

**India and the Soft Power Rubric:  
The Relevance of Migrants, Students, Visitors and Movies<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** Much has been written about India's soft power – how much it has, its sources and origins, and its deficits and applications. This article aims to place India's soft power in context of other nations like China and the US, by applying the Soft Power Rubric, a model that harnesses quantitative data on ordinary human interactions – like foreign visitors appearing in local street markets – to understand the relationships among countries. In this examination of India's soft power, the focus is on the activity of ordinary people, not necessarily actions by the government. The Soft Power Rubric centers around understanding in which foreign countries are people attracted to India and, vice versa, which foreign countries attract Indians to go abroad. The sum of this activity paints a picture of cultural affinity and social interaction unlike any other analysis of soft power.

Years ago, travelling on a high Asian plateau, I bought a yak jacket from a street market merchant. I still wear it today. We bargained, we settled a price, I paid, she made too much change, I returned the difference. Surprised, she asked me where I was from. Befuddled at outing myself as a foreigner, America, I replied.

In economics, the purchase connects directly to the calculation of the country's Gross Domestic Product. The sum of all yak jacket prices is added to sums across other sectors and published as a yearly total. How about in international relations and politics? She left an impression of her country, and I of mine. Can that be entered into a calculus of soft power resources?

Much has been written about India's soft power – how much it has, its sources and origins, and its deficits and applications. This article aims to place India's soft power in context of other nations like China and the US, by applying the Soft Power Rubric, a model that harnesses quantitative data on ordinary human interactions – like foreign visitors appearing in local street markets – to understand the relationships among countries.

Soft power contrasts with hard power, which is defined here as both economic and military power. Military power is directly controlled by government. Governments mostly have the monopoly on military force, each in its own jurisdiction. States make decisions at the heart of military power, such as spending on weapons and hiring of soldiers. Economic power is

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deeply influenced by government. Government decisions shape market structures; fiscal and monetary policy influence the direction and volume of growth. However, much about economic activity is outside the direct control of government. Central banks can lower interest rates and economies fail to grow. Entrepreneurs can launch highly profitable innovations in market areas previously ignored by policy planners. Soft power is even more so beyond the direct leverage of government officials. Which government ever successfully selected a movie to become popular abroad? More examples exist instead of movies governments tried to promote to foreigners, only to find little traction.

In this examination of India's soft power, the focus is on the activity of ordinary people, not necessarily actions by the government. In this regard, this article follows the path laid out in *India Review's* 2009 special issue on foreign policy ideas, interests and values edited by Devesh Kapur. That issue discussed India's foreign policy influence as shaped by foreigners' perceptions of the country, its ability to lead by example especially as the world's largest and multicultural democracy, and the impact of its diaspora, its media, ideology and culture.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Soft Power Rubric centers around understanding in which foreign countries are people attracted to India and, vice versa, which foreign countries attract Indians to go abroad. The sum of this activity paints a picture of cultural affinity and social interaction unlike any other analysis of soft power.

### Literature review

The international relations literature on soft power includes case studies, quantitative studies, policy reports including indices, and theory. The seminal case study on soft power is Nye's work on the US. Nye's early formulations of soft power in 1990 responded to American public sentiment that US power was in decline, especially compared to Japan's rising economic power. His essential argument was that although US economic power might be in decline, it would remain a great power due to its soft power influence.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the US case, there are several significant volumes on India. Tharoor writes, "Mahatma Gandhi won us our independence through the use of soft power – because nonviolence and satyagraha were indeed classic uses of soft power before the term was even coined. Pandit Nehru was also a skilled exponent of soft power: he developed a role for India in the world based entirely on its civilizational history and its moral standing, making India the voice of the oppressed and the marginalized against the big power hegemons of the day."<sup>4</sup> Nair wrote recently, the debates today surrounding secularism's role in India's identity have implications for its soft power abroad.<sup>5</sup> Kugiel's book *India's soft power* also emphasizes India's moral authority. Kugiel identifies India's cultural diversity – racial, religious, ethnic, and linguistic – as a major source of soft power. He also emphasizes its democratic political values, diaspora, and economic potential

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<sup>2</sup> Kapur, Devesh. 2009. "Introduction: future issues in India's foreign policy: ideas, interests, and values." *India Review*. 8(3):200-208.

<sup>3</sup> Nye, Jr. Joseph S. "The changing nature of world power." *Political Science Quarterly*. Vol.105, No. 2 (1990): 177-192.

<sup>4</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cell Phone*. New York: Arcade, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Nair, Neeti. "For the first time, India has seen secularism go from a top-down decree to street slogan." *The Print*. January 3, 2020. <https://theprint.in/opinion/india-seeing-secularism-go-from-top-down-decree-to-street-slogan/343834/>

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as attractive to foreigners.<sup>6</sup> Chadda's *Why India matters* focuses on India's civilization, democracy and diaspora as its main soft power resources. She highlights the success of Indian diaspora, especially in market economies abroad, as an important way for India to project soft power.<sup>7</sup> Kumar and Biswas's edited volume *Modi's cultural diplomacy and soft power* covers this government's heightened interest in cultural and diasporic connections with other countries along with special essays on movies, religion, diaspora, and cuisine.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Schaefer and Karan's edited volume *Bollywood and globalization* provides a historical and social analysis of the Indian movie industry's growing global influence, including the effects of political change in India on the type of movies exported abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Quantitative studies show soft power's causal effect on foreign policy. For example, Goldsmith and Horiuchi demonstrate that foreign public opinion had an important impact on countries' willingness to send troops to Iraq with the US in 2003.<sup>10</sup> Rose and Spiegel show that more popular countries have more international trade.<sup>11</sup> In international education, Spilembergo's and Atkinson's show if foreign students are educated in democratic countries, once they return, their home country becomes more democratic.<sup>12</sup>

There are several soft power indices. The Soft Power 30 Index identifies annually the leading countries with quantitative data on culture, digital, education, engagement, enterprise, and government. In recent years, India does not appear among the global top 30; but, in the 2018 report, which included an Asia Index, India ranks eighth.<sup>13</sup> India also appears in the cultural influence section of the Lowy Asia Power Index, ranked third in 2018 and fourth in 2019.<sup>14</sup> These indices' simplicity keeps soft power on the radar of policymaking and business elites, although the confidentiality of their algorithms reduces their academic rigor.

