	82.1	Core
10	India	81.6	Cultural
11	South Korea	80.2	Cultural
12	Singapore	79.8	Hub
13	Netherlands	78.7	Core
14	Russia	78.7	Core
15	Mexico	78.3	Cultural
16	Sweden	78.2	Core
17	Canada	77.3	Core
18	Australia	76.8	Core
19	Türkiye	76.7	Cultural
20	United Arab Emirates	76.5	Hub

Four immediate readings from the Top 20

The United States leads once contemporary commercial and platform ubiquity is treated as an explicit channel of soft power.

Europe remains exceptionally strong because cultural capital, tourism, institutions and diplomacy continue to reinforce one another.

Japan enters the Top 10 and South Korea reaches 11th after a bounded contemporary-salience supplement captures mass culture, entertainment, technology and brand recognition that a heritage-heavy cultural stock can miss.

Hub power remains important, but dominant hub scores are now confirmed against a country's broader routes. Singapore remains 12th and the UAE remains in the Top 20 without thin gateway evidence deciding the table by itself.

02

Introduction

The Power of Being Chosen

The most visible forms of power are easy to count. Armies have inventories. Economies have output. Governments have budgets, treaties and votes. Soft power is harder to observe because it lives in preferences: where people want to travel, what they watch, which universities they seek out, whose brands they buy, which cities they aspire to experience, which countries they trust to convene, and whose cultural vocabulary becomes familiar far beyond national borders.

That does not make soft power less real. In many situations, it determines the environment in which hard choices are made. A country that is familiar is easier to engage. A country that is attractive faces lower barriers to tourism, talent and investment. A country whose culture is widely consumed enters foreign societies without needing official permission. A country whose brands and platforms are used every day can shape familiarity at a scale that formal public diplomacy rarely matches.

A country can therefore be visible without being attractive, admired without being influential, or powerful without being chosen. Soft power exists where recognition begins to shape preference and behaviour.

This distinction matters because the global distribution of influence no longer follows a simple hierarchy. Established Western powers remain formidable soft-power actors, but cultural and commercial influence is increasingly multipolar. East Asian entertainment and technology, Gulf gateway cities, Turkish popular culture, Latin American sport and music, African creative industries and the expanding diplomatic agency of middle powers all demonstrate that attraction can originate from very different political and economic systems.

The 2026 index is designed to capture that diversity. It gives weight to international reach rather than to size alone. It recognises popularity without reducing soft power to opinion polling. It acknowledges credibility without turning soft power into a governance league table. And it explicitly recognises that global brands, consumer ecosystems and digital platforms can themselves become durable channels of national familiarity.

> *A country can be visible without being attractive, admired without being influential, or powerful without being chosen.*

03

The Index in Plain Language

What do we mean by soft power?

What is soft power?

Soft power is the capacity of a country to shape preferences and behaviour abroad through attraction, familiarity, credibility, networks and voluntary engagement rather than coercion or direct payment. It is the difference between being obeyed because others must, and being followed, visited, emulated, trusted or sought out because others choose to.

How is soft power different from reputation?

Reputation is what others think of a country. Soft power is what that perception allows the country to do. A state may have a positive reputation yet exercise limited international influence because its cultural, diplomatic or economic networks are narrow. Another may be controversial but still possess enormous soft power because its cities, entertainment, brands, education, language or diplomacy are deeply embedded in the choices of people abroad.

Why measure it?

Because attraction changes the cost of international action. Countries with stronger soft power can often enter conversations more easily, draw visitors and students more readily, attract talent and capital, secure a wider hearing for their positions and build coalitions with less friction. Their cultural products may normalise familiarity long before a diplomatic initiative begins. Their companies and platforms can become part of everyday life abroad.

Why does soft power matter particularly in 2026?

The international environment is simultaneously more fragmented and more connected. Strategic competition has intensified, yet societies remain linked through travel, migration, entertainment, universities, digital platforms, consumer markets and global cities. Middle powers have more room to manoeuvre. Countries in the Global South have greater agency in choosing partners. Influence increasingly depends on being relevant to different audiences for different reasons.

When does soft power become strategic power?

Soft power becomes strategically meaningful when attraction changes behaviour or lowers the resistance to cooperation. This can happen when familiarity creates the benefit of the doubt during a crisis, when cultural affinity sustains ties through political disagreement, when a diaspora opens commercial or diplomatic networks, when a global city becomes a convening platform, or when a commercial ecosystem becomes so familiar that a country is continuously present in the lives of foreign publics.

04

What the Index Looks For

Five routes to international influence

The 2026 model is deliberately plural. Countries do not need to possess the same assets to generate comparable soft power.

	Route	What it captures	Illustrative strengths
01	**Core / Transnational Reach**	Diplomacy, people-to-people links, network breadth and voluntary international embeddedness.	France, United Kingdom, Netherlands
02	**Cultural & Symbolic Capital**	Civilisational depth, heritage, symbolic recognition and verified contemporary cultural salience.	Italy, Japan, South Korea
03	**Hub & Familiarity**	Gateway pull, global cities, tourism and connectivity, with confirmation against broader routes when Hub is dominant.	Singapore, UAE, Qatar
04	**Trust & Reputation**	Credibility, reliability, external reception and the confidence that converts recognition into usable access.	Switzerland, Canada, Norway
05	**Commercial & Platform Reach**	Global brands, consumer ubiquity and digital or commercial ecosystems that embed a country in everyday life abroad.	United States, China, Japan

Two safeguards built into the 2026 design

Forced displacement is not treated as voluntary affinity. Refugee-driven international dispersion does not automatically create positive diaspora credit.

Missing data are not allowed to masquerade as average performance. Weakly observed countries do not inherit an unearned neutral score simply because several source fields are unavailable.

05

Criteria and Weightage

How the routes are weighted

This is a multi-pathway model, not one flat 100-point weighted sum. Each route has its own internal weightage. The final score is the strongest supported route after the common v4.7 calibration safeguards are applied.

CORE	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
Network + intensity	Culture + symbol + salience	Gateway + confirmation	Receiver + credibility	Brand-market reach

FINAL SCORE = STRONGEST SUPPORTED ROUTE AFTER COMMON CALIBRATION SAFEGUARDS

Core / transnational base

Reach pathway	Intensity pathway

Alternative routes

Cultural & Symbolic	**Base: 70% Symbolic / civilisational capital | 20% Receiver | 10% Familiarity check v4.7: bounded contemporary-salience uplift, maximum +6.3 points**	**Heritage remains the base; verified current cultural salience can correct clear undermeasurement.**
Hub & Familiarity	Base: 85% Gateway strength | 15% Familiarity check If Hub wins: confirm against the second-strongest non-Hub route using a coverage-sensitive blend	Preserves real hub power while limiting gateway-only inflation on thin evidence.
Trust & Reputation	47% Receiver | 43% Credibility | 10% Familiarity check	Trust can be a soft-power asset in its own right.
Commercial & Platform Reach	80% Commercial brand-market reach | 20% Familiarity check	Commercial ubiquity can now surface rather than hide inside generic business indicators.

06

What the Index Is Not

A ranking of influence, not a ranking of virtue

Not a military-power index

Military capability can create visibility and strategic relevance, but coercion by itself is not soft power. Fear alone is not attraction.

Not a measure of economic size

Economic scale can amplify international presence, but population and output do not automatically produce soft power. Large countries must still convert scale into recognition, while smaller states can outperform their size through hubs, trust or cultural intensity. The relationship between size and score is reported in the statistical appendix so that readers can judge it directly.

Not a popularity poll

Public perception matters, but survey sentiment can be volatile, uneven and sensitive to current events. External reception is therefore used as a reality check within the routes where it applies, rather than as the whole index.

Not a foreign-policy approval rating

Foreign publics may oppose a government's policy while continuing to consume its culture, visit its cities, study at its universities, use its technology or buy its brands.

Not a ranking of political systems

The index does not reward or punish a country simply for being democratic, authoritarian, Western, non-Western, rich, poor, large or small.

07

How to Read the Ranking

What does a high rank mean?

A high rank indicates that a country is difficult to ignore internationally because one or more of its routes to attraction are unusually strong. Some top performers are broad-spectrum powers. Others are more specialised. The ranking should therefore be read alongside the route through which influence is generated.

How much should we read into small rank differences?

Rankings impose order on complex information, but they should not create false precision. A one-place or two-place difference does not necessarily imply a meaningful strategic gap. Readers should look at the underlying score, the dominant route and the profile beneath the final ordinal position.

Can a controversial country still rank highly?

Yes. Soft power is not identical to political approval. A country can be controversial and still possess enormous cultural, technological, diplomatic or commercial influence. Reputational weaknesses matter, but they do not automatically erase the forms of attraction and familiarity that continue to operate in practice.

What should a reader be cautious about?

Every index encodes choices, and this one is no exception. Scores depend on which channels are counted, how they are weighted and how well each country is observed in the underlying sources. Coverage is uneven across the 194 entities, and countries with thinner source availability carry wider uncertainty than the single published figure suggests. The appendix sets out where that applies.

08
Continuity and Perspective

From 2023 to 2026

Conceptual continuity, a substantially rebuilt measurement system.

The earlier ISSF index established a simple intuition: soft power is experienced through recognition, tourism, culture, brands, international collaboration, stability, assistance and influence in multilateral institutions. The 2026 edition retains that intuition but uses a substantially broader measurement architecture.

The two editions are not comparable. The 2023 index was built on a different instrument, a different indicator set and a different aggregation rule, and its published positions do not enter the 2026 scoring in any form. Movements between the two editions therefore describe a change of method, not a change in the world, and should not be read or reported as a time series. The 2026 results are best understood as a new baseline.

The more important continuity is conceptual. Soft power remains relational. It exists outside the state as much as inside it. Governments can cultivate it, accelerate it and damage it, but they cannot completely command it.

09

An Indian Institution, a Global Index

Why perspective matters, and why consistency matters more

Every global index makes choices about what deserves to count. Those choices are often presented as purely technical, but they reflect a theory of the world. An index that gives overwhelming weight to governance will favour one type of state. An index based almost entirely on global opinion surveys will favour countries already familiar to the populations most heavily represented in those surveys. An index based on economic scale will confuse size with attraction.

ISSF's approach is deliberately plural. We treat culture, civilisational familiarity, international gateways, diaspora networks, brands, education, diplomacy, trust and commercial ubiquity as substantive forms of soft power rather than peripheral additions to a governance score. This makes the index better suited to a multipolar world in which influence originates from more than one political model and more than one geographic centre.

ISSF is an Indian institution, and India is one of the 194 entities assessed. We think that is worth stating plainly rather than leaving for a reader to notice. The safeguards are procedural: no final rank is typed directly into the table; where pre-publication review identifies a systematic measurement weakness, any correction must be converted into a common, versioned rule and rerun across the full universe; the same five routes and the same selection logic apply to every country; missing evidence is not treated as zero unless the underlying indicator genuinely records zero; and the editorial interpretation follows the recalculated ranking rather than replacing it.

Perspective cannot become discretion. The ambition is therefore not neutrality in the abstract. It is analytical consistency: a clearly stated conception of soft power, transparent rules, and enough empirical breadth to capture forms of influence that narrower models can miss.

1

How to Use This Report

A ranking is the beginning of the analysis, not the end

For the general reader

Start with the Top 20 and the full ranking table that follows later in the report. The country profiles then explain the sources of each leading country's position: what travels, where its influence is strongest and which assets convert most effectively into attraction and reach.

For policymakers and practitioners

Use the ranking as a diagnostic rather than a trophy table. A country's overall position is less actionable than the structure beneath it. Cultural capital, gateway strength, transnational reach, trust and commercial ubiquity imply different policy choices. A country can improve soft power by building the channels in which it is weak, not merely by spending more on public diplomacy.

For scholars and methodological readers

The detailed methodology belongs at the back of the report so the public-facing ranking remains accessible without sacrificing technical scrutiny. That section should set out the v4.7 data architecture, source coverage, transformations, missing-data safeguards, contemporary-salience supplement, Hub confirmation rule, aggregation logic, external benchmarks, source vintages and sensitivity tests used to construct the final index.

For journalists and editors

Report the score and the dominant route together. A country's position is a summary of one particular strength as often as it is a summary of overall standing, and the route is what makes the number interpretable. Rank differences of one or two places should not be described as gaps.

> *When the world encounters a country through culture, travel, education, brands, diplomacy, people or ideas, does that encounter create familiarity, preference and a relationship the country can carry forward?*

Soft power begins with recognition.

It becomes power when recognition creates preference, access and influence.

PART II

Global Rankings

The 2026 ranking orders 194 entities by their capacity to generate voluntary international influence through transnational reach, culture, hub power, trust and contemporary commercial presence.

Photo · NASA / Unsplash

The ranking in one sentence

The United States remains first, while the recalibrated upper tier better captures contemporary cultural-commercial salience and reduces overstatement from thin, single-route hub signals.

The five routes

Cultural / Symbolic	Civilisational depth, heritage and deep cultural recognition
Hub / Familiarity	Gateway pull, cities, connectivity and destination magnetism
Trust / Reputation	Credibility, reception and international confidence
Commercial / Platform	Global brands, consumer ubiquity and digital-commercial presence
Transnational	Diplomacy, people-to-people links and durable international networks

Scores are shown to one decimal place. The underlying score engine retains full precision. Small differences in score should not be read as large strategic gaps.

Reading the Table

Rank is the headline. Score is the evidence.

Ordinal rank is useful for orientation, but the score profile matters more. Countries separated by fractions of a point are often better understood as peers than as ranked competitors.

One decimal, not false precision	The public table rounds scores to one decimal. Full precision remains in the underlying dataset.
Full-precision rank	Ranks are assigned using the underlying full-precision score. Equal one-decimal display scores do not create a tie.
No 2023 column here	The main ranking is a 2026 product. The 2023 edition used a different instrument and its positions do not enter this score. Historical comparison, where used, belongs in a separate context spread and is not a like-for-like series.
No geopolitical colour coding	Flags identify countries. Colour denotes route, never bloc or alliance.
Dominant route is explanatory	It shows the strongest supported pathway in the model. Where evidence is too thin for a substantive route interpretation, the table prints Insufficient coverage instead.
Coverage varies	Source availability is uneven across 194 entities. Countries with thinner observed data carry wider uncertainty than a single published figure suggests. Coverage grades are set out in the statistical appendix.

The Top 20

The top tier is shown first. The score profile bar is scaled to the score, so bar length is comparable down the whole table.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
1	United States	92.0	Commercial / Platform
2	France	89.8	Transnational
3	China	88.4	Transnational
4	Italy	88.2	Cultural / Symbolic
5	United Kingdom	88.0	Transnational
6	Germany	88.0	Cultural / Symbolic
7	Spain	86.0	Cultural / Symbolic
8	Japan	84.0	Cultural / Symbolic
9	Switzerland	82.1	Transnational
10	India	81.6	Cultural / Symbolic
11	South Korea	80.2	Cultural / Symbolic
12	Singapore	79.8	Hub / Familiarity
13	Netherlands	78.7	Transnational
14	Russia	78.7	Transnational
15	Mexico	78.3	Cultural / Symbolic
16	Sweden	78.2	Transnational
17	Canada	77.3	Transnational
18	Australia	76.8	Transnational
19	Türkiye	76.7	Cultural / Symbolic
20	United Arab Emirates	76.5	Hub / Familiarity

The dominant route identifies the strongest pathway in the 2026 score, not the only source of a country's soft power.

