



*The BESA Center is pleased to introduce a new series: **Soft Power and Global Standing**, compiled by Shay Attias.*

*The term “soft power” came into currency in the 1990s but its use has accelerated dramatically in recent years, reflecting the explosion of the digital age.*

*Soft power is defined as the application of persuasive, rather than coercive, techniques to attract positive attention on the international stage and thereby achieve greater room for diplomatic maneuver. Soft power assessments can be used to compare how countries stand in terms of democracy, global image, corruption, life expectancy, and many other criteria. Soft power combined with hard power – i.e., military strength and the ability to coerce – amounts to “smart power,” a metric in which Israel is particularly strong.*

**Number 1, June 21, 2018**

**US**

**Is Donald Trump killing the US image?**

**The global image of the US has dramatically dropped under President Donald Trump according to a 2017 Pew Research Center poll.** The survey of public opinion was held in 37 countries around the world. Seventy-four percent of the 40,000 respondents expressed no confidence in the president. On his [first foreign trip](#) as president, Trump received a warm welcome in Saudi Arabia and Israel but a cold reception in Europe, with which he clashed over NATO’s budget spending.

**There is a serious problem of trust in US institutions**

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer [finds](#) that while Chinese confidence is on the rise, “trust in US institutions” is collapsing. Fifty-nine percent of

responders said the US government is “[the most broken](#),” placing it behind China, Russia, Poland, South Africa, Turkey, and Mexico [January 2018].

### **Lack of innovation in the US?**

The US has [slipped out](#) of the Top 10 in the 2018 Bloomberg Innovation Index.

The index ranks countries using seven criteria, including R&D spending and number of high-tech companies. South Korea and Sweden lead the list while Israel maintained its strong position, closing once again among the top 10 most innovative countries in the world (see below).

## **ASIA**

### **Hong Kong ranks as the world’s best free economy for 24th straight year**

Great news for the East’s economic freedom: Hong Kong once again took the [top spot](#) on the 2018 Index of Economic Freedom. The Index, which is issued by the US Heritage Foundation, shows that Hong Kong's score improved by 0.4 points over last year, bringing it to 90.2 points – making Hong Kong the only economy with an overall score above 90. Singapore held onto second place with a score of 88.8 points, and New Zealand ranked third with an overall score of 84.2.

### **Democracy is falling in India**

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index showed a [sharp fall](#) in India, which crashed 10 places to the rank of 42nd. This was the steepest decline for 2018 and brought India the dubious distinction of “worst-performing nation.” The Index shows that in general, democracy is in decline around the globe. 2018 is showing the worst performance for democracy since 2010 after the global financial crisis [January 2018].

## **EUROPE**

### **Great achievement for the UK: “The best place in the world to do business”**

*Forbes’s* latest rankings of “Best countries in the world for business” [ranked the UK at number one](#) for the first time ever. The UK's \$2.6 trillion economy also ranked as fifth-largest in the world. The publication ranked 153 countries on 15 factors, including “property rights, innovation, taxes

and red tape.” New Zealand and the Netherlands took second and third, while Chad ranked last for the third year in a row.

### **Highest life expectancy: Monaco**

The Life Expectancy Index [ranks Monaco](#) as the highest in the world. The average Monacoian lives 89.5 years, which is four years longer than any other country and longer than the lifespan of the average American. Monaco also ranked as the wealthiest country in the world. One in three Monacoians are millionaires. On the other side of the planet, the ongoing war in Syria brought it to 100th place in life expectancy. South Africa has the world’s lowest life expectancy at 50 years [January 12, 2017].

### **Which are the world’s most influential passports for 2018?**

German and Singaporean passports continue to hold first and second place, respectively, for the fifth year in a row, with visa-free or visa-upon-arrival access to 177 countries, says the Henley & Partners [ranking](#). Singapore received its highest score in the last 10 years. Afghanistan stayed at the bottom with the “worst passport in the world” [January 22, 2018].

### **The Russia-Crimea crisis caused serious damage to Ukraine’s growth and development**

The 2018 Inclusive Growth and Development Index (IDI) indicates that Ukraine’s economy has been in a state of major crisis since 2014 in the wake of Russia’s ongoing aggressiveness in Crimea and the war in the Donbas. Those two conflicts led to a 15% contraction of Ukraine’s economy. Moreover, Russia started blocking exports of Ukrainian goods to Central Asia in 2015, and Ukraine stopped buying Russian gas and many other Russian products.

The IDI is an annual assessment of 103 countries’ economic performance. It measures how countries perform in 11 categories of economic progress in addition to GDP. It has three pillars: growth and development; inclusion and intergenerational equity; and sustainable stewardship of natural and financial resources.

### **The 2017 World Press Freedom Index**

Ukraine (109) and Russia (148) are [among the worst](#) countries on the Press Freedom Index. According to the Index, “Russia has imposed draconian laws,” blocked websites, and put more pressure on press independence since Vladimir Putin’s return to the Kremlin in 2012.