Soft power theory centers on defining political power and what subset might be "soft." Nye's argues that military might and natural endowments, such as population, geography, and access to raw materials, are not the only or even primary sources of power. Instead, appealing domestic assets, such as technology, education, and economic growth, are as important; a

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<sup>6</sup> Kugiel, Patryk. *India's soft power: a new foreign policy strategy*. New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Chadda, Maya. *Why India matters*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, Satish and Bibhuti Buhsan Biswas. *Modi's cultural diplomacy and soft power*. New Delhi: Ansh Book International, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Schaefer, David and Kavita Karan. *Bollywood and globalization: the global power of popular Hindi cinema*. Oxford: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Goldsmith, Benjamin E. and Yusaku Horiuchi. "In search of soft power: does foreign public opinion matter for US foreign policy?" *World Politics*. Vol. 64, no. 3 (2012):555-585.

<sup>11</sup> Rose, Andrew K. "Like me, buy me: the effect of soft power on exports." *Economics and politics*. Vol. 28, No. 2 (2016):216-232.

<sup>12</sup> Atkinson, Carol. *Military soft power: public diplomacy through military educational exchanges*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. Antonio Spilembergo. "Democracy and foreign education." *American Economic Review*. Vol. 99, No. 1 (2009):528-543.

<sup>13</sup> McClory, Jonathan. "Soft Power 30 Report 2018" and "Soft Power 30 Report 2019." Portland Communications. <https://softpower30.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> Lowy Institute Asia Power Index. <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>

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innovative view in 1990, but widely accepted today.<sup>15</sup> Nye views soft power as cooperative and non-coercive, leading him to argue that “sharp power,” such as Chinese and Russian disinformation campaigns, are hard not soft power tactics.<sup>16</sup> Beyond Nye, Bakalov’s literature review identifies three points of consensus: (1) soft and hard power differ by degree rather than of kind, (2) soft power changes over the long term, while hard power can change quickly, and (3) civil society holds soft power as much as government.<sup>17</sup> Still problematic are differentiating the effects of social structures and specific actors on soft power. Also, to alleviate confusion surrounding when conditions create soft power and when soft power leads to outcomes, Bakalov suggests focusing on sequences of interaction between people as links in a process of influence. The Soft Power Rubric also prioritizes social interaction. Further, by re-defining soft power and offering an empirical tool to make cross-country and historical comparisons, the Soft Power Rubric retains the communicative clarity of indices with a method rigorously grounded in conceptual debates.

### **How ordinary people and their worldviews link with a country’s soft power**

The Soft Power Rubric considers the experiences people have that inform their long-term view of foreign countries. The Rubric’s elements each quantify some type of interaction with foreigners. There are several lines of social science research that suggest observing people-to-people interactions are likely to shed light on country-to-country politics.

*Look to the audience: Dallas and meta-power in a networked world.* In political communication, research is just as focused on how people receive and understand a message as how people send a message. Ang studies Dutch viewers’ reaction to the hugely popular US soap opera *Dallas* in the 1980’s, a flagship example of the American cultural imperialism that concerned European governments. Ang’s methodological insight is that to understand the impact of a television show it is important to ask the viewers.<sup>18</sup> In the study of soft power, to understand the extent of a country’s potential soft power, it is as important to study the countries it influences and their reactions, as it is to examine the intent behind its public diplomacy program.

*The volume and intensity of social interactions reflects the degree of cultural integration.* Deutsch, in *Nationalism and Communications*, demonstrates that communities’ levels of integration can be observed in traffic across their communications facilities.<sup>19</sup> Merritt examines

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<sup>15</sup> Nye, Jr. Joseph S. *Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power*. New York: Basic Books, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Nye, Jr. Joseph S. “How sharp power threatens soft power: the right and wrong ways to respond to authoritarian influence. *Foreign Affairs* (January 24, 2018).

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power>

<sup>17</sup> Bakalov, Ivan. "Whither Soft Power? Divisions, Milestones and Prospects of a Research Programme in the Making." *Journal of Political Power* Vol. 12, no. 1 (2019): 129-151, DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2019.1573613.

<sup>18</sup> Ang, Ien. 1982. *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. Della Couling, trans. Methuen: London.

<sup>19</sup> Deutsch, Karl W. 1966a. *Nationalism and social communication: an inquiry into the foundations of nationality*. MIT: Cambridge.

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the volume of postal mail in the US. In the mid-eighteenth century, there were more pieces of mail between the various colonies in the US and the United Kingdom than there were mail among the colonies. However, by the early nineteenth century, the volume among the US states grew to be greater than the mail between the US and the United Kingdom. The change reflects the greater integration of the states with each other. In addition, Merritt discusses how better roads eased travel, the movement of ideas, and grew the market for news among the colonies.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the content of the mail or the newspapers, the change in volume and direction of communications is evidence that certain communities are more connected to each other than before. If soft power relationships occur where foreigners think of us as “we” rather than “they,” Deutsch and Merritt’s work suggests that the first place to look is who interacts with us the most.

*Creating culture, building trust, and accumulating social capital through interaction.*

Culture, Fine reminds us, is not an outside force that is a catch all for everything else unexplained by other means. People create and perform culture as they interact with each other. His term, “tiny publics,” builds on Alexis de Tocqueville’s notion of “minute associations,” small groups of people – like a book club or a team of video gamers- that work together, hold common values, share a past, and look forward to a future. He argues that big social forces get started in small-scale places.<sup>21</sup> To understand how cultural forces came to be, we must start tiny and work our way up to big. To understand global dynamics of influence and attraction among countries, we must start with individuals interacting with others on the other side of national borders.