Ranks 21–40

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
21	Brazil	76.3	Transnational
22	Egypt	75.9	Cultural / Symbolic
23	Saudi Arabia	75.3	Hub / Familiarity
24	Greece	74.9	Cultural / Symbolic
25	Denmark	74.5	Trust / Reputation
26	Norway	73.9	Trust / Reputation
27	Qatar	73.7	Hub / Familiarity
28	Finland	73.4	Trust / Reputation
29	Austria	73.3	Transnational
30	Portugal	73.1	Cultural / Symbolic
31	Iran	73.1	Cultural / Symbolic
32	Belgium	73.0	Cultural / Symbolic
33	Poland	72.1	Cultural / Symbolic
34	Ireland	71.8	Transnational
35	Czechia	71.4	Cultural / Symbolic
36	Luxembourg	69.5	Hub / Familiarity
37	New Zealand	69.1	Hub / Familiarity
38	Israel	68.4	Hub / Familiarity
39	Kuwait	68.0	Hub / Familiarity
40	Jordan	67.3	Hub / Familiarity

Ranks 41–60

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
41	Thailand	66.8	Cultural / Symbolic
42	Pakistan	66.5	Transnational
43	Philippines	65.8	Transnational
44	Oman	65.6	Hub / Familiarity
45	Malaysia	65.2	Hub / Familiarity
46	South Africa	64.5	Cultural / Symbolic
47	Ukraine	64.1	Hub / Familiarity
48	Bahrain	63.8	Hub / Familiarity
49	Argentina	63.8	Cultural / Symbolic
50	Vietnam	63.7	Transnational
51	Colombia	63.0	Transnational
52	Peru	63.0	Cultural / Symbolic
53	Monaco	62.4	Hub / Familiarity
54	Indonesia	62.4	Transnational
55	Romania	62.2	Cultural / Symbolic
56	Iceland	62.1	Hub / Familiarity
57	Malta	62.0	Hub / Familiarity
58	Morocco	61.8	Cultural / Symbolic
59	Croatia	61.3	Cultural / Symbolic
60	Hungary	60.8	Transnational

Ranks 61–80

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
61	Chile	60.6	Hub / Familiarity
62	Ethiopia	60.1	Cultural / Symbolic
63	Nigeria	60.0	Transnational
64	Tunisia	59.5	Cultural / Symbolic
65	Bulgaria	59.1	Cultural / Symbolic
66	Slovenia	58.5	Hub / Familiarity
67	Cuba	58.1	Cultural / Symbolic
68	Algeria	58.0	Cultural / Symbolic
69	Serbia	57.8	Hub / Familiarity
70	Slovakia	57.8	Cultural / Symbolic
71	Estonia	57.6	Hub / Familiarity
72	Kazakhstan	57.5	Hub / Familiarity
73	Bangladesh	57.0	Transnational
74	Lebanon	56.5	Cultural / Symbolic
75	Iraq	56.3	Cultural / Symbolic
76	Taiwan	56.3	Hub / Familiarity
77	Cyprus	56.3	Hub / Familiarity
78	Jamaica	56.2	Transnational
79	El Salvador	56.1	Transnational
80	Costa Rica	56.0	Hub / Familiarity

Ranks 81–100

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
81	Sri Lanka	55.8	Cultural / Symbolic
82	Liechtenstein	55.6	Hub / Familiarity
83	Syria	55.6	Cultural / Symbolic
84	Bolivia	55.5	Cultural / Symbolic
85	Lithuania	55.5	Cultural / Symbolic
86	Latvia	55.3	Hub / Familiarity
87	Belarus	55.3	Hub / Familiarity
88	Uzbekistan	55.2	Hub / Familiarity
89	Venezuela	55.0	Transnational
90	Dominican Republic	54.8	Hub / Familiarity
91	Maldives	54.8	Hub / Familiarity
92	Andorra	54.5	Hub / Familiarity
93	Libya	54.4	Hub / Familiarity
94	Kenya	54.4	Cultural / Symbolic
95	Panama	54.3	Hub / Familiarity
96	Senegal	53.9	Cultural / Symbolic
97	Brunei Darussalam	53.8	Hub / Familiarity
98	Azerbaijan	53.7	Cultural / Symbolic
99	Côte d'Ivoire	53.6	Hub / Familiarity
100	Armenia	53.5	Transnational

Ranks 101–120

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
101	Albania	53.5	Transnational
102	Cambodia	53.4	Cultural / Symbolic
103	Uruguay	52.7	Hub / Familiarity
104	Sudan	52.1	Hub / Familiarity
105	Bosnia and Herzegovina	52.0	Transnational
106	Bahamas	52.0	Hub / Familiarity
107	Ecuador	51.9	Hub / Familiarity
108	Tanzania	51.8	Cultural / Symbolic
109	Mongolia	51.7	Cultural / Symbolic
110	Yemen	51.7	Cultural / Symbolic
111	Gabon	51.5	Hub / Familiarity
112	Georgia	51.2	Cultural / Symbolic
113	Democratic Republic of the Congo	51.1	Hub / Familiarity
114	Ghana	51.1	Hub / Familiarity
115	Montenegro	51.1	Hub / Familiarity
116	Turkmenistan	50.9	Cultural / Symbolic
117	Equatorial Guinea	50.9	Hub / Familiarity
118	Guatemala	50.9	Cultural / Symbolic
119	Mali	50.9	Cultural / Symbolic
120	Paraguay	50.8	Transnational

Ranks 121–140

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
121	Nepal	50.6	Hub / Familiarity
122	North Korea	50.6	Cultural / Symbolic
123	Antigua and Barbuda	50.4	Hub / Familiarity
124	North Macedonia	50.2	Hub / Familiarity
125	South Sudan	50.0	Hub / Familiarity
126	Gambia	49.5	Hub / Familiarity
127	Rwanda	49.0	Hub / Familiarity
128	Mauritius	49.0	Insufficient coverage
129	Central African Republic	48.8	Insufficient coverage
130	Zimbabwe	48.7	Cultural / Symbolic
131	Moldova	48.6	Insufficient coverage
132	Belize	48.5	Hub / Familiarity
133	Bhutan	48.5	Hub / Familiarity
134	Tajikistan	48.4	Cultural / Symbolic
135	Burkina Faso	48.1	Hub / Familiarity
136	Laos	47.7	Cultural / Symbolic
137	Namibia	47.7	Hub / Familiarity
138	Guyana	47.6	Insufficient coverage
139	Cameroon	47.6	Hub / Familiarity
140	Fiji	47.6	Insufficient coverage

Ranks 141–160

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
141	Afghanistan	47.5	Insufficient coverage
142	Barbados	47.4	Hub / Familiarity
143	Kyrgyzstan	47.4	Hub / Familiarity
144	Dominica	47.3	Insufficient coverage
145	Liberia	47.2	Hub / Familiarity
146	Uganda	47.1	Insufficient coverage
147	Botswana	47.1	Hub / Familiarity
148	Zambia	47.0	Hub / Familiarity
149	Angola	47.0	Hub / Familiarity
150	Congo	47.0	Hub / Familiarity
151	Haiti	47.0	Insufficient coverage
152	Djibouti	47.0	Hub / Familiarity
153	Palau	46.9	Hub / Familiarity
154	Honduras	46.9	Insufficient coverage
155	Madagascar	46.9	Insufficient coverage
156	San Marino	46.8	Hub / Familiarity
157	Comoros	46.8	Insufficient coverage
158	Suriname	46.7	Insufficient coverage
159	Somalia	46.7	Insufficient coverage
160	Chad	46.6	Insufficient coverage

Ranks 161–180

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
161	Eritrea	46.5	Insufficient coverage
162	Benin	46.5	Hub / Familiarity
163	Seychelles	46.4	Insufficient coverage
164	Cabo Verde	46.4	Insufficient coverage
165	Samoa	46.3	Insufficient coverage
166	Mozambique	46.2	Insufficient coverage
167	Trinidad and Tobago	46.2	Insufficient coverage
168	Guinea-Bissau	45.9	Insufficient coverage
169	Grenada	45.8	Insufficient coverage
170	Togo	45.8	Insufficient coverage
171	Nicaragua	45.7	Insufficient coverage
172	Sierra Leone	45.7	Insufficient coverage
173	Guinea	45.7	Insufficient coverage
174	Tonga	45.6	Insufficient coverage
175	Papua New Guinea	45.6	Insufficient coverage
176	Eswatini	45.6	Insufficient coverage
177	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	45.6	Insufficient coverage
178	Myanmar	45.6	Trust / Reputation
179	Malawi	45.6	Insufficient coverage
180	Sao Tome and Principe	45.5	Insufficient coverage

Coverage note: when Trust / Reputation is the mathematical maximum but raw source coverage is below four of nine inherited source families, the published route label is Insufficient coverage. The score is retained, but the label is not interpreted as a positive credibility finding.

Ranks 181–194

Scaled score profile. Bar length is comparable across every page of the ranking.

Rank	Country	Score	Dominant route
181	Niger	45.5	Insufficient coverage
182	Saint Kitts and Nevis	45.5	Insufficient coverage
183	Burundi	45.5	Insufficient coverage
184	Saint Lucia	45.3	Insufficient coverage
185	Timor-Leste	45.2	Insufficient coverage
186	Solomon Islands	44.9	Insufficient coverage
187	Nauru	44.8	Insufficient coverage
188	Mauritania	44.7	Insufficient coverage
189	Micronesia	44.6	Insufficient coverage
190	Marshall Islands	44.5	Insufficient coverage
191	Vanuatu	44.4	Insufficient coverage
192	Tuvalu	44.3	Insufficient coverage
193	Kiribati	44.1	Insufficient coverage
194	Lesotho	44.0	Insufficient coverage

COUNTRY PROFILES

The Top 20, country by country

Each profile opens with the published score, the dominant route and the route scorecard. Why, challenges and outlook follow the locked v4.7 engine — not a separate editorial ranking.

Photo · Ross Parmly / Unsplash

Photo · Pedro Lastra / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 01 / 20

United States

Unmatched commercial reach, with a growing reputation discount.

#1

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
89.4	83.1	74.3	72.7	92.0

Winning Route Weighting 80% Commercial Brand Score + 20% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.67 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Commercial Brand Score 100.0 | Brand Finance anchor 100.0 | Transnational core 89.4 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +2.6 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2025 full-country aggregate; 2026 continuity check.

Why it ranks this high

• The only Top 20 country whose final score is determined by the Commercial / Platform route. Global brands, technology platforms, entertainment and consumer ecosystems keep the country present in everyday life worldwide.

• Its underlying transnational route is also exceptionally strong at 89.4, so the lead is not dependent on commercial evidence alone.

• Receiver reaches 100 in the inherited core data, giving the United States near-universal recognition even where sentiment is less positive.

Challenges to its soft power

• The model shows a gap between visibility and credibility: credibility is 66.9, materially below receiver strength.

• Brand Finance 2026 reports broad deterioration in international perceptions of the United States even as familiarity and influence remain dominant.

• A more fragmented digital and regulatory environment could reduce the cross-border universality of US platforms, while political polarisation can erode trust faster than familiarity.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

The United States remains the benchmark because its soft power is distributed across brands, universities, media, technology, sport, science and diplomacy. The main question for the rest of the decade is not whether the world will remain familiar with America, but whether familiarity continues to convert into preference and trust. If credibility stabilises while commercial and technological leadership remains global, the lead is difficult to dislodge. If reputation continues to weaken, China and the leading European states have more room to close the gap.

Model watchlist

Watch credibility and receiver sentiment. They are the clearest potential drag on an otherwise dominant commercial and network position.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "US sees steepest decline out of all 193 nation brands in Global Soft Power Index 2026", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Routes are alternative pathways, not additive contributions. v4.7 adds a bounded contemporary-salience supplement and a common hub-confirmation rule. Ranks use full-precision scores, while public scores are rounded to one decimal. The retained commercial register covers 17/194 entities; N/S means no commercial observation was ingested and must not be interpreted as zero soft power.

Photo · Chris Karidis / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 02 / 20

France

The most complete non-US portfolio in the index.

#2

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
89.8	86.8	72.0	71.6	61.0

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. With full observed coverage, the core is retained without shrinkage; the coverage penalty activates only below complete coverage with lambda = 0.60.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 89.8 | Brand Finance anchor 97.4 | Credibility 66.1 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +3.0 points over Cultural / Symbolic.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2025 full-country aggregate.

Why it ranks this high

• France combines dense diplomatic and people-to-people networks with an unusually powerful cultural reserve. Its transnational score wins, but culture at 86.8 is close enough to show a genuinely multi-route profile.

• Receiver is 97.4 and symbolic capital 96.2, meaning reach is backed by recognition rather than scale alone.

• French language networks, diplomacy, higher education, luxury, cuisine, heritage and destination appeal reinforce one another instead of operating as isolated assets.

Challenges to its soft power

• Credibility at 66.1 is strong but notably below receiver and symbolic strength, leaving room for political or reputational shocks to affect conversion.

• France faces intense competition for cultural attention from English-language, East Asian and digital-native ecosystems.

• Its commercial/platform route is much lower than its cultural and network routes, showing that cultural ubiquity is not matched by US-scale digital or consumer-platform reach.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

France is structurally well protected because no single asset carries the ranking. Its foreign ministry formalised influence as a strategic capability in its 2021 soft-power roadmap. The country can renew that advantage through education, creative industries, Francophone networks, law, science and European leadership. The major opportunity is to modernise delivery: convert legacy cultural prestige into digital, youth-facing and commercially scalable influence without sacrificing the institutional networks that make France distinctive.

Model watchlist

Watch whether cultural prestige continues to renew itself among younger audiences and whether credibility can keep pace with near-universal recognition.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; France Diplomatie, "Roadmap for France's Soft Power", 14 Dec 2021 (official page accessed 2026).

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Sam Moqadam / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 03 / 20

China

Transnational reach narrowly leads a top-tier cultural profile; trust remains the constraint.

#3

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
88.4	86.7	65.9	68.3	76.1

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Full observed coverage preserves the core score; no country-specific bonus is applied.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 88.4 | Brand Finance anchor 99.5 | Credibility 51.8 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.7 points over Cultural / Symbolic. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2026.

Why it ranks this high

• China combines global diplomatic presence, economic networks, technology, trade and large-scale cultural recognition. The cultural route at 86.7 sits only 1.7 points below the winning transnational route.

• Receiver is 99.5 and symbolic capital 95.1. In other words, China is no longer merely large: it is deeply recognised across multiple channels.

• The 2026 commercial route is also substantial. The v4.6 evidence base records 68 Global 500 brands and a 15% portfolio share, giving China a second contemporary route into global daily life.

Challenges to its soft power

• Credibility is 51.8, far below receiver strength. This is the largest structural gap in China's top-tier profile.

• Gateway strength at 57.7 is moderate compared with leading tourism and hub states, limiting direct-experience conversion.

• Geopolitical competition can cause technology, media, education and cultural products to be interpreted through strategic rivalry rather than attraction alone.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

China has one of the strongest upward pathways in the index because its assets are broad and still internationalising. Brand Finance 2026 reports stronger perceptions in business, science and technology and a rise in reputation relative to the United States. The ceiling will depend on whether commercial and technological relevance produces deeper voluntary affinity. More inbound mobility, cultural exchange and confidence in institutions would narrow the current gap between being recognised and being trusted.

Model watchlist

The key swing variable is credibility. If trust rises while receiver and network scores remain near the ceiling, China can challenge for the top positions.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "China now ranks higher than the US in global reputation", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · David Köhler / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 04 / 20

Italy

Culture narrowly leads one of the index's strongest multi-route profiles.

#4

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
86.7	88.2	69.0	69.8	N/S

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 100.0 | Brand Finance anchor 95.8 | Transnational route 86.7 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.6 points over Transnational. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Italy reaches the maximum symbolic-capital score in the v4.5 engine. Heritage, art, architecture, food, fashion, design and lifestyle provide recognisability across audiences that may otherwise share little in common; the cultural route wins only narrowly over transnational reach.

• Receiver at 95.9 shows that this cultural stock remains internationally legible rather than merely historical.

• The transnational route is also 86.7, only 1.6 points below culture, so Italy is not a one-dimensional heritage state.

Challenges to its soft power

• The strongest assets are mature and inherited. The strategic challenge is renewal, especially in digital culture, contemporary creative industries and globally scaled platforms.