## **Switzerland named the world's best country in 2018; Canada ranked second**

*US News & World Report's* Best Countries Index, which ranks 80 countries on the basis of economic influence, power, citizenship, and quality of life, has [put Switzerland](#) at number one for 2018, with Canada ranked at number two. This is the second time Switzerland has won the prestigious title. After Switzerland and Canada, Germany, the UK, and Japan close out the top five.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

### **The world's most corrupt countries: Somalia, South Sudan, North Korea, and Syria**

Transparency International's latest annual report has named Somalia, South Sudan, North Korea, and Syria the most corrupt countries in the world. The report uses business and governmental sources to make these determinations. Corrupt countries are generally characterized by a high tendency towards dishonesty, poor governance, and weak institutions.

Somalia has held the title as the most corrupt country on earth for the past 10 years. Second from the bottom, with a score of 11 (the lower the score, the more corrupt the country) is South Sudan, a relatively new country that only gained its independence from Sudan six years ago. The third most corrupt country is North Korea, followed by Syria.

Countries in the Middle East suffered the worst declines on the corruption index, led by Qatar, which fell 10 points from the previous year. According to the report, this was due to scandals such as reports of the abuse of migrant workers that coincided with FIFA's decision to host the 2022 World Cup in Qatar [January 2017, CNBC].

### **Gender equality? Not in Iran, Chad, Syria, or Pakistan**

The Global Gender Gap report [ranks Iran, Chad, Syria, and Pakistan](#) as the worst countries in the world in terms of gender equality. The annual index is carried out in 144 countries by the World Economic Forum. The indicators used for the ranking are economic participation and opportunity, health and educational attainment, political empowerment, workforce, skill sets, and academic degrees [January 2018].

## **A surprise: United Arab Emirates breaks into the top 10 in Global Economic Freedom**

For over two decades, the Index of Economic Freedom has measured the impact of liberty and free markets around the globe. Its 2018 Index confirms the formidable positive relationship between economic freedom and progress. The United Arab Emirates' economic freedom score came in at 77.6, making its economy the 10th freest on the 2018 Index. [The UAE is ranked first](#) among 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, and its overall score is above the regional and world averages. Israel and Qatar follow UAE on the top regional list [February 2018].

## **ISRAEL**

### **Smart power**

Israel is one of the top 10 most powerful countries in the world according to the 2018 Smart Power Index, which combines the strategies of both hard and soft power. For a country with a population of just over 8 million, Israel has an outsize influence on the world stage. Despite the ongoing Palestinian conflict, the Jewish nation has a strong economy and a high level of education and per capita income according to the latest edition of the annual "Best Countries" index released by *US News and World Report*.

The Smart Power Index evaluates 80 countries across a range of criteria including cultural history, citizenship, and quality of life. Another key measure is "power," which assesses a country's economic and political influence and weighs the strength of its international alliances and military power. More than 21,000 business leaders, informed elites, and regular citizens were surveyed.

### **Israel is low in soft power but very high in "digital"**

Israel was [ranked only 27th](#) out of 30 countries in soft power. However, Israel had one of the highest scores in the "digital" category.

### **Good news for the "start-up nation": 'Most innovative country'**

Israel is the [top-ranked](#) "innovative country" in the Middle East and the world's 10th most innovative country overall according to a report by the Wharton School of Business and *US News and World Report*. The annual survey measures economy, political influence, international alliances, and military alliances. According to the Bloomberg Innovation Index, Israel

[ranks 10th](#) in innovation – and the US has dropped out of the top 10. This index is based on 21,000 people in four regions.

### **Economy on the rise: Israel reaches its highest ranking since 2008**

The World Economic Forum [ranks Israel at 16](#) on its Global Competitiveness Report for 2018. This is the first time Israel has reached the index's top 20. Israel ranks seventh on “networked readiness,” 11th on “financial market development,” and 15th on “business sophistication.” Since 2004, the WEF has evaluated the “potential level of productivity and prosperity to the world’s economies based on the 137 reviewed countries.”

### **Democracy Index: Israel remains regional number one**

Israel continues to lead the Middle East and North Africa region on the Democracy Index issued by the Economist Intelligence Unit for 2017. The Index shows that the 2011 “Arab Spring” uprising did not usher a wave of democracy into the region – indeed, the region has suffered the world’s worst decline in democracy. The average regional score slipped from 3.56 in 2016 to 3.54 in 2017, and the region is still characterized by a concentration of absolute monarchies. The 15 lowest-ranked countries in the world come from the Middle East and North Africa. Syria and North Korea close the list as the “worst in democracy.”

### **Israel ranks 28th on the Global Corruption Index**

According to the [Global Corruption Index](#), published by Transparency International, Israel continues to slide down the rankings, coming in at 28th for 2017. Denmark is in first place with New Zealand and Finland. The Index, which surveyed 176 countries, stated that “most countries ranked lower compared to last year and that is a worrisome sign.”

### **Israel’s lack of information technology**

Though Israel is known as the “start-up nation,” it keeps falling on the Global ICT Data and ICT Development Index. It is ranked at 23rd on the Index for 2018. This annual report presents “a global and regional overview of the latest developments regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs)” and is based on “internationally comparable data and agreed methodologies.” It aims to provide ITU member states with an objective assessment of countries’ ICT performance by highlighting success stories and areas that need further improvement.

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