Research on trust and social capital focuses on the ties that bind people together and improve cooperation in society. Ostrom’s work emphasizes that people create trust through a series of reciprocal actions. She investigated how people with a common resource to share – like water or land - govern themselves successfully for the group’s overall benefit. Ostrom’s conception of “trust” is not simply an act of faith, but a choice based on experience and self-interest.<sup>22</sup> Putnam and Goss’s work on social capital characterizes several types of bonds among people that can lead to cooperation: formal and informal; thick and thin; inward and outward; and bonding and bridging. Inward focuses on helping members of the group; outward on achieving a public good. Bridging social capital is among people who are different; bonding among people who are similar.<sup>23</sup> Putnam’s work focuses on the kinds of bonds that hold society together; Ostrom focuses on how these bonds are built. In my own work *Forging trust communities*, I apply these concepts into the Internet era. The more recent technologies of telephones, televisions, mobile phones, and Internet, each in their turn create the potential for

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<sup>20</sup> Merritt, Richard. 1966. Nation building in America: the colonial years. In *Nation building in comparative contexts*. Karl W. Deutsch and William Foltz, eds. AdlineTransaction: New Brunswick, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> Fine, Gary Alan. 2012. *Tiny publics: a theory of group action and culture*. Russell Sage Foundation: New York.

<sup>22</sup> Ostrom, Elinor. 2003. Toward a behavioral theory linking trust, reciprocity, and reputation. In *Trust and reciprocity: interdisciplinary lessons from experimental research*. Elinor Ostrom and James Walker, eds. Russell Sage: New York.

<sup>23</sup> Putnam, Robert and Kristin Goss. 2002. Introduction. In *Democracies in flux: the evolution of social capital in contemporary society*. Robert Putnam, ed. Oxford: Oxford. pp.3-20.

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new communities. This potential is converted into actual communities when the people included interact, reciprocate, and build trust. Soft power relationships among countries reflect their willingness to work together based on trust accrued through positive, reciprocal interactions in the past, not only between states, but also among ordinary people. Soft power relationships are the social capital among nations.

**Redefining soft power**

Suppose soft power is present when foreigners think of us as *we*, not *they*. That is the ultimate form of foreigners accepting our point of view. A country does not so much have soft power *over* another country, but rather countries have soft power relationships *with* each other. Getting to *we* and *with* suggests these societies are integrated, in whole or in part.

The Soft Power Rubric brings together a group of time series data that tracks changes in the interactions that people have with foreigners. Three series are direct people-to-people interactions, emigration, study abroad, and traveling abroad; the fourth is a mediated interaction, watching foreign movies. Emigration reflects a person’s ultimate integration in a foreign society, permanently moving family and home to another country. Study abroad reflects a person’s serious interest and commitment to understanding another society by spending substantial financial resources and formative time in a foreign country. Visiting a foreign country reflects a short-term interest in a foreign society. Watching a movie expresses a curiosity about another country.

The diagram below shows these indicators range from short-term attraction – such as buying a ticket to see a movie from another country, to long-term attraction – emigrating to a foreign country. What matters is not how many movies a country produces, but rather how many foreigners choose to watch them.

**Figure 1**

**Soft power rubric: measuring a country’s cultural influence**

<i>Short-term attraction</i>	<b>Watch a movie</b>	<b>Visit a country</b>	<b>Study Abroad</b>	<b>Emigrate</b>	<i>Long-term Attraction</i>
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To explore the practical application of this new view of soft power, I composed a dataset on migration, study abroad, and travel for over 200 countries from 1960 to 2017. For each of these three series, international institutions have collected data for many countries for many years already. I also built a dataset on foreign movie audiences for about 50 countries from 1970 forward. Data for this is available, but less comprehensive than the other three series. Taken together, these four indicators provide a nuanced picture of the personal interaction of people across nations and opens the possibility of comparing soft power of countries across time.

The Soft Power Rubric measures soft power *resources*, the *potential* for a country to have a soft power relationship with another. GDP, a measure of economic power resources, sums the financial value of goods and services produced by an economy. For military power, the number of military bases, aircraft carrier, or personnel are measures of military power resources (Global

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Firepower). More resources likely mean more success, but there is no guarantee. A bigger GDP does not guarantee the upper hand in a trade negotiation. More military bases do not ensure victory in war. However, more resources make success more likely, and the depletion of resources heightens the risk of failure. Similarly, the Rubric reveals the volume and intensity of people-to-people interactions that form the basis of many individuals' views of foreign countries and the foundation of a country's soft power resources. More soft power resources no more predict greater political cooperation than more military resources predict victory in war. However, it is reasonable to expect the presence of major soft power resources itself alters behavior.

This Soft Power Rubric provides empirical markers that can ground qualitative studies of individual countries. The next section applies the Soft Power Rubric in depth to India.<sup>24</sup> The first application uses the Soft Power Rubric to illustrate changes in India's soft power from 1960 to the present – both in attracting foreigners and reaching out to foreign countries; to provide context, India's data is also compared to China's. The second application uses the Soft Power Rubric data to illustrate an alternative explanation to why India is included in G20, but excluded from the G7 – possibly soft power is as powerful an explanation as economic power.

### **Exploring India with the Soft Power Rubric**

The quantitative data of the Soft Power Rubric are indicators that suggest which lines of qualitative inquiry might prove fruitful. From movies to migration, scholars of India's soft power highlight its strengths and weaknesses; the quantitative data can place India in global context and also unearth changes over time. Throughout this analysis India is compared with other countries. Indian government reports and other research on soft power often highlight China<sup>25</sup>, which also has an active soft power strategy; therefore, China is included in several instances. Further, India aspires to join groups like the G7, membership which is determined as much by a country's soft power as its economic power; therefore, India is compared to G7 members like France and Italy.

### Foreign audiences for Indian movies

Indian movies are the most popular image of the country in many regions of the world. In the 1970's, in several countries ranging from Indonesia to Nigeria, Indian movies had a virtual monopoly since few were locally made. In the Soviet Union, they were very popular, until American movies were allowed.<sup>26</sup> With greater economic liberalization in the early 1990s, Indian movies took a more popular turn, shifting from the mainly classical styles to more Western-style, hybridized productions.<sup>27</sup> While there is substantial qualitative work on the

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<sup>24</sup> Author. 'Soft Power Amidst Great Power Competition.' Wilson Center Asia Brief. May 1, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Singh, A.K. and S. Tiwari. *Proceedings of a seminar on leveraging India's soft power as a strategic resource*. Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS). New Delhi: Vij Books, 2010. B. Bhattacharyaa. *Enhanced soft power and India's cultural exports*. Mumbai: MVIRDC World Trade Centre, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Anjali Gera Roy (Ed.) *The Magic of Bollywood: at Home and Abroad*. New Delhi: Sage, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> David J. Schaefer, Kavita Karan, Amar Donepudi, and Namrata Bansal, 'Cinematic Soft Power and Contraflows: the Prevalence of South Asian Culture and Art in Popular Hindi Cinema' in *David J.*

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popularity of Indian films, quantitative data on the number of foreigners who watch Indian movies is difficult to come by and, therefore, is an opportunity for further research.