• Tourism success creates pressure on historic centres, infrastructure, residents and heritage conservation, making sustainability part of soft-power preservation.

• Credibility at 61.7 and hub strength at 69.0 are respectable but materially below symbolic recognition.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Italy is unlikely to lose cultural recognition quickly because its soft power is embedded in global habits of consumption and aspiration. The opportunity is to convert that inherited advantage into a more contemporary ecosystem: design technology, creative SMEs, premium manufacturing, food systems, cinema and digital tourism. OECD policy work in 2026 emphasises quality, innovation, digitalisation and sustainability in tourism. If Italy modernises the experience around its heritage, it can preserve a top-five position without needing US-style scale.

Model watchlist

Watch whether symbolic capital is continuously refreshed rather than simply conserved, and whether tourism pressure begins to weaken the lived experience behind the brand.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; OECD, "Italy: OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2026", 1 Jul 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Benjamin Davies / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 05 / 20

United Kingdom

Language, institutions and networks still travel farther than the country itself.

#5

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
88.0	82.1	74.5	73.4	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Full observed coverage retains the audited core without evidence shrinkage.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 88.0 | Brand Finance anchor 98.4 | Credibility 71.4 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +5.9 points over Cultural / Symbolic.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• English, global media, universities, finance, law, diplomacy, sport and the accumulated reach of British institutions create network effects that are difficult to reproduce deliberately.

• Receiver is 98.4, and the United Kingdom remains strong across culture, hubs and trust rather than relying on one narrow advantage.

• London acts as a multiplier for education, finance, media, culture and convening, while British universities reproduce elite networks over long time horizons.

Challenges to its soft power

• The principal risk is self-erosion: visa uncertainty, funding pressure and constraints on international education or cultural institutions can weaken the very networks that sustain the score.

• Post-Brexit frictions and a more competitive global education market reduce the automatic advantage once associated with British institutional access.

• The v4.6 commercial register contains no UK observation. The N/S score is therefore a coverage gap, not evidence that the UK lacks commercial or platform soft power.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

The UK remains a soft-power superpower, but inherited assets require active maintenance. British Council and UK Soft Power Group work published in 2025 stresses strategic coordination, predictable support and the importance of international education. A strong future path would connect universities, the creative economy, the BBC, sport, science, development partnerships and diplomatic posts more deliberately. The ranking is durable if Britain keeps itself accessible to the audiences it wants to influence.

Model watchlist

Watch international education, cultural-institution funding and openness. They are infrastructure for the transnational route, not peripheral domestic policy choices.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; British Council, "Strengthening UK Soft Power: Strategic Recommendations", May 2025; "The impact of international study on perceptions", Nov 2025.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Jannik Selz / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 06 / 20

Germany

Cultural-symbolic strength narrowly leads a profile built on reliability and networks.

#6

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
86.4	88.0	73.7	74.4	64.6

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 98.6 | Brand Finance anchor 97.9 | Transnational route 86.4 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.5 points over Transnational. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2025 full-country aggregate; 2026 rank-position check.

Why it ranks this high

• Germany's 98.6 symbolic score helps the cultural route narrowly lead, but the result is not driven only by traditional culture. Engineering, industrial standards, technical competence and product reliability have become recognisable national associations.

• Receiver is 97.9, while trust at 74.4 and the transnational route at 86.4 make the profile unusually balanced.

• Germany also retains meaningful commercial reach through globally known industrial and automotive brands, even though this route does not determine its final score.

Challenges to its soft power

• Brand Finance 2026 identifies weaker international economic perceptions, showing that industrial reputation can be affected by domestic growth and competitiveness debates.

• Germany has less mass-entertainment dominance than the United States, Japan or South Korea, so much of its appeal is competence-led rather than obsession-led.

• Energy costs, industrial transition and political fragmentation can affect the image of Germany as the unquestioned model of economic reliability.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Germany can renew its soft power if the next phase of industrial modernisation becomes internationally visible. Leadership in advanced manufacturing, green industry, mobility, engineering standards, science and vocational education can refresh the same competence narrative that built the current score. The key is to avoid allowing economic stagnation to turn a strong inherited association with reliability into a backward-looking reputation.

Model watchlist

Watch global perceptions of economic dynamism. The cultural route is unusually dependent on the continued credibility of German competence.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Germany holds 5th place globally despite notable score decline...", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Nick Karvounis / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 07 / 20

Spain

Culture narrowly leads a near-tied transnational profile.

#7

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
84.6	86.0	71.4	69.9	N/S

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 95.6 | Brand Finance anchor 94.3 | Transnational route 84.6 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.4 points over Transnational. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Spain's cultural score rests on a large language community, globally familiar food and lifestyle, heritage, football and exceptionally strong destination appeal.

• Receiver at 94.3 means Spanish cultural capital is repeatedly encountered and recognised abroad.

• The transnational score of 84.6 is close to the winning cultural route, reflecting broad European, Latin American and Mediterranean connectivity.

Challenges to its soft power

• Tourism concentration can create housing, infrastructure and environmental pressures that weaken resident support and eventually the visitor experience.

• Climate stress and extreme heat increasingly matter for destinations whose international attractiveness depends on place-based experience.

• No Spanish commercial portfolio observation was ingested into v4.6. The N/S entry cannot be used to infer weak Spanish commercial or technology-platform reach.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Spain can sustain a top-tier position by moving from volume tourism toward higher-value, geographically dispersed and more sustainable experiences while continuing to scale Spanish-language media and creative industries. OECD work on tourism resilience in 2026 highlights the need to balance economic, social and environmental outcomes. Spain's advantage is that its soft power is lived directly by millions of visitors and Spanish speakers, which makes it resilient if the experience remains attractive.

Model watchlist

Watch tourism sustainability and the ability to translate the Spanish-language cultural sphere into newer digital, scientific and commercial channels.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; OECD, "Spain: OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2026", 1 Jul 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

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COUNTRY PROFILE 08 / 20

Japan

Anime, games and world-loved brands convert contemporary salience into a Top 10 position.

#8

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
76.5	84.0	68.1	76.2	62.0

Winning Route Weighting Base Cultural / Symbolic 78.4; v4.7 adds a bounded contemporary-salience uplift of +5.6 points from verified 2026 evidence, producing 84.0.

Key Model Inputs Base Cultural 78.4 | Symbolic Capital 76.8 | Brand Finance anchor / contemporary signal 99.0 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +7.4 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). Japan: 2026 full-country evidence; 33 Global 500 brands worth USD489.9bn.

Why it ranks this high

• The v4.7 supplement corrects a clear undercount of contemporary Japanese cultural reach. Anime, manga, gaming, cuisine, design and consumer culture generate everyday familiarity far beyond heritage stock alone.

• Brand Finance 2026 places Japan 3rd overall, 1st for products and brands the world loves and 3rd in Culture & Heritage. Receiver is 99.0 and credibility 80.6, so attraction is reinforced by trust.

• Japan also carries exceptional commercial attribution through companies and products associated directly with the country, including automotive, electronics, gaming and entertainment ecosystems.

Challenges to its soft power

• The transnational and gateway routes remain below the strengthened cultural profile, so Japan does not convert all admiration into equally broad network or hub power.

• Demographic ageing can constrain the future domestic scale of cultural, technological and commercial production unless productivity and international talent compensate.

• Maintaining technological relevance is essential as competition from South Korea, China and the United States accelerates in digital platforms, AI and emerging consumer technologies.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Japan now enters the ISSF Top 10 because the model explicitly recognises contemporary salience that the heritage-heavy route previously missed. The opportunity to 2030 is to keep anime, games, cuisine and design connected to world-leading brands, advanced technology, tourism and trusted institutions. Japan does not need to become louder; it needs to ensure that the next generation of globally consumed products and stories remains recognisably Japanese.

Model watchlist

Watch whether contemporary cultural salience remains attached to future technology and globally loved products rather than becoming a legacy advantage.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Japan overtakes the UK to rank 3rd globally for Soft Power", 27 Jan 2026; Brand Finance Global 500 2026 Japan evidence.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Joshua Earle / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 09 / 20

Switzerland

A high-trust, highly balanced profile now sits just below recalibrated Japan.

#9

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
82.1	80.7	76.4	76.1	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Complete coverage preserves the core score; the evidence shrinkage mechanism is inactive.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 82.1 | Brand Finance anchor 96.4 | Credibility 83.1 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.4 points over Cultural / Symbolic. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Switzerland is one of the most balanced profiles in the Top 20. Transnational, culture, hub and trust routes all sit within six points of each other.

• Receiver is 96.9 and credibility 83.1, allowing a small state to convert finance, diplomacy, science, global institutions and destination appeal into durable influence.

• Brand Finance 2026 identifies Switzerland as a global leader in reputation and trust, validating the model's unusually strong receiver and credibility layer.

Challenges to its soft power

• The country has less mass-culture scale than larger peers, so its influence depends heavily on premium reputation, reliability and institutional centrality.

• Neutrality is an asset only while external audiences view it as useful and credible rather than ambiguous or opportunistic.

• High costs can limit the breadth of direct personal experience compared with mass-tourism destinations.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Switzerland is likely to remain a top soft-power state if it continues to function as a trusted place to meet, arbitrate, invest, study and innovate. The future opportunity lies in attaching its reputation for reliability to emerging domains such as AI governance, biotechnology, climate finance and scientific collaboration. Its ranking is less dependent on cultural fashion than on continuing to be regarded as a high-trust international platform.

Model watchlist

Watch neutrality, financial credibility and international convening. A trust shock would matter more here than a temporary loss of cultural attention.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Switzerland rises to 7th globally...", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Yann / Wikimedia Commons

COUNTRY PROFILE 10 / 20

India

Exceptional symbolic capital, with a visible conversion gap and an external digital-reputation headwind.

#10

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
78.8	81.6	62.7	61.2	N/S

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 90.4 | Brand Finance anchor 83.9 | Transnational route 78.8 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +2.8 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• India combines civilisational depth, religion, cuisine, cinema, music, yoga, diaspora networks and a rapidly expanding contemporary technology story. The model gives symbolic capital 90.4, the principal reason India enters the Top 10.

• The transnational route is also strong at 78.8, showing that diaspora and diplomatic reach support rather than substitute for culture.

• Brand Finance's latest India-specific public analysis highlights cultural influence, scientific capability and future-growth perceptions, reinforcing the breadth of the underlying story even though that analysis is from 2025.

Challenges to its soft power

• Gateway at 62.7 and Trust at 61.2 remain well below cultural and transnational strength. This is the clearest conversion gap in the Top 10.

• Credibility is 46.9, but the perception layer cannot separate criticism of India from externally generated racism and platform amplification. A 2026 Carnegie/YouGov survey found 48% of Indian Americans saw racist posts targeting Indians or Indian Americans very or somewhat often since the start of 2025. Separate monitoring reports weak and inconsistent enforcement of platform moderation against anti-Indian hate. This is not a reputational variable the Indian state can fully control.

• Many globally important Indian-origin firms, executives and cultural products are not automatically attributed to India, weakening country-brand capture even when Indian talent or consumption is visible.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

India has one of the largest upside ranges in the Top 20 because its existing cultural and transnational assets can still be converted more efficiently. Better visitor experience, global-city connectivity, universities, internationally attributed brands, sport and entertainment franchises, and more systematic cultural diplomacy would lift routes that lag culture. At the same time, external platform environments matter: persistent online racial stereotyping can damage reception independently of India's own projection. The strategic objective is to turn civilisational recognition and diaspora scale into a consistently positive, high-quality international encounter while distinguishing endogenous reputation problems from externally generated digital hostility.

Model watchlist

Watch gateway conversion, credibility and the extent to which externally generated anti-Indian online racism contaminates receiver sentiment. Future measurement should distinguish these mechanisms where data permit.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Culture, commerce, and cosmos: India positions itself as a global soft power force", 20 Feb 2025, contextual only; Carnegie Endowment, "Indian Americans in a Time of Turbulence: 2026 Survey Results", Feb 2026; Center for the Study of Organized Hate, "Anti-Indian Racism on X", 16 Sep 2025.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 11 / 20

South Korea

K-pop, screen culture and globally embedded brands turn contemporary salience into Top 20 power.

#11

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
75.4	80.2	67.3	71.9	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Base Cultural / Symbolic 74.1; v4.7 adds a bounded contemporary-salience uplift of +6.1 points from verified 2026 brand, technology, entertainment and food evidence, producing 80.2.

Key Model Inputs Base Cultural 74.1 | Brand Finance anchor 94.8 | Transnational route 75.4 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +4.8 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No Korean commercial portfolio observation was ingested; N/S is not zero. Contemporary brand salience enters only through the bounded v4.7 supplement.

Why it ranks this high

• The Korean Wave is now a structural global channel rather than a niche cultural export. K-pop, K-dramas, film, gaming, beauty, fashion and food create repeated voluntary engagement across regions and age groups.

• Commercial recognition reinforces culture. Samsung, Hyundai, Kia, LG and other Korean brands connect national familiarity to technology, mobility and consumer products. Brand Finance 2026 ranks South Korea 7th for products and brands the world loves and 5th for advanced technology and innovation.

• The transnational route remains strong at 75.4, so South Korea is not being lifted by entertainment alone. Trade, diplomacy, education, technology networks and a large export ecosystem broaden the base of influence.

Challenges to its soft power

• Contemporary cultural momentum can be more trend-sensitive than heritage-based recognition. The challenge is to convert fandom into durable affinity for institutions, education, tourism and the country brand.

• Regional security tensions and strategic competition can interrupt the otherwise positive association created by culture and technology.

• The retained commercial register has no full Korean portfolio observation, so the formal Commercial route still understates a major part of the country's real-world visibility. v4.7 addresses this only through a bounded salience supplement rather than a bespoke rank adjustment.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

South Korea has one of the clearest upward soft-power stories of the decade because culture, technology and brands reinforce one another. Brand Finance 2026 places it 11th overall and records elite positions in loved brands, innovation, entertainment and food. The next step is institutional conversion: more international students, tourism, research partnerships, globally recognised universities and deeper diplomatic networks can make Hallyu less dependent on entertainment cycles. If commercial portfolio evidence is broadened in the next edition, Korea may have further upside.

Model watchlist

Watch whether Hallyu converts into durable education, tourism, institutional trust and country-brand attribution, and whether the commercial evidence base catches up with Korea's obvious global brand footprint.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "South Korea ranks 11th for global Soft Power, strengthened by brands, innovation, and future growth", 27 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Mike Enerio / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 12 / 20

Singapore

Hub power remains exceptional, but v4.7 now requires confirmation from broader routes.

#12

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
78.3	49.9	79.8	73.8	39.5

Winning Route Weighting Base Hub 80.1 from Gateway + Brand Finance anchor; with 9/9 raw coverage, v4.7 confirms it as 85% base Hub + 15% second-best non-Hub route, producing 79.8.

Key Model Inputs Base Hub 80.1 | Gateway 85.5 | Brand Finance anchor 89.1 | Transnational 78.3 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +1.5 points over Transnational. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2026 named-brand lower bound. Lower-bound observation only; not a complete national portfolio.

Why it ranks this high

• Singapore remains the strongest high-confidence hub case in the Top 20. Gateway strength of 85.5 captures its role as a business, aviation, finance, talent and regional coordination node.

• The v4.7 confirmation rule barely changes the result because Singapore is fully observed and already has a 78.3 transnational route. Hub power is therefore supported by broader international embeddedness rather than standing alone.

• Receiver 89.6 and credibility 84.7 show that utility is reinforced by trust. Brand Finance 2026 also places Singapore strongly on governance, business and education.

Challenges to its soft power

• Cultural / Symbolic remains much lower than hub and transnational strength, so Singapore has less insulation from shifts in global mobility and business flows than culturally deep powers.

• High costs and a small domestic cultural market can limit the organic scale of entertainment and popular-culture exports.