There is an important further question -- does watching movies from a country improve that country's image in the audience's mind? For a recent study, over two hundred Croatian students screened five Indian movies, followed by discussion. When surveyed afterward, most said their view of India had changed little, with the exception of *Pinjar*, a historical movie about a family during the Partition.<sup>28</sup> A second study from the 1990's of Koreans who had immigrated to the US asks whether movies and mass media influenced their view before immigrating and whether life in the US matched the mass media image. Immigrants with less education were more dependent on mass media for their image of the US, especially the sense that it was a country of luxury. Immigrants with more education were likely to have a range of sources of information on the US, including personal contacts, and also had a firmer sense that Americans were more frugal than Koreans.<sup>29</sup> Finally, an ongoing research project finds that people in Central Asia have a negative view of American movies and cultural products as purveyors of decadent culture.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand we know that movie fans are hugely knowledgeable about their favorites abroad. On the other hand, serious studies suggest movies provide at best a partial understanding of the foreign country. Movies are one source of soft power, but alone they are not effective and they are not likely the main source of a country's soft power.

India's movie industry is often held as an example of its soft power, but no studies have been able to empirically link its movies to influence in foreign policy. The trend is that more countries are producing and co-producing movies that reach a global audience. It is reasonable to expect that there will be more diversity of movies in the global market, as has happened in other media markets like television and radio. Straubhaar, an expert on Brazil's media industry, argued in the 1990's that the US was not as dominant in the world media market as it once was, and that this was part of a predictable cycle of technology and structural change. If the US was an early entrant into an industry, like the movies, then it has a first mover advantage, especially when the costs of production and distribution are high. However, as production and distribution costs decline, other countries' producers will grow.<sup>31</sup> The UNESCO data shows that while US-

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Schaefer and Kavita Karan (Eds.) *Bollywood and Globalization: the Global Power of Popular Hindi Cinema*. Oxford: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Viktorija Car, Lidija Kos-Stanisic, and Zrinka Viduka. "The Limits of Soft-power Public Diplomacy: Consumption and Representation of Bollywood Movies among Croatian Students of Media, Communications, and Political Science." *Teorija in Praksa*. Vol. 53. Issue 5 (2016):1213-1277.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Messaris and Jisuk Woo. "Image vs. Reality in Korean-Americans' responses to Mass-mediated Depictions of the United States." *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*. Vol.8 (1991): 74-90.

<sup>30</sup> Eric McGlinchey and Marlene Laruelle, 'Explaining Great Power Status in Central Asia: Unfamiliarity and Discontent.' Posted in *The Owl in the Olive Tree*. [https://minerva.defense.gov/Owl-In-the-Olive-Tree/Owl\\_View/Article/2001688/explaining-great-power-status-in-central-asia-unfamiliarity-and-discontent/](https://minerva.defense.gov/Owl-In-the-Olive-Tree/Owl_View/Article/2001688/explaining-great-power-status-in-central-asia-unfamiliarity-and-discontent/) (accessed February 6, 2020)

<sup>31</sup> Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity." *Critical studies in Mass Communication*. Vol. 8. (1991): 39-59.

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produced movies continue to sell tickets, the number of co-productions among investors from different countries is also rising. Given that India is already among the small number of countries with movies appearing regularly in the UNESCO Top Ten lists, the prospects for growing prominence are good.

### Foreign visitors, students, and immigrants in India

For the other three elements of the Soft Power Rubric, there is excellent data on India. There has been a steady increase in foreign visitors and students to India in recent years, reflecting India's pull on people in other parts of the world. Tourists come to see the sites and business people to explore opportunities. Foreigners enrolling in an Indian university shows an even greater commitment to learn about the country. It also reflects the students' confidence that India offers opportunities for intellectual and technical learning that are better than at home.

Many scholars have explored the impact the host country has on foreign students and the implications for when they return home. Carol Atkinson's work on US military academies shows how officer exchanges influence foreign military culture, including a greater likelihood of transitioning to democracy.<sup>32</sup> Alice Kaplan follows the influence that a year in Paris had on future US First Lady Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, writer Susan Sontag, and philosopher Angela Davis.<sup>33</sup> The exposure these three women had to French intellectual, cultural, and artistic life transformed American culture for a generation.

Similarly, travel reflects the foreigner's interest in the country – whether visiting members of their extended family, exploring business opportunities, or simply site-seeing. The tourism literature demonstrates travel is not just an industry, but also a way for the host country to develop and convey a narrative about their own community to outsiders. In the US, Humboldt Park, Chicago, is a Puerto Rican neighborhood that uses its local heritage and its contribution to American culture to attract tourists, both for the benefit of local and outside travel businesses.<sup>34</sup> In the Netherlands, part of the success of Volendam, a Catholic village in a Protestant nation, is its appeal as among the most picturesque fishing villages in the country.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, tourism is an industry like any other. On the other hand, it can be an opportunity for a community and a country to shape its own narrative for visitors.

To put India's soft power influence into context, it helps to compare India with China's pull on foreign visitors and foreign students.

### **Figure 2**

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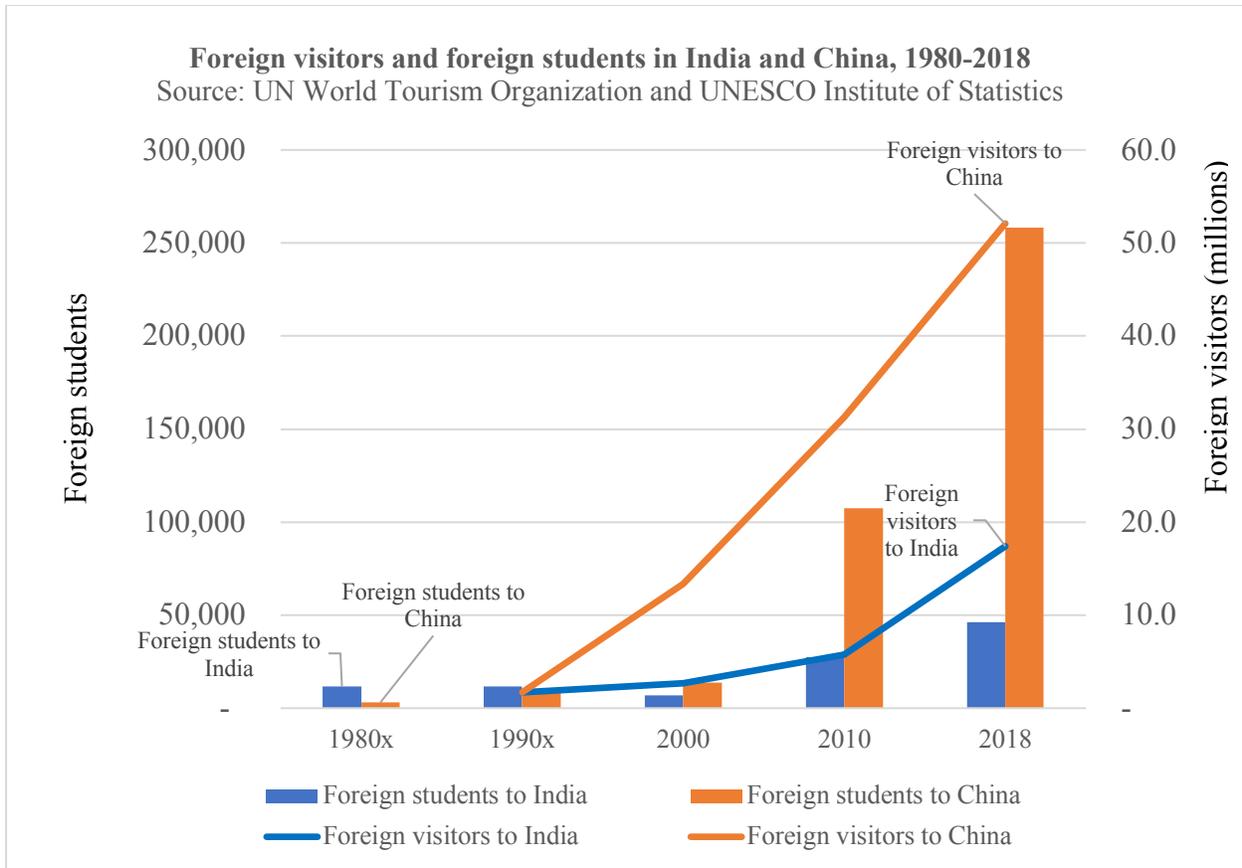
<sup>32</sup> Carol Atkinson. *Military Soft Power: Public Diplomacy through Military Educational Exchanges*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Alice Kaplan. *Dreaming in French: the Paris Years of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Susan Sontag, and Angela Davis*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Carla Almeida Santos and Christine Buzinde. "Politics of Identity and Space: Representational Dynamics." *Journal of Travel Research*. Vol. 45.(Feb 2007): 322-332.

<sup>35</sup> Johan Van Rekom and Frank Go. "Being Discovered: a Blessing to Local Identities?" *Annals of tourism research*. Vol. 33. Issue 3(2006): 767-784.

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Note: Reporting years vary.<sup>36</sup>

As the bars in Figure 2 show, while in the 1980 and 1990 there were more foreign students in India (blue) than in China (orange), around 2000 China overtook India. Similarly, in foreign visitors, represented by lines in Figure 2, India (blue) and China (orange) were at comparable levels in 1990s, but foreign visitors to China have grown faster than to India. Hosting foreign visitors is a short term and hosting foreign students is a long term opportunity to build soft power with people from other nations. Even though India's numbers have grown rapidly, China began to overtake in 2000, also reflecting a shift in soft power influence.

Where India far exceeds China is as host for foreign immigrants, and through these immigrants India has deeper soft power relationships with their home countries that China lacks. Figure 3 shows the number of foreigners who live in both countries from 1990 to 2019.

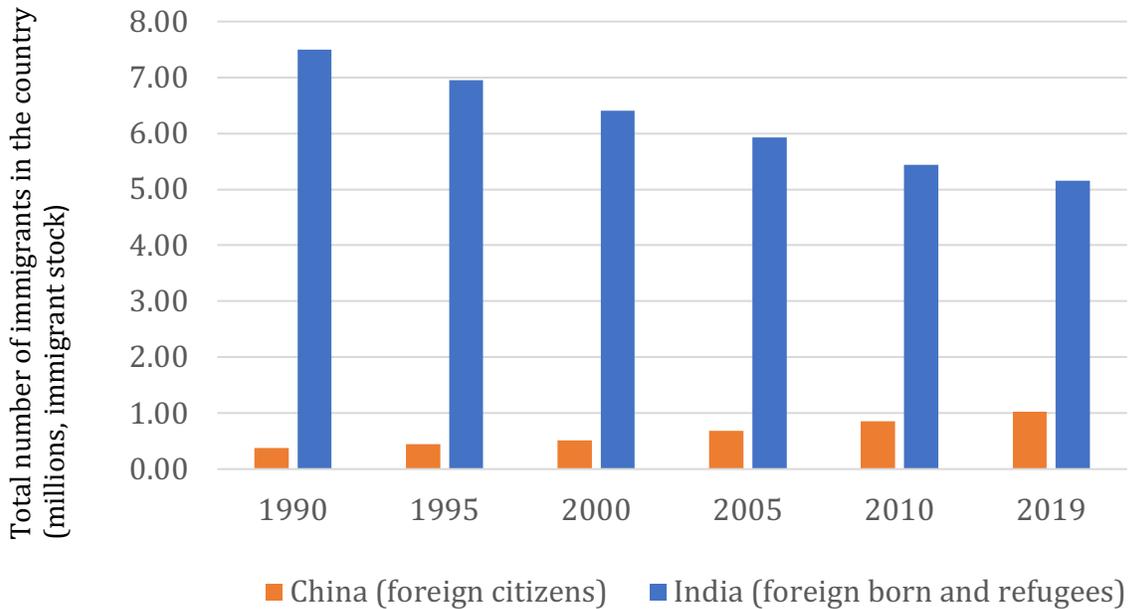
### Figure 3

<sup>36</sup> Reporting years vary: 1980x = 1981(China) and 1978(India); 1990x = 1989(China) and 1986(India)