• Competition from Dubai, Gulf hubs and other Asian gateway cities means connectivity advantages must be continuously renewed rather than assumed.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Singapore remains a global soft-power overperformer because it converts competence and connectivity into repeated international contact. v4.7 does not remove that advantage; it simply requires the hub result to be confirmed against the country's wider routes. Brand Finance 2026 again identifies Singapore as ASEAN's soft-power leader. A durable path would add more cultural, educational, research and globally attributed brand depth to an already exceptional gateway.

Model watchlist

Watch gateway competitiveness and whether Singapore can build more cultural and commercial attribution around the connectivity and institutional trust it already owns.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Singapore reaffirms ASEAN Soft Power leadership", 27 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Jace Grandinetti / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 13 / 20

Netherlands

Network density and trust sustain a Top 15 position despite limited demographic scale.

#13

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
78.7	71.4	71.0	73.5	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Complete coverage preserves the transnational core without shrinkage.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 78.7 | Brand Finance anchor 92.7 | Credibility 79.2 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +5.2 points over Trust / Reputation.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• The Netherlands is a classic network amplifier. Trade, diplomacy, logistics, universities, English proficiency, European centrality and corporate networks create reach far beyond population size.

• Receiver at 92.7 and credibility 79.2 support a high-quality, trusted international presence.

• The profile is balanced: trust, culture and hub routes all sit above 70, reducing dependence on a single narrative.

Challenges to its soft power

• Small-state influence can be diluted when larger European actors dominate agenda-setting and media attention.

• Domestic debates over migration, climate, agriculture and political fragmentation can affect perceptions of openness and policy stability.

• The v4.6 commercial register contains no Netherlands observation despite substantial external evidence of Dutch brand strength. That is a model-coverage limitation, not a finding of weak commercial soft power.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

The Netherlands has a strong path through sectors where technical competence becomes diplomacy: semiconductors, water management, logistics, agriculture, design, finance and climate adaptation. Brand Finance reports the top 50 Dutch brands reached EUR147.6 billion in 2026, up 13% year on year. Better integration of these commercial assets into future scoring could strengthen the profile further. The country's strategic advantage is that many of its most valuable capabilities are embedded in international systems rather than dependent on spectacle.

> **Model watchlist**
>
> Watch whether commercial brand evidence is incorporated more fully in future editions and whether the reputation for openness survives domestic political pressure.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, Netherlands 50 2026 release, 17 Jun 2026, contextual only and not a v4.6 commercial input.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

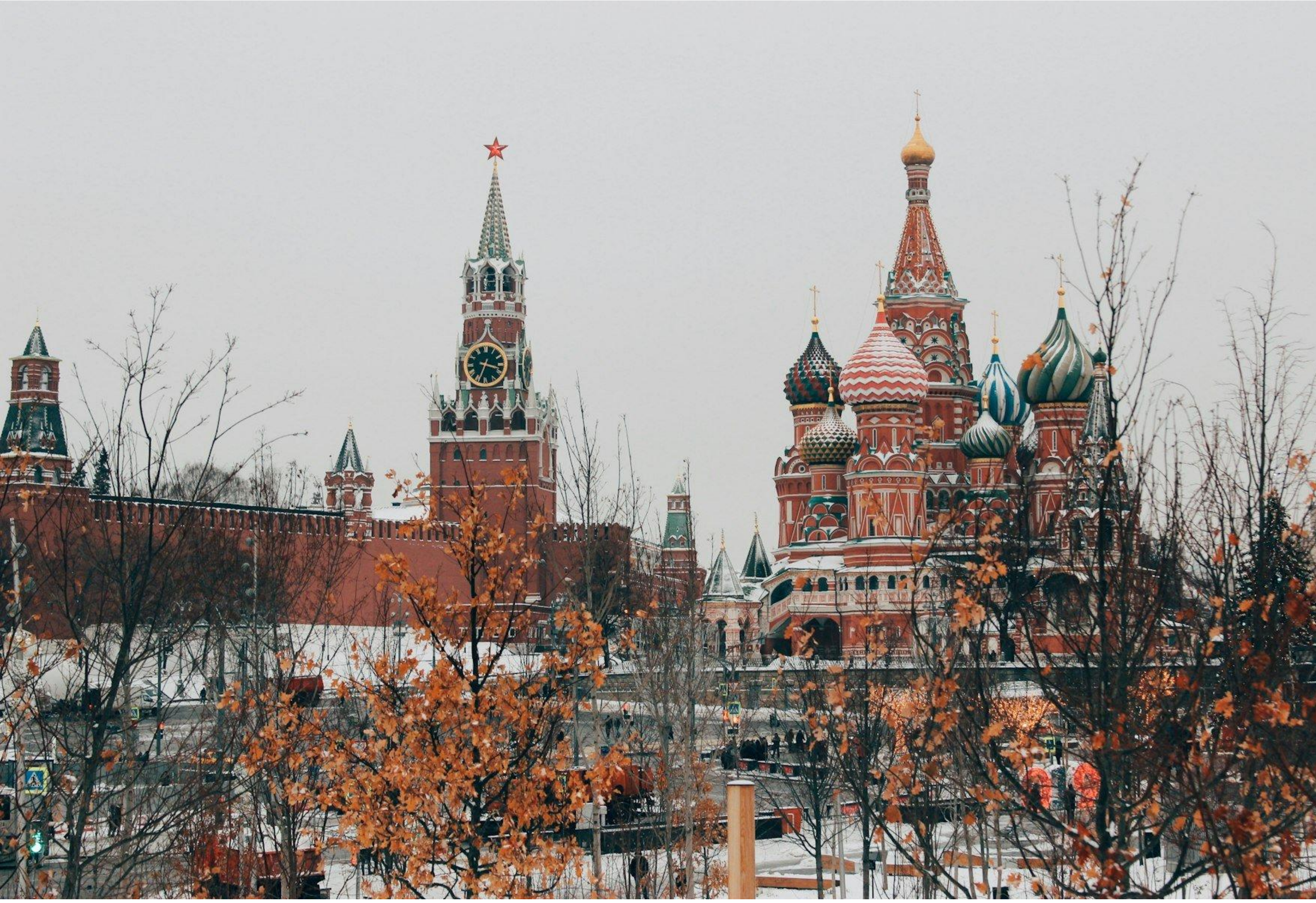

Photo · Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 14 / 20

Russia

Networks and culture are near-tied; credibility remains the exceptional constraint.

#14

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
78.7	77.8	65.3	61.1	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Full coverage retains the audited transnational score, with no country-specific correction for political controversy.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 78.7 | Brand Finance anchor 93.2 | Credibility 34.3 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +0.9 points over Cultural / Symbolic. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Russia remains highly familiar through language networks, history, literature, classical culture, science, diplomacy and enduring political attention across Europe, Eurasia and parts of the Global South. Its transnational route leads culture by only 0.9 points.

• The cultural route at 77.8 is almost identical to the transnational result, indicating that influence is not solely geopolitical.

• Receiver is 93.3. The world may hold sharply divided views of Russia, but it remains difficult to ignore, and long-standing networks continue to transmit influence.

Challenges to its soft power

• Credibility at 34.3 is by far the weakest among the highest-ranked transnational powers. This creates a major gap between recognition and positive conversion.

• War, sanctions and restrictions on academic, cultural and commercial exchange can progressively weaken the networks that currently preserve reach.

• Political instrumentalisation of culture can reduce the autonomy that often makes cultural attraction persuasive in the first place.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Russia's position is one of the clearest tests of the index's distinction between influence and approval. The released model records very high external recognition alongside very low credibility, while long-standing cultural and transnational networks remain strong. The future depends on whether those inherited networks remain durable under prolonged geopolitical separation. If recognition eventually converges downward toward credibility, the ranking could weaken materially. If relations normalise while cultural and network assets survive, Russia retains substantial latent soft power.

Model watchlist

The key question is convergence: does very high recognition remain detached from low credibility, or do the two eventually move together?

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2026 / executive summary, 20 Jan 2026, used for the external perception anchor only.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

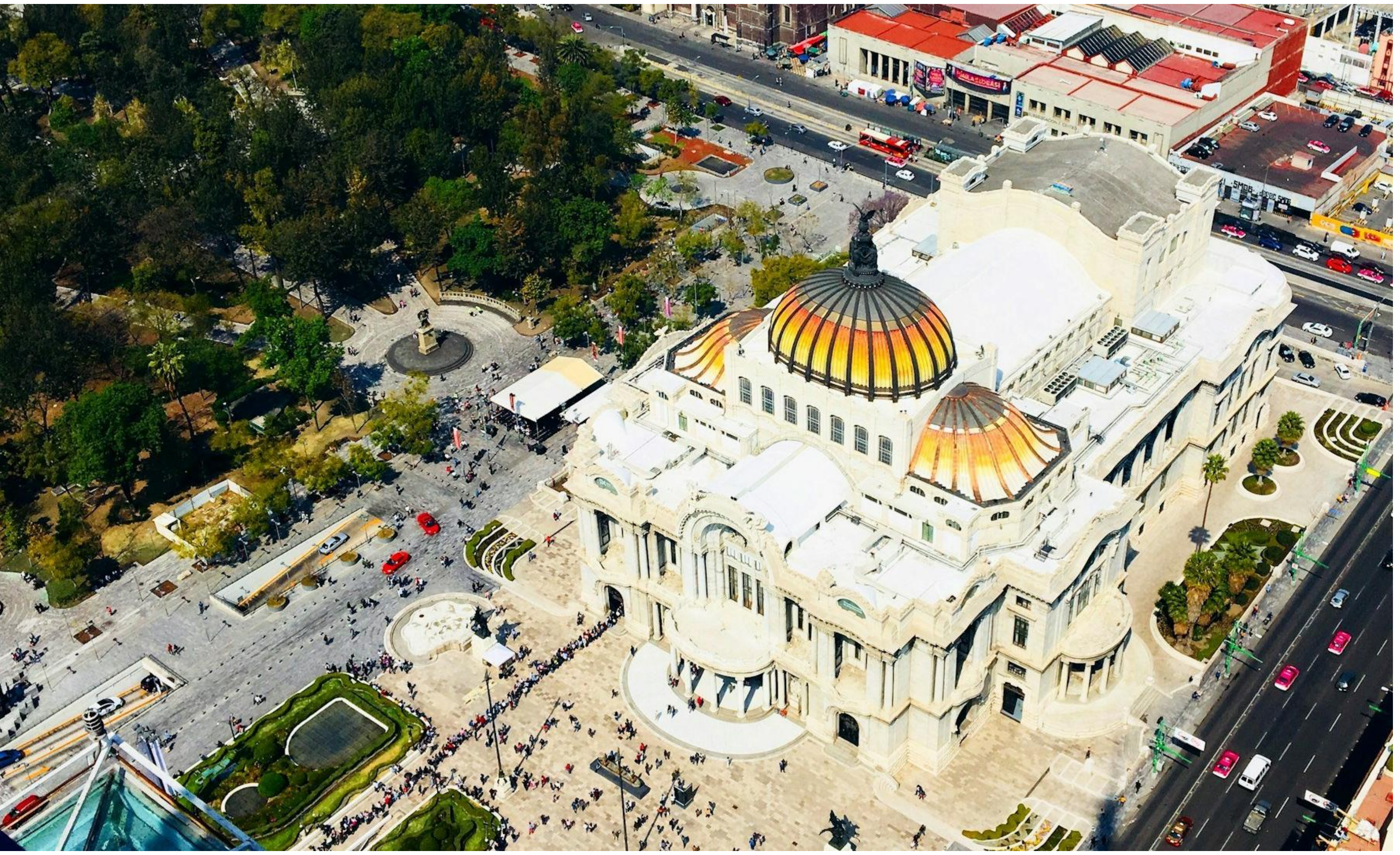

Photo · Jezael Melgoza / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 15 / 20

Mexico

Culture pulls Mexico into the Top 20 almost by itself.

#15

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
54.4	78.3	59.3	60.1	N/S

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 85.3 | Brand Finance anchor 78.6 | Transnational route 54.4 | Core raw coverage 66.7%

Route Margin +18.2 points over Trust / Reputation.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Mexico's 85.3 symbolic score reflects the global reach of food, music, visual culture, heritage, film and a large cultural footprint across North America and the Spanish-speaking world.

• The cultural route exceeds Mexico’s next-best route by 18.2 points, the widest route margin in the Top 20. Its 54.4 transnational score is also the lowest in the Top 20, about 14 points below the next-lowest member. Mexico’s position therefore rests on cultural and symbolic power more heavily than any other country in the group.

• Receiver at 78.8 is high enough for cultural recognition to convert into a top-tier final score.

Challenges to its soft power

• The network route at 54.4 and gateway route at 59.3 remain far below cultural strength, showing that recognition is not yet matched by equally broad diplomatic or hub conversion.

• Security and governance perceptions can cap trust and investment attraction even when cuisine and culture are loved.

• Mexico's international image is often filtered through its relationship with the United States, which can crowd out a more autonomous global narrative.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Mexico has significant upside if it can attach stronger institutions, cities, brands and global business networks to cultural familiarity that already exists. The easiest gain is not more awareness; it is conversion. Creative industries, tourism, nearshoring, Spanish-language media and a stronger country-brand link for Mexican firms can widen the number of routes through which Mexico scores. A durable climb requires the trust and transnational layers to move closer to the cultural one.

Model watchlist

Watch the gap between symbolic capital and the transnational core. Closing even part of it would make Mexico's Top 20 status far more robust.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2026, 20 Jan 2026; Mexico 50 2026 release, 29 Jul 2026, post-freeze commercial context only.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Niklas Gretz / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 16 / 20

Sweden

A high-trust network power whose innovation story is stronger than its scale.

#16

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
78.2	73.1	72.8	74.3	42.8

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Complete coverage leaves the transnational core unchanged.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 78.2 | Brand Finance anchor 93.8 | Credibility 80.5 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +4.0 points over Trust / Reputation.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2026.

Why it ranks this high

• Sweden converts a small population into outsized influence through European networks, innovation, design, multinational firms, music, sustainability and a high-trust institutional reputation.

• Credibility is 80.5 and receiver 93.8, creating a strong conversion environment for networks and brands.

• The profile is balanced: culture, hub and trust routes all exceed 72, which reduces dependence on one national story.

Challenges to its soft power

• The v4.6 commercial route is only 42.8 because the narrow Global 500 measure captures a limited portfolio, even though Swedish consumer brands have much wider everyday visibility.

• Nordic peers compete for many of the same associations: sustainability, governance, quality of life and innovation.

• Brand Finance 2026 notes plateauing perceptions across the Nordic region, so existing strengths cannot simply be assumed to continue rising.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Sweden's next gains are likely to come from making innovation more visible and more strongly attributed to the country. Climate technology, gaming, music, design, life sciences and digital entrepreneurship can add contemporary salience to the established trust narrative. Because the profile is already diversified, Sweden does not need a dramatic reinvention. It needs renewed distinctiveness in a region where several neighbours possess similar reputational strengths.

Model watchlist

Watch whether innovation and commercial attribution improve faster than the broader Nordic perception plateau.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Sweden continues to lead Nordic nations...", 20 Jan 2026; Global 500 Nordic release, 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Mwangi Gatheca / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 17 / 20

Canada

A broad reputation advantage, but without one overwhelming alternative route.

#17

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
77.3	71.2	74.8	74.4	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Complete observed coverage preserves the inherited transnational score.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 77.3 | Brand Finance anchor 96.9 | Credibility 77.5 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +2.6 points over Hub / Familiarity.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Canada combines immigration networks, education, diplomacy, English and French cultural reach, North American access and a reputation for stability.

• Receiver is 96.4 and credibility 77.5, while hub and trust routes sit close to the winning transnational route. This makes Canada a balanced rather than spectacular soft-power state.

• Brand Finance 2026 ranks Canada among the world leaders for overall reputation and highlights business accessibility, lifestyle and political stability.