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### India and China Immigrant Stock, 1990-2019

Source: UN Population Division



In 2019, India is home to over 5 million immigrants; China just over 1 million. Historically, there were two large waves of refugees that came to India, first after Partition in 1947 and the second from Bangladesh after the 1971 war. The decline in total immigrants in India since 1990 is due to these now elderly refugees passing away.<sup>37</sup> China hosts more immigrants than it did before, more than doubling between 1990 and 2015. However, the government's concerns about foreigners is reflected in its immigration policy.<sup>38</sup> Especially compared to India, China's restrictive approach is a missed opportunity in terms of extending its soft power influence.<sup>39</sup>

When emigrants move to India that is evidence that foreigners are attracted to the country, an indicator that there is a soft power relationship between the two countries. When

<sup>37</sup> "Despite Drop, India No. 9 in Number of Immigrants." *Times of India*. March 2, 2012.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Despite-drop-India-No-9-in-number-of-immigrants/articleshow/12105590.cms> (downloaded November 19, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> He Huifeng and Josh Ye. "While Trump Curbs Immigration, China's Giving Out More Green Cards, But Can It Attract More Foreigners?" *South China Morning Post*. February 17, 2017.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2071793/while-trump-curbs-immigration-chinas-giving-out-more> (accessed February 6, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> As Figure 3 indicates, the definition of migrant varies from country to country. In the case of China, migrant refers only to those living in China who are foreign citizens. In India, migrant refers to those living in India who are foreign born or are refugees. In both cases, these data are stock, not flow. They capture the total number of immigrants living in a country, not the number that crossed the border that year.

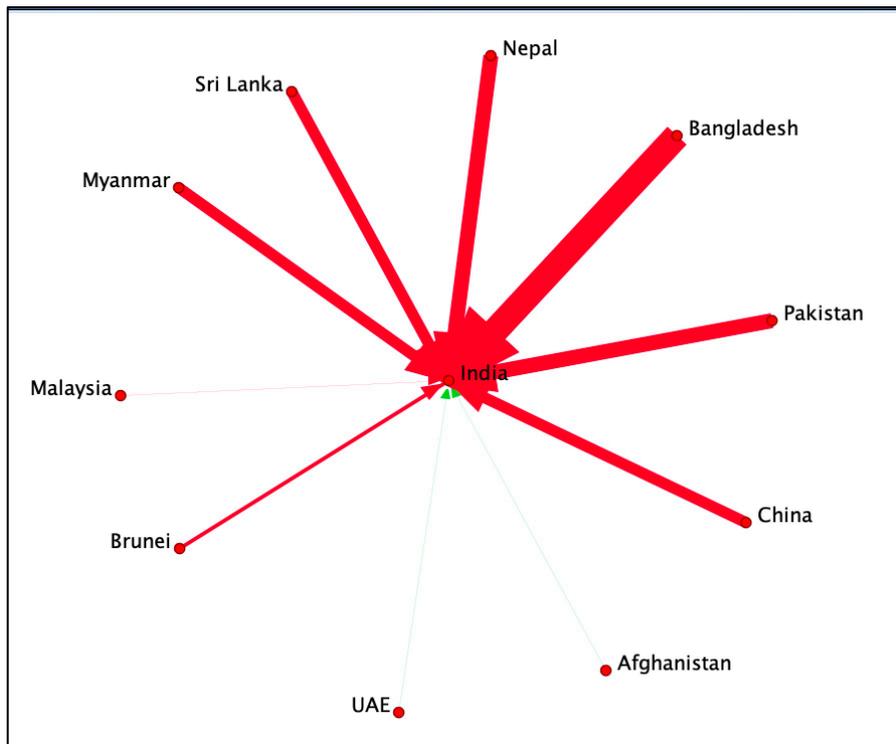
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immigrants come for a better life, they hold India in high esteem. When refugees arrive to escape troubles at home, at minimum India is a safer haven than before. Figure 4 is a network diagram showing which countries sent immigrants to India as of 2019.

**Figure 4**

Top ten countries sending immigrants to India, 2019

Source: UN Population Division



Of all the immigrants in India in 2019, 3 million were from in Bangladesh, 1 million from Pakistan, and over half million from Nepal. These are the countries where India’s soft power influence is likely to be the greatest.

Indian students abroad

Another important aspect of the Soft Power Rubric is how many Indian students go abroad, serving as unofficial cultural ambassadors. For a few years, these students are part of these foreign communities, building friendships and relationships which leave a lasting impression of India.<sup>40</sup> Figure 5 shows the remarkable movement of Indian students to study at foreign universities for a degree.

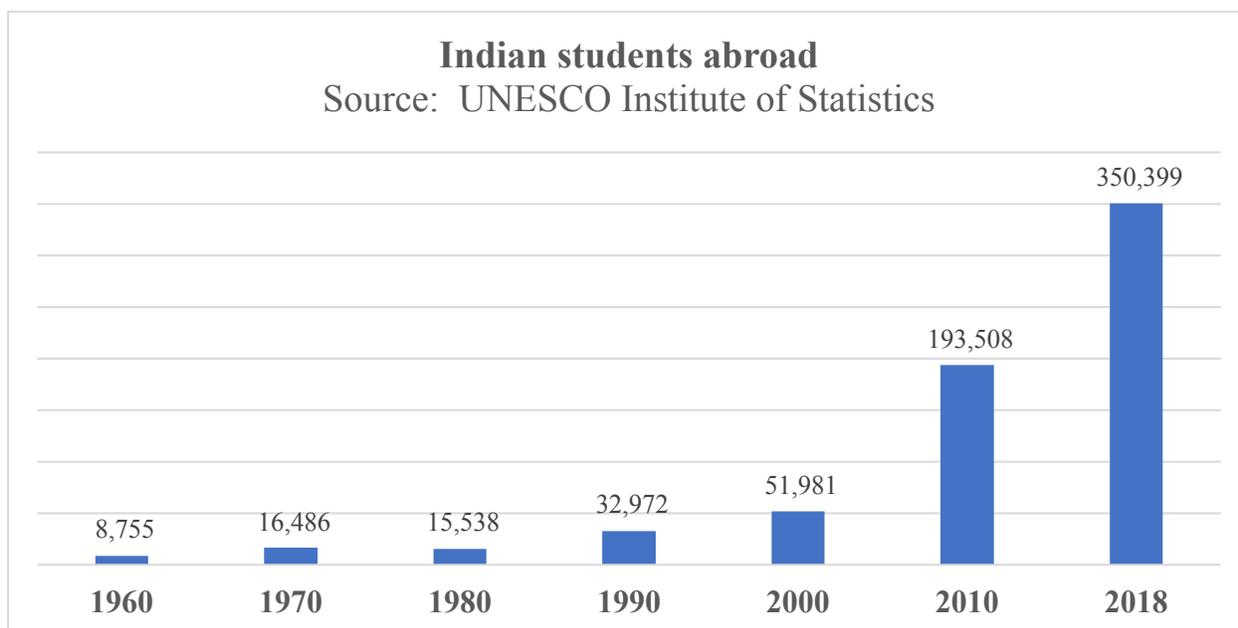
**Figure 5**

<sup>40</sup> See Author, “Applying the Soft Power Rubric: How the study abroad data reveals international cultural relations” in *Cultural Values and Political Economy*, ed. J. P. Singh. Stanford University Press, 2020.

As submitted to *India Review*, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>

### Indian students abroad

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics



By 2010, with annual figures approaching 200,000 students abroad a year, India is second only to China with the largest movement of young people to foreign universities. Kapur in his book on the Indian diaspora argues that the government was able to undertake reforms that re-balanced privilege from the elites to non-elites in part because dissatisfied elites always had the option of emigrating. In particular, as education policy made it easier for non-elites to gain seats at university, elite families sent their children abroad to foreign campuses. While this drains talent away, it increases India’s profile abroad. India’s diaspora has deep network power, a consequence of personal relationships and professional ties.<sup>41</sup>

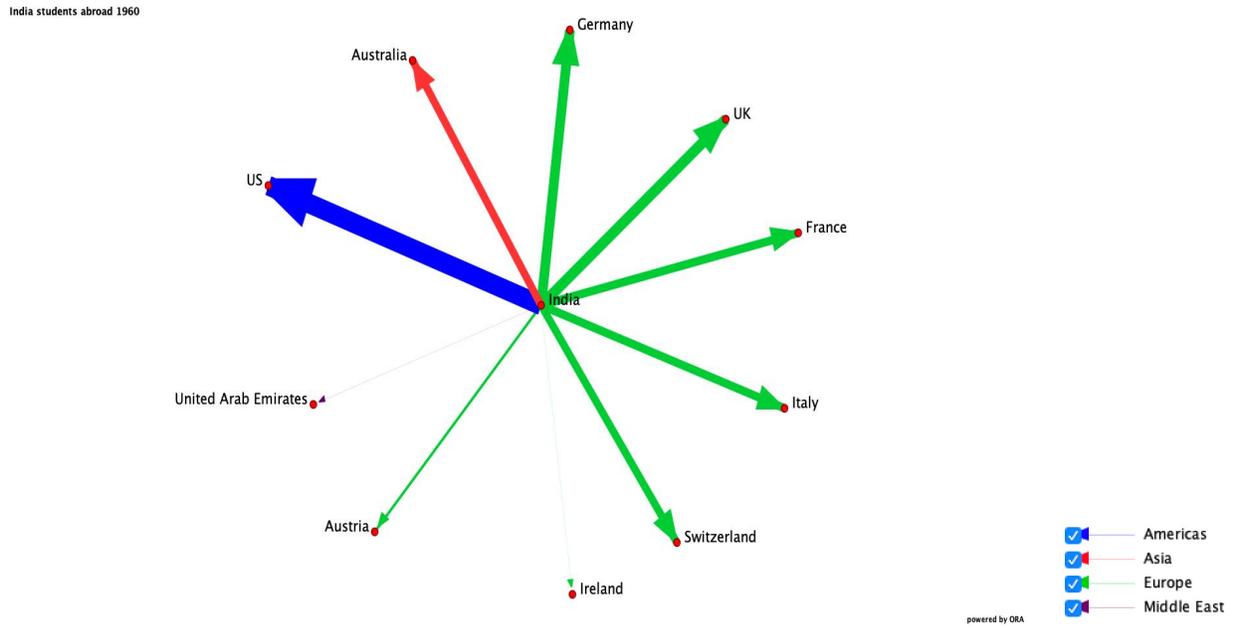
Figures 6 and 7 show the top country destination of Indian students enrolled in foreign universities. In 1960, about one-third of the students went to the US; in 2017, 42% to the US and 15% to Australia.