Challenges to its soft power

• Housing costs, infrastructure pressure and strain around immigration can affect the domestic experience that supports Canada’s international image of openness.

• The country competes directly with the United States, United Kingdom and Australia for students, talent, media attention and English-language cultural reach.

• No Canadian commercial portfolio observation was ingested into v4.6. The model therefore makes no comparative claim about Canada’s commercial-route strength.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Canada's strongest future path is to convert its reputation for stability into leadership in education, AI, clean technology, life sciences, Arctic governance and talent attraction. Its soft power is unlikely to collapse quickly because it is spread across several routes. The greater risk is relative stagnation as other countries invest more aggressively in cultural and commercial projection. Maintaining openness while managing domestic capacity pressures will be central to preserving the current advantage.

Model watchlist

Watch whether domestic affordability and migration pressures begin to weaken the external image of Canada as an accessible, high-quality destination.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Canada ranks 8th...", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Dan Freeman / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 18 / 20

Australia

Transnational and hub power are almost tied.

#18

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
76.8	68.3	76.2	73.5	N/S

Winning Route Weighting Evidence-adjusted v4.4 core. Full coverage preserves the transnational result; at full precision, hub power finishes about 0.7 points behind.

Key Model Inputs Transnational core 76.8 | Brand Finance anchor 92.2 | Credibility 79.8 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +0.7 points over Hub / Familiarity. Close-route result.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Australia is the narrowest route contest in the Top 20: transnational reach leads hub power by only 0.7 points. International education, migration, tourism, cities and Indo-Pacific connectivity reinforce both routes.

• Gateway strength is 77.8 and credibility 79.8, supporting both direct experience and trust.

• Its geographic distance is partly offset by strong education, migration and English-language networks that repeatedly bring international audiences into contact with the country.

Challenges to its soft power

• Brand Finance 2026 identifies pressure on higher education linked to geopolitical and policy uncertainty, a direct risk to one of Australia's most important soft-power channels.

• Distance remains a structural cost for travel, convening and cultural distribution.

• Climate and environmental credibility matter increasingly for a country whose image is closely tied to landscape, lifestyle and outdoor experience.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Australia can remain in the Top 20 if it protects international education and migration as strategic assets rather than treating them only as domestic capacity questions. The Indo-Pacific provides a large opportunity for deeper university, cultural, scientific and diaspora partnerships. Green minerals, climate technology, sport and screen production can add newer channels to the established lifestyle and education brand. Because hub and transnational routes are already close, modest gains in either can materially strengthen the ranking.

Model watchlist

Watch international education policy and gateway openness. They influence both of Australia's strongest routes at the same time.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Australia ranks 16th for global Soft Power...", 27 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Benjamin Suk / Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 19 / 20

Türkiye

Cultural depth is scaling outward, while credibility remains the brake.

#19

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
71.9	76.7	64.2	60.2	N/S

Winning Route Weighting 70% Symbolic Capital + 20% Receiver + 10% BF 2026 percentile; transformed as 25 + 0.64 x weighted input.

Key Model Inputs Symbolic Capital 77.9 | Brand Finance anchor 87.5 | Transnational route 71.9 | Core raw coverage 100%

Route Margin +4.8 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). No commercial portfolio observation was ingested for this country; N/S is omitted from the max and must not be read as zero.

Why it ranks this high

• Türkiye sits at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Mediterranean and carries a large cultural repertoire through cuisine, heritage, television, tourism and history.

• Receiver is 87.6 and symbolic capital 77.9, producing a cultural route that clearly beats the hub and trust routes.

• The transnational score of 71.9 reflects diplomacy, regional connectivity and the country's ability to operate across several strategic theatres.

Challenges to its soft power

• Credibility at 38.4 is one of the weakest values in the Top 20 and sharply constrains the trust route.

• Brand Finance 2026 notes that weaker Business & Trade perceptions continue to hold back influence despite gains in culture and international relations.

• Macroeconomic volatility and political polarisation can reduce the reputational dividend from otherwise strong cultural visibility.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

Türkiye has a plausible path upward because its culture already travels and its diplomatic relevance is difficult to ignore. The next gains require a stronger conversion layer: business confidence, educational exchange, institutional credibility and global brands. Turkish television, food and tourism can keep expanding familiarity, but a sustained top-tier position will depend on whether the country becomes as easy to trust and transact with as it is easy to recognise.

> **Model watchlist**
>
> Watch credibility and business perceptions. Cultural success is already established; the constraint sits in conversion rather than visibility.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "Türkiye returns to top 25 most influential Soft Power nations globally", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft power.

Photo · Unsplash

COUNTRY PROFILE 20 / 20

United Arab Emirates

Gateway power remains formidable, but v4.7 now requires broader confirmation.

#20

Route scorecard

TRANSNATIONAL	CULTURAL	HUB	TRUST	COMMERCIAL
68.5	55.5	76.5	66.3	41.9

Winning Route Weighting Base Hub 78.5 from Gateway + Brand Finance anchor; with 5/9 raw coverage, v4.7 confirms it as 80% base Hub + 20% second-best non-Hub route, producing 76.5.

Key Model Inputs Base Hub 78.5 | Gateway 81.5 | Brand Finance anchor 95.3 | Transnational 68.5 | Core raw coverage 55.6%

Route Margin +8.0 points over Transnational.

Commercial Evidence v4.7 retains the v4.6 commercial register (17/194 entities). This country: 2026 named-brand lower bound. Lower-bound observation only; not a complete national portfolio.

Why it ranks this high

• The UAE has built soft power by maximising repeated contact through aviation, tourism, finance, logistics, events, sport and business. It remains the highest-ranked Gulf state in the ISSF Top 20.

• v4.7 reduces the degree to which a single hub pathway can dominate when underlying source coverage is thinner. The UAE still scores 76.5 because the gateway signal is strong, but the result is now confirmed against its broader profile.

• Brand Finance 2026 independently records the UAE at 10th in its perception-based index, with particular strength in influence, international relations and business, supporting the conclusion that the country has genuine soft-power reach beyond transit alone.

Challenges to its soft power

• The country still has less historical-cultural insulation than older civilisational powers, making sustained institutional, educational and creative depth important if hub momentum slows.

• Its international position remains exposed to regional security, aviation flows, global capital cycles and competition from other Gulf and Asian hubs.

• The strategic challenge is conversion from usage to attachment: convenience, spectacle and connectivity do not automatically create the same durable affinity as language, education or long-standing cultural networks.

Future outlook: 2026 to 2030

The UAE remains an important soft-power case after recalibration. Brand Finance 2026 keeps it among the world's leading perception-based soft-power states, while the ISSF model now asks whether gateway strength is corroborated by broader routes. The future opportunity is to turn Dubai and Abu Dhabi from internationally used platforms into sources of universities, research, creative industries, brands and institutions that remain influential even when people are not physically travelling through them.

Model watchlist

Watch whether gateway intensity is increasingly supported by transnational, cultural and educational depth. That is the path back toward the middle of the Top 20 without relying on a single-route advantage.

Sources / context: ISSF WSP 2026 v4.7 score engine; Brand Finance, "The UAE maintains 10th place as Western nations decline", 20 Jan 2026.

Reading note: Margin = gap to second-best eligible route. N/S = no observation in the retained v4.6 commercial register, not zero commercial soft pow

PART III

Scientific Methodology & Statistical Appendix

Technical release v4.7 · 194 entities · five routes to influence. Pre-publication technical annex, generated from the same v4.7 release score file used for Part II rankings and the Top 20 country profiles.

Photo · Sean Pollock / Unsplash

Technical abstract

The World Soft Power Index 2026 ranks 194 entities by their capacity to generate voluntary international influence through transnational reach, cultural and symbolic capital, gateway familiarity, trust and reputation, and contemporary commercial or platform presence. The unit of analysis is the country or separately ranked entity, not the incumbent government. The final score is the strongest eligible route after the common v4.7 calibration safeguards are applied; the commercial route is omitted when comparable portfolio evidence is unavailable.

The design is deliberately non-compensatory and multi-pathway. A country is not required to resemble a single ideal type in order to score highly. v4.7 retains the five-route architecture while adding two bounded safeguards: a contemporary-salience supplement inside the Cultural route and coverage-sensitive confirmation when Hub / Familiarity is initially the strongest route. Both are common rules, not country-specific rank adjustments.

All published ranks are generated from full-precision engine values. Public-facing scores are rounded to one decimal place only after ranking. No country is manually promoted, demoted, capped or assigned an ordinal position. The 2023 ISSF ranking has zero scoring weight and must not be interpreted as a comparable time series.

SCIENTIFIC CLAIM BOUNDARY

This annex distinguishes measurement design, data transformations, deterministic aggregation, and post-engine diagnostics. It does not attach p-values or sampling confidence intervals to the final deterministic composite. Where uncertainty is examined, it is labelled as sensitivity to design parameters or evidence coverage, not as classical sampling uncertainty.

Publication-grade transparency status

The v4.5, v4.6 and v4.7 downstream equations are directly documented in the current release package. The v4.7 contemporary-salience register is frozen as a versioned scoring input, and the Hub confirmation rule is fully deterministic from Raw Coverage and the route vector. The downstream v4.4 Core equations and the forced-displacement N3 adjustment remain reproducible from the archived 194-row output and predecessor inputs to rounding precision. Three inherited upstream items remain frozen archival intermediates: the v4.4 Reputation-Converted Diaspora transformation, the v4.4 Gateway transformation, and the v4.5 modelled Brand Finance percentile fallback used for Taiwan.

1. Construct, estimand and unit of analysis

1.1 What the index measures

Soft power is operationalised as the capacity of a country to shape preferences and behaviour abroad through attraction, familiarity, credibility, networks and voluntary engagement rather than coercion or direct payment. The measurable target is therefore not moral approval and not governmental popularity. It is internationally realised relevance: the extent to which a country is recognised, chosen, visited, consumed, trusted, connected to, or repeatedly encountered beyond its borders.

The index is influence-first rather than virtue-first. Governance and credibility can affect whether recognition becomes usable access, but governance is not the definition of soft power. Population, GDP and military capability do not receive direct scoring weight merely because they are large. Scale matters only when it is converted into cross-border relationships, destination pull, recognition or consumption.

1.2 Statistical object

The WSP 2026 score is a deterministic composite index. It is a function of observed, computed and inherited modelled inputs placed on common 0-100 scales, combined under pre-specified route equations. The resulting number is an index score, not an estimate of a physical constant. The ordinal rank is derived from that score and carries less information than the score vector and dominant route.

1.3 Universe

Item	Released rule
Universe	194 entities: 193 United Nations member states plus Taiwan
Unit of analysis	Country or separately ranked entity, not current government
Country-specific overrides	None. All score movements follow common equations or frozen evidence registers.
Historical 2023 rank	0% scoring weight; context only
Published score precision	One decimal place
Ranking precision	Full engine precision before display rounding
Final route rule	Strongest eligible route after v4.7 calibration safeguards

No post-score geopolitical adjustment is permitted. The same released functional rules apply across the 194-entity universe. Taiwan is included as a separately ranked entity; its external Brand Finance percentile remains a disclosed modelled fallback because Brand Finance reports all 193 UN member states rather than Taiwan as a separate member-state observation.

2. Version lineage and release freeze

The 2026 architecture was developed through versioned technical releases. The current published score must be understood as v4.7. Earlier workbooks remain relevant only where they provide audited lineage for inherited inputs or prior-stage formulas.

Version	Role in current release	Status
v4.3	Source-preprocessing lineage: six pillars, migrant and refugee corrections, receiver construction	Superseded as final score; retained as input lineage
v4.4	Creates inherited Core / Transnational route and frozen Gateway, Receiver, Credibility and converted-network intermediates	Inherited Core layer
v4.5	Adds evidence shrinkage plus Cultural, Hub and Trust alternative routes; final becomes strongest of four routes	Base architecture
v4.6	Adds uplift-only Commercial & Platform Reach; final becomes strongest of five eligible routes	Commercial extension retained inside v4.7
v4.7	Adds bounded contemporary-salience supplementation, coverage-sensitive Hub confirmation and evidence-aware public route labelling	Released score engine

2.1 Release-stage procedural safeguards

• No formula references the QA sheet. QA diagnostics identify mapping or specification questions but do not supply a target rank.

• No named-country score override, rank override or geopolitical adjustment exists in the released v4.7 layer. The contemporary-salience supplement, Hub confirmation and public-label floor operate through common rules and a frozen evidence register.

• Any released methodological change is versioned, applied mechanically to the relevant eligible universe, and followed by regeneration of the complete full-precision ranking. Missing Commercial or contemporary-salience evidence is non-penalising rather than coded as zero.

• Editorial interpretation follows the locked v4.7 score file. Published ranks are not typed directly into the report and are not adjusted to match an expected ordering.

3. Evidence architecture, source states and coverage

3.1 Evidence-state vocabulary

State	Definition	Examples
Observed	Directly ingested or source-standardised value from an external or audited dataset	GII where mapped, Lowy diplomacy, migrant stock, N2/N3 sample, Brand Finance rank, UNESCO site count
Computed	Deterministic value calculated from observed inputs	Robust normalisations, v4.3 diaspora network, heritage depth, commercial brand score
Modelled / fallback	Common rule used when a direct anchor is unavailable	v4.3 Receiver fallback; Taiwan BF percentile fallback
Frozen inherited intermediate	Preserved audited vector from a prior locked engine	v4.4 Gateway and Reputation-Converted Diaspora
Contextual	Displayed for interpretation but zero scoring weight	2023 rank, population diagnostics

3.2 Inherited source-family coverage

Input family	Entities	Coverage	Evidence state	Current role
WIPO GII	138	71.13%	Observed where mapped	Knowledge / capability lineage
Lowy diplomacy	65	33.51%	Observed	Core Reach lineage
N3 corridor breadth	51	26.29%	Observed sample	Core Reach lineage
Creative	29	14.95%	Observed; neutral placeholder elsewhere	Culture / knowledge lineage
Education / STI	138	71.13%	Observed; neutral placeholder elsewhere	Culture / knowledge / gateway lineage
Business	29	14.95%	Observed; neutral placeholder elsewhere	Knowledge / gateway lineage
Credibility / Trust	31	15.98%	Observed; neutral elsewhere	Core intensity and Trust route
N2 diaspora dispersion	51	26.29%	Observed sample	Network lineage
People	194	100% populated	Computed, not 194 direct observations	Core Reach and v4.3 pillars
Migrant stocks	194	100%	Observed source stock	Network preprocessing
External Receiver anchor	46	23.71%	Observed benchmark anchor	Inherited Receiver lineage
Brand Finance 2026 percentile	193 + 1 fallback	193 observed UN states	External perception check	External perception check; v4.5 routes; v4.6 commercial recognition check; v4.7 salience confirmation
UNESCO cultural sites	194 populated field	2025 frozen snapshot	Observed count / defined zero	Cultural route
Commercial portfolio evidence	17	8.76%	Observed full aggregate or labelled lower bound	Commercial route only; retained unchanged in v4.7
Contemporary salience register	3 activation rows	Release-stage bounded register	Observed 2026 domain ranks + computed composite	v4.7 Cultural supplement only

The inherited Raw Coverage variable is a 0-1 fraction discretised in ninths. It records evidence availability across the nine audited source families in the inherited core evidence architecture. In v4.7 it continues to govern Core shrinkage and also determines the strength of Hub confirmation when the base Hub route is initially dominant. It is an evidence-availability variable, not a substantive quality score.

Raw coverage	Number of entities
1/9	48
2/9	4
3/9	71
4/9	24
5/9	8
6/9	10
9/9	29

Mean Raw Coverage is 0.416 and the median is 0.333. Only 29 entities have full 9/9 coverage, 47 have coverage of at least 0.5, and 147 are below 0.5. This is a major methodological limitation and is why evidence coverage is disclosed separately from the headline score.

MISSINGNESS IS NOT RANDOM

Country data availability is structurally related to income, institutional reporting capacity, research attention and international prominence. The model therefore does not describe sparse cases as if their missing values were ordinary random omissions. The v4.5 shrinkage rule is a conservative heuristic safeguard, not a formal multiple-imputation procedure.

4. Normalisation and scale transformation

Source variables enter the model on different units. Where a raw continuous variable must be normalised, the inherited audited pipeline uses robust percentile clipping so that extreme values do not dominate the full scale.

Generic robust 1-100 transformation

Norm_i = 1 + 99 * [clip(x_i, q05, q95) - q05] / (q95 - q05)

Values below q05 are mapped to 1 and values above q95 are mapped to 100. Intermediate observations are linearly interpolated. Log transformation is applied before robust normalisation when the underlying stock is highly right-skewed, particularly migration-scale measures.

4.1 Frozen migration normalisation constants

Signal	q05	q95
Outbound log effective stock	8.4566195541	15.4604833681
Outbound effective-stock / population intensity	0.0067638604	0.3299708558
Inbound log effective stock	8.2292946634	15.7235984407
Inbound effective-stock / population intensity	0.00228354045	0.43086102656

These constants are frozen from the v4.3 preprocessing release and are not recomputed inside v4.7. Freezing them is essential for reproducibility: re-estimating q05 and q95 on a changed country or vintage sample would silently alter every normalised value.

05

5. Human networks and forced-displacement safeguard

5.1 Why displacement is corrected

International migration can create durable human networks, but forced displacement is not equivalent to voluntary affinity. A large refugee population cannot be treated as evidence that the country of origin has successfully attracted or retained positive transnational attachment. The pipeline therefore discounts forced-displacement components under one common rule.

v4.3 outbound preprocessing

OutboundEffective_i = EmigrantStock_i - 0.50 * RefugeesByOrigin_i

v4.3 inbound preprocessing

InboundEffective_i = ImmigrantStock_i - 0.75 * RefugeesHosted_i

The outbound coefficient retains partial network contact while reducing the risk that conflict-driven dispersion is rewarded as soft power. The inbound coefficient treats refugee hosting as international contact but not as equivalent to voluntary destination choice. Both coefficients apply identically across countries and are design choices, not fitted causal parameters.

5.2 Diaspora and inbound composite signals

DiasporaNetwork_v43_i = 0.70 * OutboundLogReach_i + 0.30 * OutboundIntensity_i

InboundMagnetism_v43_i = 0.55 * InboundLogReach_i + 0.45 * InboundIntensity_i

5.3 N2 dispersion and N3 corridor breadth

The audited 51-origin bilateral network sample distinguishes absolute network scale from destination dispersion and corridor breadth. N2 is a normalised entropy score. If p_ij is origin i's share of its diaspora in destination j and k_i is the number of represented destinations, the normalised entropy component is:

N2_i = 1 + 99 * [-sum_j p_ij * ln(p_ij) / ln(k_i)]

N3 treats a corridor as material when the bilateral stock is at least the larger of 1,000 persons or 0.10% of the origin diaspora stock. The archived N3 build combines the number of material corridors, macro-regional reach and concentration under fixed weights. This input is observed only for the 51-country network sample and is never described as a 194-country direct observation.

Audited N3 construction

N3_i = 0.55 * MaterialCount_i + 0.25 * RegionReach_i + 0.20 * Concentration_i

5.4 v4.4 refugee adjustment of N3

The v4.4 output contains a second forced-displacement safeguard that shrinks corridor breadth toward the neutral midpoint in proportion to the share of emigrants represented by refugees by origin. The formula is recoverable from the archived 194-row output to rounding precision:

f_i = clip(RefugeesByOrigin_i / EmigrantStock_i, 0, 1)

N3adj_i = 50 + (N3_i - 50) * (1 - f_i)

If the forced-displacement share is zero, N3 is unchanged. As the share rises, the network-breadth signal moves toward 50 instead of being mechanically rewarded. The rule can move a score above or below 50 toward neutral and therefore does not impose a one-direction country penalty.

6. Inherited v4.4 Core / Transnational Reach

The v4.7 score does not recompute v4.4 from raw sources. It inherits the audited v4.4 Core layer. For transparency, the downstream v4.4 equations have been reconstructed and verified against all 194 archived rows. The maximum discrepancy from the stored four-decimal output is below 0.0001, consistent with rounding of archived intermediate columns.

6.1 Reach pathway

$$REACH\_i = 0.38 * Diplomacy\_i + 0.31 * N3adj\_i + 0.22 * People\_i + 0.09 * RepConvertedDiaspora\_i$$

Component	Weight	Interpretation
Diplomacy	38%	Formal international network reach
Refugee-adjusted N3	31%	Cross-border corridor breadth with displacement safeguard
People	22%	People-to-people international signal
Reputation-Converted Diaspora	9%	Inherited diaspora signal after v4.4 conversion

6.2 Intensity pathway

$$INTENSITY\_i = 0.20 * CulturePeople\_i + 0.20 * KnowledgeBrand\_i + 0.25 * Gateway\_i + 0.20 * Receiver\_i + 0.15 * Credibility\_i$$

Component	Weight
Culture & People	20%
Knowledge & Brand	20%
Gateway	25%
Receiver	20%
Credibility	15%

6.3 Symmetric dominant-path geometric envelope

$$CORE\_i = \max(REACH\_i, INTENSITY\_i)^{0.90} * \min(REACH\_i, INTENSITY\_i)^{0.10}$$

This is a symmetric non-compensatory aggregator. It does not permanently privilege Reach over Intensity. Whichever pathway is stronger receives 90% of the geometric exponent, while the weaker pathway contributes 10%. A country can therefore demonstrate a strong transnational core through breadth or through intense gateway, cultural, reception and credibility channels, but an extremely weak secondary pathway still has some constraining effect.

7. Evidence-adjusted Core

v4.5 adds a one-sided coverage safeguard to the inherited Core. The purpose is to prevent a country with sparse underlying coverage from inheriting a high Core because repeated neutral placeholders happen to combine favourably.

> **Evidence shrinkage**
>
> CORE*_i = CORE_i - lambda * (1 - q_i) * max(0, CORE_i - BF_i)
>
> where lambda = 0.60

Here q_i is Raw Coverage and BF_i is the Brand Finance 2026 percentile used as an external familiarity check. The rule has four important properties:

- It never boosts the Core.
- It only activates when Core exceeds the external familiarity percentile.
- The penalty grows as evidence coverage falls.
- At q_i = 1, the adjustment is exactly zero regardless of BF_i.

lambda = 0.60 is a fixed design parameter. It is not estimated from a target ranking. Structural sensitivity tests at lambda = 0 and lambda = 1 are reported later to show how strongly the released order depends on this choice.

8. External familiarity percentile

Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index 2026 is used as a limited external-perception input, not as the master ranking. Brand Finance reports all 193 UN member states and is based on a survey of more than 150,000 respondents in more than 100 countries. In v4.5, the published country rank is converted to a 0-100 percentile among the 193 observed UN member states:

v4.5 percentile transform

BF_i = 100 * (193 - rank_i) / 192

This gives 100 to rank 1 and 0 to rank 193. The percentile is used at low weight inside the alternative routes and in the one-sided evidence adjustment. It is not independent validation because it is itself an input to the released model.

Taiwan has no observed Brand Finance UN-member-state rank in this source universe. The v4.5 engine stores a modelled fallback percentile of 61.9171. The surviving v4.5 workbook identifies this as a disclosed fallback but does not preserve the exact regeneration rule. The scalar is retained unchanged in v4.7 and must be accompanied by that evidence-state label in a reproducibility package.

9. Cultural & Symbolic Capital route

9.1 Heritage depth

The objective heritage stock is the count of UNESCO cultural World Heritage properties in the frozen 2025 source snapshot. The snapshot used by the engine contains a maximum country count of 55 cultural properties. Counts are compressed logarithmically to avoid allowing one country with a very large inventory to dominate the entire route.

$$H_i = 100 * \ln(1 + U_i) / \ln(56) \quad \text{if } U_i > 0; \text{ otherwise } H_i = 0$$

9.2 Symbolic medal uplift

Brand Finance 2026 cultural and symbolic medal evidence is used only as an uplift. Sport medals are excluded from this symbolic heritage variable. Let M_i be the cultural medal score stored in the v4.5 evidence sheet, with 0 when no relevant medal is present:

$$S_i = \max[\, H_i, 0.40 * H_i + 0.60 * M_i \,]$$

The max operator makes medal evidence non-destructive. A country without a medal retains its UNESCO-based heritage depth rather than being penalised.

9.3 Base Cultural route

$$CUL0_i = 25 + 0.64 * (0.10 * BF_i + 0.20 * Receiver_i + 0.70 * S_i)$$

Input	Weight
Brand Finance familiarity check	10%
Receiver	20%
Symbolic / civilisational capital	70%

The offset 25 and slope 0.64 are fixed calibration parameters used to place the route on a score range compatible with the inherited Core. They are not regression intercepts or estimated coefficients. v4.7 retains this equation as the base Cultural score before the bounded contemporary-salience supplement.

9.4 Contemporary-salience supplement

The base Cultural route is intentionally heritage-heavy. v4.7 therefore permits a bounded, non-penalising supplement when the frozen 2026 evidence register contains at least three quantified contemporary-salience observations for an entity. Eligible metric families are consumer brands, technology or innovation, arts or entertainment, cuisine, lifestyle or fun, destination appeal, and a directly comparable culture pillar. Missing register evidence produces no deduction and no imputed zero.

For each registered entity: $P(r) = 100 * (193 - r) / 192$

D_i = arithmetic mean of the qualifying domain-rank percentiles

$CS_i = \max(BF_i, D_i)$

$CUL47_i = CUL0_i + \min[6.3, 0.27 * \max(0, CS_i - CUL0_i)]$

Eligibility is established before the uplift equation is evaluated. The max in CS makes the supplemental signal one-sided within an eligible row, while the outer cap limits any increase to 6.3 points. The coefficient 0.27 and cap 6.3 are fixed v4.7 design parameters. They are not fitted to a target ranking. The detailed frozen register is published in Appendix C.

Because the register is not full-universe, the supplement is treated as a bounded undermeasurement correction rather than a sixth route or a universal cultural pillar. The released activation rows are Japan, South Korea and Thailand. Non-entry must not be interpreted as absence of contemporary cultural relevance.

10. Hub & Familiarity route

The Hub route creates a legitimate pathway for countries whose international significance is concentrated in gateways, travel, connectivity and repeated exposure rather than large population or deep historical-cultural stock. v4.7 retains the original Hub equation as a base score and adds a coverage-sensitive confirmation step when that base score would otherwise determine the final result.

$$HUB0_i = 25 + 0.64 * (0.15 * BF_i + 0.85 * Gateway_i)$$

Input	Weight
Brand Finance familiarity check	15%
Gateway	85%

Gateway is the frozen v4.4 Gateway intermediate. Its current 194-value vector is fully present, but the exact upstream v4.4 construction formula remains an archival dependency. v4.7 does not alter the Gateway values themselves.

10.1 Coverage-sensitive Hub confirmation

Let B_i be the strongest eligible non-Hub route after the v4.7 Cultural supplement is applied. If HUB0_i is not greater than B_i, the Hub confirmation step is inactive. If HUB0_i is greater than B_i, the published Hub score is blended with B_i using a Raw-Coverage-dependent weight.

If HUB0_i > B_i: HUB47_i = w(q_i) * HUB0_i + [1 - w(q_i)] * B_i

Otherwise: HUB47_i = HUB0_i

Raw Coverage	Hub weight w(q)
9/9	85%
5/9 or 6/9	80%
4/9	75%
1/9 to 3/9	60%

No entity in the released 2026 Raw Coverage vector occupies 7/9 or 8/9, so no release weight is assigned to those unused categories. The confirmation rule cannot raise a score; it only limits cases in which a single Hub route is materially stronger than the rest of a thinly observed profile. Fully observed hub states retain 85 per cent of the base Hub value when confirmation is active.

11. Trust & Reputation route

The Trust route captures the ability of credibility and external reception to become a form of soft power in their own right, particularly for small or medium states that may not dominate cultural scale or transnational network breadth.

```
TRUST_i = 17 + 0.65 * (0.10 * BF_i + 0.47 * Receiver_i + 0.43 * Credibility_i)
```

Input	Weight
Brand Finance familiarity check	10%
Receiver	47%
Credibility	43%

Credibility is deliberately bounded inside one route rather than allowed to define the entire index. A country cannot obtain a top score solely because it has strong governance indicators if it lacks other forms of international attraction or recognition.

12. Commercial & Platform Reach route

v4.6 introduced one common uplift-only route for contemporary global commercial and platform ubiquity. v4.7 retains the commercial equation and the frozen 17-entity portfolio register unchanged. The aim is to measure repeated contact with nationally attributable global brands and consumer platforms that traditional culture, diplomacy and governance indicators can undercount.

12.1 Commercial Brand Score

Let p_i be a country's share of total Brand Finance Global 500 portfolio value expressed in percentage points, not a 0-1 fraction. The transform is:

```
CBS_i = min[100, 100 * ln(1 + p_i) / ln(51)]
```

The denominator ln(51) maps a 50-percentage-point portfolio share to the top of the 0-100 Commercial Brand Score scale. The log transform preserves differences at lower portfolio shares while limiting the leverage of the largest commercial ecosystem. Values above the calibration point remain capped at 100. The constant is treated as a fixed release-scale parameter and is included in sensitivity interpretation through the commercial-disabled counterfactual.

12.2 Commercial route

```
COM_i = 25 + 0.67 * (0.80 * CBS_i + 0.20 * BF_i)
```

Portfolio evidence dominates at 80%; the Brand Finance percentile is a 20% recognition check. The offset 25 and slope 0.67 are fixed global calibration parameters, not fitted coefficients.

12.3 Eligibility and missing commercial data

- If comparable commercial portfolio evidence exists, COM_i is computed.
- If commercial evidence is unavailable, COM_i is missing and is omitted from the final max. It is never set to zero.
- Named-brand-only evidence is explicitly labelled as a conservative lower bound rather than a complete country portfolio.
- A lower-bound commercial observation can only reveal an uplift if even the conservative route exceeds the v4.5 score. It cannot reduce the score.

Commercial evidence remains available for 17 countries and is uplift-only. Missing commercial data are omitted rather than coded as zero, while named-brand-only observations remain labelled as lower bounds. In v4.7 only the United States is still uplifted by the Commercial route. Disabling the route changes only the order of the first two countries and yields a Spearman rank correlation of 0.999998 with the released v4.7 ranking.

13. Final aggregation, route interpretation and rank

FINAL47_i = max(CORE*_i, CUL47_i, HUB47_i, TRUST_i, COM_i if observed)

The max operator encodes the theory that soft power can be realised through different architectures. It is monotone: improving any eligible route cannot reduce the final score. The v4.7 Cultural and Hub safeguards are applied before the maximum is taken. The aggregator remains non-additive and non-smooth at route crossings, intentionally preserving specialisation rather than forcing all countries into one compensatory average.

13.1 Mathematical dominant route and published pathway label

The mathematical dominant route is the argument of the v4.7 maximum. It is explanatory, not ontological: a country labelled Cultural / Symbolic can still possess strong transnational networks or commercial reach. For publication, one additional evidence rule applies. When Trust / Reputation is the mathematical maximum but Raw Coverage is below 4/9, the score is retained but the published pathway label is Insufficient coverage. Insufficient coverage is a disclosure label, not a sixth soft-power route.

Route margins remain important. Across all 194 entities, the median gap between the strongest and second-strongest eligible v4.7 routes is 2.94 points; 43 entities have a margin of 1 point or less and 79 have a margin of 2 points or less. For those cases the route label should be read as a close model outcome rather than a categorical national identity. Country profiles therefore publish the route margin alongside the label.

13.2 Rank precision and display precision

Ranks are calculated from the unrounded v4.7 engine score. The public report rounds scores to one decimal place. There are no full-precision score ties, but one-decimal rounding produces 36 duplicated display levels covering 88 entities, with as many as 6 countries sharing the same displayed tenth. Two countries can therefore show the same printed score while retaining distinct ranks. The ranking is never recomputed from the displayed value and equal displayed scores must not be presented as shared ranks.

No 2023 rank is used as a tie-breaker. Because the 2026 method is substantially rebuilt, 2023 and 2026 positions are not a valid time series.

14. Statistical profile of the released v4.7 scores

Statistic	Value
N	194
Mean	57.288
Sample standard deviation	12.018
Median	53.782
Minimum	44.016
Maximum	92.000
5th percentile	45.231
10th percentile	45.638
25th percentile	47.167
75th percentile	63.746
90th percentile	76.423
95th percentile	80.679

14.1 Mathematical routes and published pathway distribution

Published pathway label	Entities	Share
Core / Transnational Reach	27	13.9%
Cultural & Symbolic	49	25.3%
Hub & Familiarity	66	34.0%
Trust & Reputation	4	2.1%
Commercial & Platform Reach	1	0.5%
Insufficient coverage	47	24.2%

Before the publication-label floor, the mathematical maxima are Hub 66, Trust 51, Cultural 49, Transnational 27 and Commercial 1. The evidence floor relabels 47 low-coverage Trust maxima as Insufficient coverage while retaining their scores. The distribution therefore remains five-route mathematically; the sixth printed category is an evidence disclosure, not a new route.

15. Collinearity and latent structure

The four full-universe v4.7 route vectors (Core*, calibrated Cultural, calibrated Hub and Trust) remain strongly correlated because they are alternative manifestations of a common latent construct of international relevance and share some source families. They should not be interpreted as statistically independent causal factors.

	Core*	Cultural47	Hub47	Trust
Core*	1.000	0.866	0.882	0.861
Cultural47	0.866	1.000	0.753	0.782
Hub47	0.882	0.753	1.000	0.888
Trust	0.861	0.782	0.888	1.000

Principal-component analysis of the standardised four-route v4.7 matrix assigns 87.94% of variance to the first component and 6.91% to the second; the first two components together explain 94.84%. This indicates a strong general soft-power/salience dimension plus a smaller pathway-composition dimension.

INTERPRETATION

High collinearity does not invalidate a deliberately multi-pathway composite, but it means weight-sensitivity results can look stable partly because the routes move together. Robustness must therefore include structural counterfactuals, not only small perturbations of weights.

16. Population-scale diagnostic

Population is not a direct v4.7 scoring variable. It remains relevant indirectly because large societies can genuinely create larger migrant networks, cultural output and markets. The diagnostic asks whether population alone dominates the released score, not whether the correlation is literally zero.

Diagnostic	v4.7 result
Pearson r: final score vs ln(population)	0.4942
Linear R-squared from that bivariate association	0.2442
Spearman rho: final score ordering vs ln(population)	0.4906

The 0.244 R-squared is descriptive association, not causal attribution. A simple cross-sectional linear relationship with log population accounts for about one-quarter of v4.7 score variation, leaving substantial variation consistent with the presence of small-state hub and trust pathways and large-state conversion differences.

17. External benchmark concordance

Across the 193 UN member states observed by Brand Finance, the released v4.7 ISSF rank has a Spearman correlation of approximately 0.9436 with the Brand Finance 2026 rank. The Pearson correlation between the final ISSF score and the Brand Finance percentile is approximately 0.8946.

NOT INDEPENDENT VALIDATION

Brand Finance percentile enters the evidence-adjusted Core, the base Cultural, Hub and Trust routes, the Commercial recognition check, and the eligibility-confirmed v4.7 contemporary-salience layer. High concordance is therefore partly mechanical and is reported as benchmark consistency, not external validation.

A stronger validation program would use external outcomes not present in the score, such as future tourism preference, international student choice, cultural consumption, elite-network survey measures, or cross-country favourability data collected independently of Brand Finance. Such validation is outside the present release and should not be implied by rank correlation alone.

18. Weight sensitivity: Monte Carlo diagnostic

A 10,000-draw conditional Monte Carlo sensitivity test was rerun on the released v4.7 equations. The experiment perturbs normative internal route weights and the evidence-shrinkage parameter while holding the frozen source vectors, contemporary-salience register, Hub confirmation bands and missingness pattern fixed. It tests design-parameter sensitivity, not sampling uncertainty.

18.1 Design

• Fixed random seed: 20260815.

• For each draw, every internal route weight is multiplied independently by Uniform(0.8, 1.2) and then renormalised to sum to one within its route.

• Evidence shrinkage lambda is drawn from Uniform(0.48, 0.72), which is plus or minus 20% around the released value 0.60.

• Route offsets and slopes, the v4.7 salience coefficient and cap, and the Hub confirmation coverage bands are held fixed so the experiment isolates ordinary route-weight uncertainty. Structural tests vary the v4.7 safeguards separately.

• Frozen v4.4 input vectors, source observations and missingness pattern are held fixed. This is conditional weight sensitivity, not raw-data uncertainty.

• One common draw of global parameters is applied to all countries in each simulation. Countries do not receive independent bespoke weights.

18.2 Global rank stability

Statistic of Spearman rho vs released rank	rho
1st percentile	0.99868
5th percentile	0.99895
Median	0.99956
95th percentile	0.99985
99th percentile	0.99991
Minimum over 10,000 draws	0.99798

18.3 Top-20 rank bands

Country	5th-95th percentile rank	P(rank <= 20)
United States	1-1	100.00%
France	2-2	100.00%
China	3-3	100.00%
Italy	4-4	100.00%
United Kingdom	5-5	100.00%
Germany	6-6	100.00%
Spain	7-7	100.00%
Japan	8-8	100.00%
Switzerland	9-9	100.00%
India	10-10	100.00%
South Korea	11-12	100.00%
Singapore	11-12	100.00%
Netherlands	13-13	100.00%

Russia	14-14	100.00%
Mexico	15-16	100.00%
Sweden	15-16	100.00%
Canada	17-17	100.00%
Australia	18-19	100.00%
Türkiye	18-20	99.88%
United Arab Emirates	19-21	91.83%

Under this conditional experiment, the dominant route remains unchanged for all released Top 20 countries in all 10,000 draws. The United Arab Emirates remains in the Top 20 in 91.83% of draws and Türkiye in 99.88%; the other current Top 20 members remain there in 100% of draws. This is evidence of weight robustness conditional on the frozen v4.7 specification, not immunity to different data or structural choices.

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19. Structural sensitivity tests

Because the route vectors are highly correlated, small weight perturbations are not sufficient. Nine structural counterfactuals were therefore evaluated, including direct tests of the two v4.7 safeguards. They are diagnostic alternatives, not candidate published rankings.

Counterfactual	Spearman rho	Top-20 overlap	Max |rank change|	Median |rank change|	US	France	India
No evidence shrinkage, lambda=0	0.96293	20/20	55	4	1	2	10
Full evidence shrinkage, lambda=1	0.99935	20/20	20	0	1	2	10
Remove BF percentile from alternative routes	0.97929	19/20	41	4	1	2	10
UNESCO heritage only, no symbolic medal uplift	0.99891	20/20	34	0	1	2	10
Disable Commercial / Platform route	1.00000	20/20	1	0	2	1	10
Replace max by 85% strongest + 15% second	0.99836	19/20	13	1	1	2	10
Disable contemporary-salience supplement	0.99971	19/20	13	0	1	2	9
Disable Hub confirmation	0.99571	20/20	25	2	1	2	10
Disable both v4.7 refinements	0.99539	19/20	25	2	1	2	9

The top tier remains stable under most tests, while the middle and lower ranking are more sensitive to evidence shrinkage and the external-familiarity check. The lambda=0 and no-BF scenarios move some entities by several dozen places, confirming that sparse-data treatment and external reception are material design assumptions rather than decorative inputs.

The v4.7-specific tests isolate the new safeguards. Disabling only the contemporary-salience supplement moves Japan from 8th to 13th and South Korea from 11th to 22nd while India returns to 9th. Disabling only Hub confirmation leaves the Top 20 membership intact but moves the UAE from 20th to 15th. Disabling both safeguards reproduces the pre-v4.7 ordering pattern, including Japan 14th, India 9th, South Korea 23rd, Singapore 10th and the UAE 13th. These tests make the incremental effect of v4.7 explicit.

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20. Technical validation, QA and falsification protocol

The release workflow uses mechanism-level quality checks rather than desired country positions. Checks ask whether common rules behave as specified: route registration, missing-data handling, displacement safeguards, evidence coverage, salience bounds, Hub confirmation, public route labelling and full-precision ordering. No QA field enters a score formula and no check directly specifies an ordinal target.

When a QA check fails, the response is to inspect source mapping, arithmetic, missingness or a common specification. Any released rule change is versioned and the complete universe is rerun. Individual country scores are not manually edited. A counterintuitive result can remain if the data and common rule survive audit.

Mechanism check	Released rule	Status
Full-precision ordering	Rank from unrounded final score; display rounding applied afterward	PASS
Commercial missingness	Unobserved commercial evidence omitted, never coded as zero	PASS
Contemporary-salience bound	Supplement non-penalising and capped at +6.3	PASS
Hub confirmation	Winning Hub checked against broader route using coverage band	PASS
Trust label floor	Trust maximum with Raw Coverage <4/9 printed as Insufficient coverage	PASS
Forced displacement	Refugee-driven dispersion not automatically credited as affinity	PASS
Formula isolation	No QA-sheet reference in released score formulas	PASS

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21. Known limitations and measurement boundaries

21.1 Composite-design normativity

Weights, offsets, slopes and max aggregation are normative design choices. They encode a theory of how soft power travels. They are not recovered by regression against a target ranking, and the report must not present them as empirical causal effects.

21.2 Coverage imbalance

Many capability-side sources have much better coverage for wealthy, globally connected and institutionally documented countries. Neutral placeholders and inherited computed values are not equivalent to observation. The evidence-adjustment rule mitigates one failure mode but cannot remove all coverage-related selection effects.

21.3 External-perception dependence

Brand Finance provides broad 193-state perception coverage and is useful as an external reality check, but it is reused in several routes and therefore induces cross-route correlation. In v4.7 the dependency includes the evidence-adjusted Core reference, the base Cultural route at 10 per cent, the base Hub route at 15 per cent, the Trust route at 10 per cent, the Commercial route at 20 per cent, the inherited Receiver anchor where observed, and the bounded contemporary-salience register. The no-BF structural counterfactual moves individual entities by as many as 41 places. Brand Finance concordance must therefore be described as consistency, not independent validation, and future releases should diversify reception sources where comparable full-universe data exist.

21.4 UNESCO measurement boundary

UNESCO World Heritage cultural-property counts measure formal inscription stock, not the totality of a civilisation's culture. Inscription depends on nomination, conservation and institutional processes. The logarithmic transform and partial medal uplift reduce but do not eliminate this conceptual boundary.

21.5 Commercial evidence asymmetry

Commercial data are available for only 17 countries and mix full-country aggregates with explicitly labelled named-brand lower bounds. Missing countries are not penalised, but observed countries receive an additional uplift opportunity. The current empirical effect is small, yet the design should be improved toward full-universe comparable portfolio coverage in future editions.

21.6 Survey uncertainty is not propagated

ISSF uses published Brand Finance ranks or percentile values, not survey microdata. The final score therefore does not propagate respondent-level sampling error, design effects or item uncertainty. Receiver-side attitudes also record outcomes rather than causes: negative perceptions may reflect a country's own conduct, ordinary disagreement, misinformation, coordinated influence activity, xenophobia or racial hostility, or platform-amplification effects. The 2026 engine does not causally separate those mechanisms and applies no country-specific correction for them. Tiny rank gaps should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

21.7 Max aggregation and upward selection

Taking the strongest route is intentional but creates an upward-selection effect: having several legitimate pathways increases the chance that one route is high. In v4.7, 177 entities have four eligible routes and 17 have five because Commercial evidence is observed. The mean released score is 57.288; the mean of each entity's average across eligible routes is 51.020. The resulting mean selection premium is therefore 6.269 points. This is a property of the max architecture, not an error, and is published so readers can distinguish route specialisation from average breadth.

21.8 Frozen inherited transformations

A scientifically complete release should preserve not only final values but also every raw-source query, mapping table, transform, constant, evidence register and script. The surviving archive is complete enough to reproduce v4.7 from frozen v4.4 intermediates onward, including the full v4.7 calibration layer, but it is not yet complete enough to regenerate every v4.4 upstream field or the Taiwan Brand Finance fallback from raw sources.

21.9 Route-specific coverage asymmetry and evidence-aware publication

Coverage is not identical across routes. v4.7 addresses two specific failure modes without imposing a universal penalty on every alternative route. First, when base Hub is strongest, it is confirmed against the strongest non-Hub route using Raw Coverage. Second, when Trust is mathematically strongest but Raw Coverage is below 4/9, the score is retained but the public route label is suppressed as Insufficient coverage.

The Trust equation still has an arithmetic floor when Receiver and Credibility are neutral placeholders. At R = K = 50 and BF = 0, TRUST = 46.25. v4.7 does not reinterpret this floor as measured international confidence. The publication-label rule is therefore a semantic evidence safeguard: it prevents a sparse default maximum from being described as a substantive trust finding while preserving the deterministic score used in the ranking.

Under the released v4.7 route matrix, 51 entities have Trust as the mathematical maximum but only four retain Trust / Reputation as the published pathway label; 47 are labelled Insufficient coverage. Hub confirmation also reduces isolated gateway inflation while preserving high-confidence hubs such as Singapore, whose fully observed profile remains supported by strong non-Hub routes.

These safeguards do not make missingness random or eliminate all coverage imbalance. They target identifiable route-specific interpretation problems while keeping the scoring system monotone, common-rule based and auditable.

The Raw Coverage distribution itself is unchanged from the inherited evidence architecture and remains a major limitation for the lower half of the table.

21.10 Contemporary-salience register coverage

The v4.7 contemporary-salience register is deliberately bounded and non-penalising, but it is not full-universe. Three activation rows are frozen in the release. A country without a register row is not assigned a zero and receives no deduction; however, it also does not receive the additional opportunity for uplift. This creates an evidence-opportunity asymmetry analogous in direction, though smaller in magnitude, to the Commercial register. The cap of 6.3 points limits leverage, and structural sensitivity reports the effect of disabling the supplement entirely.

Future editions should broaden the same documented eligibility and metric rules to a larger set of countries before the source freeze. The 2026 release should be interpreted as a bounded correction to a heritage-heavy route, not as a complete global database of contemporary popular culture.

22. Reproducibility protocol

A reader should be able to regenerate the published ranking by following a fixed sequence. The release package should therefore contain both data and executable rules, with immutable version identifiers.

Step	Required artefact	Verification
1	Entity crosswalk with 194 entities and ISO3 codes	No duplicate ISO3; no dropped ranked entity
2	Frozen source extracts and URL/vintage register	Source date and file hash recorded
3	v4.3 preprocessing tables for migrant, refugee and normalisation constants	Recompute effective stocks and normalised signals
4	v4.4 194-row intermediate table	Verify Reach, Intensity and Core reconstruction
5	v4.5 evidence sheet and four-route engine	Verify BF percentile, heritage, symbolic, shrinkage and base routes
6	v4.6 commercial evidence register	Verify CBS, Commercial route and uplift-only rule
7	v4.7 contemporary-salience evidence register	Verify domain-rank percentiles, D, CS and bounded Cultural uplift
8	v4.7 Hub confirmation and Trust publication-label rules	Verify coverage-band blend and Insufficient coverage labelling
9	Final full-precision ranking CSV	Rank from FINAL47 before display rounding
10	Sensitivity script with fixed seed 20260815	Regenerate Monte Carlo and structural diagnostics
11	Release manifest	Record engine version, source hashes and frozen evidence-register hashes

22.1 Archival completeness matrix

Element	Status	Reproducibility statement
v4.7 Cultural supplement equation	Complete	Published formula; coefficient 0.27 and cap 6.3
v4.7 contemporary-salience register	Complete frozen release input	Three activation rows with source metrics and computed CS
v4.7 Hub confirmation	Complete	Deterministic from Raw Coverage and strongest non-Hub route
v4.7 Trust publication-label floor	Complete	Trust maximum + q<4/9 => Insufficient coverage label
v4.6 commercial equations	Complete	Directly recoverable from current workbook formulas
v4.5 four-route equations	Complete	Directly recoverable from current workbook formulas
v4.5 evidence shrinkage	Complete	Directly recoverable, lambda=0.60
v4.5 UNESCO heritage transform	Complete	Directly recoverable, max count=55
v4.4 Reach combination	Complete downstream	Reconstructed and verified across 194 rows to archived rounding
v4.4 Intensity combination	Complete downstream	Reconstructed and verified across 194 rows to archived rounding
v4.4 symmetric Core envelope	Complete downstream	Reconstructed and verified across 194 rows to archived rounding
v4.4 refugee-adjusted N3	Complete downstream	Reconstructed from archived input/output lineage

v4.4 Reputation-Converted Diaspora	Frozen vector only	Upstream construction rule absent from surviving release artefacts
v4.4 Gateway	Frozen vector only	Upstream construction rule absent from surviving release artefacts
Taiwan BF v4.5 fallback	Frozen scalar only	Fallback value preserved; exact regeneration rule absent

23. Publication governance and independent review

Methodological credibility depends on governance as much as equations. The minimum external review panel should include a composite-index or quantitative methodologist, a soft-power/international-relations scholar, and a public-opinion or country-brand specialist who did not construct the score engine.

Reviewer profile	Primary review responsibility	Preferred independence
Composite-index / quantitative methodologist	Transformations, missing data, aggregation, collinearity, sensitivity	Independent of ISSF; not involved in construction
Soft-power / international-relations scholar	Construct validity, influence-vs-reputation theory, pathway interpretation	Preferably non-Indian and independent of ranking design
Public-opinion / country-brand specialist	Receiver use, survey interpretation, benchmark dependence	Independent of Brand Finance and ISSF

23.1 Pre-publication checklist

• Part I, Part II, the Top 20 profiles and Part III must all cite v4.7 and the same locked full-precision ranking file.

• Every published score must be one decimal, but underlying audit files must retain full precision.

• The dominant route must accompany country interpretation where practical.

• 2023-to-2026 rank-change claims must be removed or explicitly labelled non-comparable.

• Commercial evidence must retain its vintage and full-aggregate versus lower-bound status.

• QA checks must remain mechanism-level and may not enter score formulas or operate as country-rank constraints.

• The three archival dependencies must either be restored or disclosed exactly as in this annex.

• External reviewers should receive the full engine, source register, route matrix, coverage vector and sensitivity script.

• No quality-assurance document accompanying the release may prescribe a country-specific rank. Any rule-level change must be versioned and applied mechanically across its eligibility universe.

• Equal displayed scores must never be printed as shared or tied ranks. Ranking tables must carry the display-rounding note wherever duplicated one-decimal levels appear.

• Dominant-route interpretation must carry the route margin where practical. Trust maxima below 4/9 Raw Coverage must use the published label Insufficient coverage.

• The v4.7 salience register and Hub confirmation parameters must be frozen and supplied to reviewers with the score engine.

• Commercial evidence must retain its fixed transform, vintage and full-aggregate versus lower-bound evidence state; missing evidence remains non-penalising.

• The max-selection premium must be reported as 6.269 points for the released v4.7 route matrix.

Appendix A. Formula register and notation

Symbol	Definition
i	Ranked entity
D	Diplomacy score
N2	Diaspora destination dispersion
N3adj	Forced-displacement-adjusted corridor breadth
P	People-to-people signal
RD	v4.4 Reputation-Converted Diaspora frozen intermediate
CP	Culture & People inherited pillar
KB	Knowledge & Brand inherited pillar
G	v4.4 Gateway frozen intermediate
R	Receiver
K	Credibility / Trust
q	Raw Coverage fraction
BF	Brand Finance 2026 percentile
U	UNESCO cultural-property count
H	Log heritage depth
M	Brand Finance cultural medal evidence
S	Symbolic capital
CBS	Commercial Brand Score
CORE*	Evidence-adjusted inherited Core
CUL	Cultural & Symbolic route
HUB	Hub & Familiarity route
TRUST	Trust & Reputation route
COM	Commercial & Platform Reach route
FINAL	Released v4.7 score after calibrated Cultural and Hub routes
DCS	Mean percentile of qualifying contemporary-salience domain ranks for an eligible register row
CS	Contemporary-salience signal = max(BF, DCS) within an eligible register row
CUL0	Base v4.5 Cultural & Symbolic route
CUL47	v4.7 Cultural route after bounded salience supplement
HUB0	Base v4.5 Hub & Familiarity route
B	Strongest eligible non-Hub route used for Hub confirmation
w(q)	Coverage-dependent Hub weight
HUB47	v4.7 Hub route after confirmation when active
PUBLIC LABEL	Published pathway label; may be Insufficient coverage for low-coverage Trust maxima

A.1 Complete released equation stack

REACH = .38D + .31N3adj + .22P + .09RD

INTENSITY = .20CP + .20KB + .25G + .20R + .15K

CORE = max(REACH,INTENSITY)^.90 * min(REACH,INTENSITY)^.10

CORE* = CORE - .60(1-q)max(0,CORE-BF)

H = 100ln(1+U)/ln(56), U>0; else 0

S = max(H, .40H + .60M)

CUL0 = 25 + .64(.10BF + .20R + .70S)
DCS = mean[P(r_k)] across >=3 qualifying 2026 salience ranks; CS = max(BF,DCS) for eligible rows
CUL47 = CUL0 + min(6.3, .27 max(0, CS-CUL0)); if no eligible salience row, CUL47 = CUL0

HUB0 = 25 + .64(.15BF + .85G)
If HUB0 > B: HUB47 = w(q)HUB0 + [1-w(q)]B; otherwise HUB47 = HUB0

TRUST = 17 + .65(.10BF + .47R + .43K)

CBS = min(100, 100ln(1+p)/ln(51))

COM = 25 + .67(.80CBS + .20BF)

FINAL47 = max(CORE*, CUL47, HUB47, TRUST, COM if observed)

A.2 Inherited v4.3 preprocessing equations

The following equations document the exact v4.3 source-processing layer from which several frozen v4.4 inputs descend. The v4.3 arithmetic final score was superseded and is not the released v4.7 aggregation rule. These equations are included so that the inherited variable lineage is explicit rather than hidden.

CulturePeople_v43 = .40*Creative + .25*People + .20*Education + .15*GII

KnowledgeBrand_v43 = .35*GII + .30*Education + .20*Business + .15*Creative

Gateway_v43 = .65*InboundMagnetism_v43 + .20*Education + .15*Business

TransnationalNetwork_v43 = .30*Diplomacy + .20*N3 + .15*N2 + .15*People + .20*DiasporaNetwork_v43

Used only in the v4.3 receiver construction

BFAnchor_v43 = 100 - (BF_rank - 1)*(100/193)

Receiver_v43 = BFAnchor_v43, when an external BF rank is observed

Common fallback branch when no external BF rank was observed

Receiver_v43 = .50*(.40*CulturePeople_v43 + .20*Gateway_v43 + .25*TransnationalNetwork_v43 + .15*KnowledgeBrand_v43) + 25

Final_v43 = .17*CulturePeople_v43 + .16*KnowledgeBrand_v43 + .09*Gateway_v43 + .35*TransnationalNetwork_v43 + .20*Receiver_v43 + .03*Credibility

The v4.3 Brand Finance anchor mapping above is not the v4.5 percentile transform. v4.5 uses BF = 100*(193-rank)/192 for the 193 observed UN-member ranks. This distinction is retained because changing a rank-to-score mapping between engine generations without disclosure would break the audit trail.

Appendix B. Commercial evidence register

Country	Portfolio share %	Brands	Value USD bn	Vintage / evidence state	CBS	COM
United States	50.0000	194	n/a	2025 full aggregate; 2026 continuity	100.000	92.000
France	4.4000	35	n/a	2025 full aggregate	42.891	61.041
China	15.0000	68	1560.0	2026 full aggregate	70.517	76.127
Germany	6.0000	27	550.2	2025 full aggregate; 2026 position check	49.491	64.648
Singapore	0.2077	n/a	21.6	2026 named-brand lower bound	4.800	39.507
United Arab Emirates	0.3577	n/a	37.2	2026 named-brand lower bound	7.777	41.941
Japan	4.7106	33	489.9	2026 full aggregate	44.313	62.012
Sweden	0.4721	5	49.1	2026	9.835	42.834
Saudi Arabia	0.6240	n/a	64.9	2026 named-brand lower bound	12.333	43.894
Qatar	0.1462	n/a	15.2	2026 named-brand lower bound	3.469	38.934
Denmark	0.2260	2	23.5	2026	5.181	39.991
Norway	0.2183	2	22.7	2026	5.021	39.835
Finland	0.1481	2	15.4	2026	3.512	38.747
Malaysia	0.2423	n/a	25.2	2026 named-brand lower bound	5.518	38.985
Vietnam	0.0760	n/a	7.9	2026 named-brand lower bound	1.862	35.839
Thailand	0.0837	n/a	8.7	2026 named-brand lower bound	2.043	36.913
Indonesia	0.1163	n/a	12.1	2026 named-brand lower bound	2.799	36.830

Only the United States commercial route exceeds its v4.5 base score in the current engine. All other observed commercial routes remain diagnostic and do not alter the headline score.

Appendix C. Contemporary-salience evidence register

The v4.7 register is a frozen, bounded scoring input. Domain ranks are transformed on the same 193-state percentile scale used for BF. DCS is the arithmetic mean of the listed qualifying domain percentiles; CS is the larger of DCS and the entity's overall BF percentile, but only for an eligible register row. The Cultural uplift is then capped at +6.3.

Country	Qualifying 2026 ranks	DCS	BF	CS	Uplift	CUL47
Japan	Products/brands 1; Culture & Heritage 3; lifestyle 4; visit appeal 8	98.438	98.958	98.958	+5.550	83.952
South Korea	Loved brands 7; technology 5; entertainment 7; food 10	96.745	94.792	96.745	+6.125	80.186
Thailand	Food 7; fun 7; visit appeal 12	96.007	80.729	96.007	+6.300 cap	66.754

Register activation is non-penalising. The source package does not treat countries without a row as having zero contemporary salience. Thailand reaches the +6.3 cap, so its exact CS value above the cap threshold does not alter its released score.

Appendix D. Primary source register

Source	Use	Vintage	URL
OECD / EC-JRC, Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators	Composite-indicator construction, transparency, sensitivity and uncertainty framework	2008	https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264043466-en
WIPO Global Innovation Index	Innovation / knowledge input lineage	2025	https://www.wipo.int/global_innovation_index/en/2025/
Lowy Institute Global Diplomacy Index	Diplomatic network reach	2024	https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org/
UN DESA International Migrant Stock	Emigrant and immigrant stock	2024	https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock
UNHCR Refugee Data Finder	Forced-displacement diagnostics by origin and asylum	2024 annual statistics used in inherited build	https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics
World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators	Credibility / trust source family in inherited release	Inherited audited values	https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators
Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index	External perception percentile / reality check	2026	https://brandfinance.com/softpower
UNESCO World Heritage Site List dataset	Frozen cultural World Heritage stock	2025 snapshot, 1248 properties total	https://ihp-wins.unesco.org/dataset/unesco-world-heritage-sites
Brand Finance Global 500	Commercial portfolio evidence and top-brand structure	2026	https://brandfinance.com/insights/view-the-full-brand-finance-global-500-2026-report-here
Brand Finance China / Global 500	China portfolio evidence	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/tiktok-douyin-worlds-sixth-most-valuable-brand-in-2026-up-one-rank-from-past-year
Brand Finance Japan / Global 500	Japan portfolio evidence; Germany position check	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/nearly-40-of-japanese-brands-ranked-in-global-500-record-double-digit-growth-in-2026
Brand Finance Global 500 French release	US, China, Germany, France full-country aggregates where public 2026 aggregate not located	2025	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/apple-est-la-marque-la-plus-valorisee-au-monde-en-2025-nvidia-entre-dans-le-top-10
Brand Finance Technology 100	US 2026 commercial/platform continuity check	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/top-100-technology-brands-valued-at-usd3-7-trillion-in-2026
Brand Finance Nordic Global 500	Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland portfolio evidence	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/lego-ranks-5th-strongest-brand-globally-as-nordic-brands-contribute-110-8-billion-in-brand-value
Brand Finance Middle East Global 500	UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia named-brand lower bounds	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/12-middle-eastern-brands-in-the-global-500-2026-showcase-continued-growth

Brand Finance ASEAN Global 500	Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam named-brand lower bounds	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/11-asean-brands-shine-amongst-the-worlds-500-most-valuable-brands
Brand Finance Japan GSPI 2026 country analysis	v4.7 salience register: products/brands, culture, lifestyle, destination appeal	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/brand-finance-global-soft-power-index-2026-japan-overtakes-the-uk-to-rank-3rd-globally
Brand Finance South Korea GSPI 2026 country analysis	v4.7 salience register: brands, technology, entertainment, food	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/brand-finance-global-soft-power-index-2026-south-korea-ranks-11th-strengthened-by-brands-innovation-and-future-growth
Brand Finance Thailand GSPI 2026 country analysis	v4.7 salience register: food, fun, destination appeal	2026	https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/brand-finance-global-soft-power-index-2026-thailand-ranks-7th-for-food-and-fun

Source-vintage note: UNESCO remains intentionally frozen to the 2025 snapshot used by the engine. v4.7 adds only the three 2026 contemporary-salience country analyses listed above and otherwise retains the v4.6 commercial/source register. Current World Bank WGI documentation reflects the revised 2025 methodology; the release retains inherited audited credibility values rather than silently substituting a new vintage.

Appendix E. Interpretation rules for users of the ranking

• Treat differences of one or two ordinal places as potentially small, especially when displayed scores round to the same tenth.

• Report the headline score together with the dominant route where possible.

• Do not describe the index as a democracy, governance, military-power or foreign-policy approval ranking.

• Do not infer causality from route weights or cross-sectional correlations.

• Do not treat Brand Finance concordance as independent validation; Brand Finance is used in several released routes and in the bounded v4.7 salience layer.

• Do not infer that missing Commercial or contemporary-salience register evidence means zero soft power in those channels.

• Do not treat refugee-driven dispersion as automatically positive diaspora affinity.

• Do not compare 2023 and 2026 ranks as a time series.

• For countries with Raw Coverage below 0.5, place greater emphasis on uncertainty, route structure and evidence state than on the single ordinal rank.

• Insufficient coverage is a publication label, not a sixth route. It is used when Trust / Reputation is mathematically strongest but Raw Coverage is below 4/9.

• Do not treat two identical printed scores as a tie. v4.7 display rounding produces 36 duplicated levels across 88 entities while the underlying ranks remain distinct.

• Do not read a dominant route as categorical where the margin to the second route is small. In v4.7, 79 of 194 entities fall within two points.

• Receiver and reputation scores should be interpreted as observed external sentiment, not a causal decomposition of why that sentiment exists. The model does not separately score misinformation, xenophobia, racial hostility or platform-amplification effects.

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The Indian Strategic Studies Foundation (ISSF), formerly the Indian Strategic Studies Forum, is a New Delhi-based, non-partisan think tank dedicated to amplifying India's perspective on global affairs and strategic considerations. Its work sits in strategic affairs, international relations and security studies.

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