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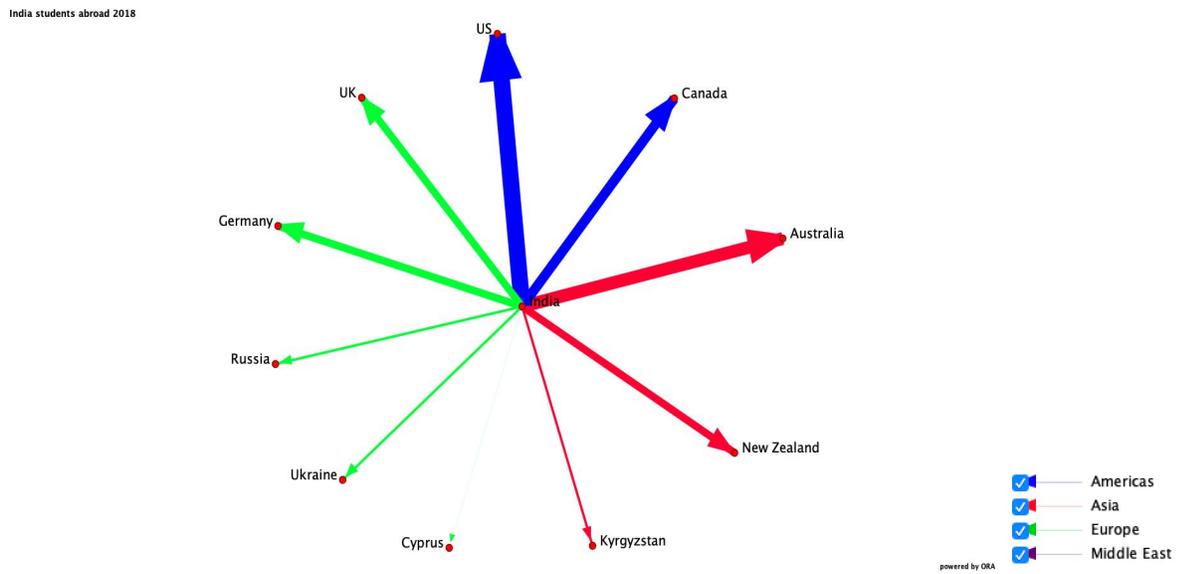
<sup>41</sup> Devesh Kapur. “Indian Diaspora and the Indian foreign policy: Soft Power or Soft Underbelly?” in *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: the Domestic Impact of International Migration from India*. Princeton: Princeton, 2010.

*As submitted to India Review*, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>

**Figure 6**  
**Indian Students Abroad 1960**  
 Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics



**Figure 7**  
**Indian Students Abroad 2018**  
 Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics



As submitted to *India Review*, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

In 1960, around 6000 Indian students went to the US, around 1600 to the UK, and just over 1000 to Germany. In 2018, about 136,000 Indian students went to the US; 73,000 to Australia; 35,000 to Canada; 20,000 to UK, 16,000 to Germany, and 12,000 New Zealand. These figures also reflect the rise of English-speaking countries besides the US and UK that seek more foreign students – Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, especially.

### Indian emigrants abroad

India has the largest emigrant community outside its borders of any other country- over 17 million people abroad. If counted as a country itself, this emigrant community would be the 65<sup>th</sup> largest among the over 200 countries in the world.

**Table 1: India’s emigrant community compared to other countries’ total population<sup>42</sup>**

World rank	Country	2019 Total population
63	Kazakhstan	18,513,930
64	Zambia	17,861,030
<b>65</b>	<b><i>Indian emigrant community</i></b>	<b><i>17,510,931</i></b>
66	Ecuador	17,373,662
67	Netherlands	17,332,850

Countries that host immigrants report their citizenship or country of origin.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, these figures do not capture those diaspora who retain with strong cultural ties to India but were born outside India and/or have non-Indian citizenship. If they are considered, the Indian diaspora community abroad is even larger than the 17 million.

Diaspora communities are inevitably linked to the ancestral country’s soft power. The Indian diaspora is a particularly important one and the Indian government publishes data

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<sup>42</sup> Indian emigrant data is from the United Nations Population Division. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>. Population data is from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators <https://data.worldbank.org/>. Downloaded January 26, 2021.

<sup>43</sup> When using the UN data on Indians abroad, the definition of the host country applies. For example, for Indian immigrants in the US, the US migrant definition will apply; whereas for Indian immigrants in Germany, the Germany migrant definition will apply. In the UN data the three major categories used by most countries to count migrants are foreign born and/or foreign citizens; further, some countries include refugees.

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regularly on how many and where they live.<sup>44</sup> Comparable data for the diaspora of other countries is not easily available, therefore, for the purposes of this article, I compare only immigration data. However, this would be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Kapur explains some of the historic, political drivers behind this migration. When India introduced universal franchise soon after Independence, the political hegemony of upper castes evaporated. Later in the 1950's, the upper castes of South India were squeezed out of government jobs and universities, they migrated to other parts of India and into central government jobs. In the late 1960's, they exited from public to private sector, and then out of the country. In 1990, the government increased affirmative action. Migration was an effective outlet for elites who found their status ebbing, within ten years the political controversy over affirmative action faded.<sup>45</sup>

Since 1990 India has been among the top five countries with the largest emigrant communities abroad, as shown in Table 2

**Table 2: Top 5 Countries with larges emigrant communities abroad<sup>46 47</sup>**

	1990		2000		2010		2019
<b>Total World</b>	<b>153,011,473</b>		<b>Total World</b>	<b>173,588,441</b>		<b>Total World</b>	<b>220,781,909</b>
Russia	12,662,893		Russia	10,721,414		<b>India</b>	<b>13,229,275</b>
Afghanistan	6,823,350		Mexico	9,562,929		Mexico	12,414,825
<b>India</b>	<b>6,623,177</b>		<b>India</b>	<b>7,932,405</b>		Russia	10,130,259
Ukraine	5,545,760		China	5,885,006		China	8,733,242
Bangladesh	5,451,831		Ukraine	5,596,883		Bangladesh	6,750,115
						Syria	8,225,499

India's emigrant community was the third largest in the world in 1990 and 2000; and first largest in 2010 and 2019. The Figure 8 network diagram shows the top ten host countries for Indians living abroad as of 2019. Again, as with Figure 3, these figures represent a snapshot of the total size of the Indian emigrant community living there in a given year, not the number of new Indian immigrants who crossed the border that year.

<sup>44</sup> See Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, "Report of the high level committee on Indian diaspora" at <https://mea.gov.in/oia-publications.htm>

<sup>45</sup> Devesh Kapur. *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: the Domestic Impact of International Migration from India*. Princeton: Princeton, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> In South Asia, the Partition is an example of borders shifting, making "immigrants" of some people who had not moved. Sometimes, immigration data reveals moving borders, not moving people. While the UN data released in 2017 lists Russia in 1990, the Soviet Union did not officially dissolve until 1991. The UN data in Table 2 reflect the political boundaries after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The number of Russians abroad declined. In Central Asia, in 1990 there were 4.6 million, but 2015, there were 3.6 million; in Eastern Europe, in 1990 there were 6.2 million Russians, but in 2015 there were 1.1 million.

<sup>47</sup> Data from UN Population Division, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp> (downloaded January 25, 2020)

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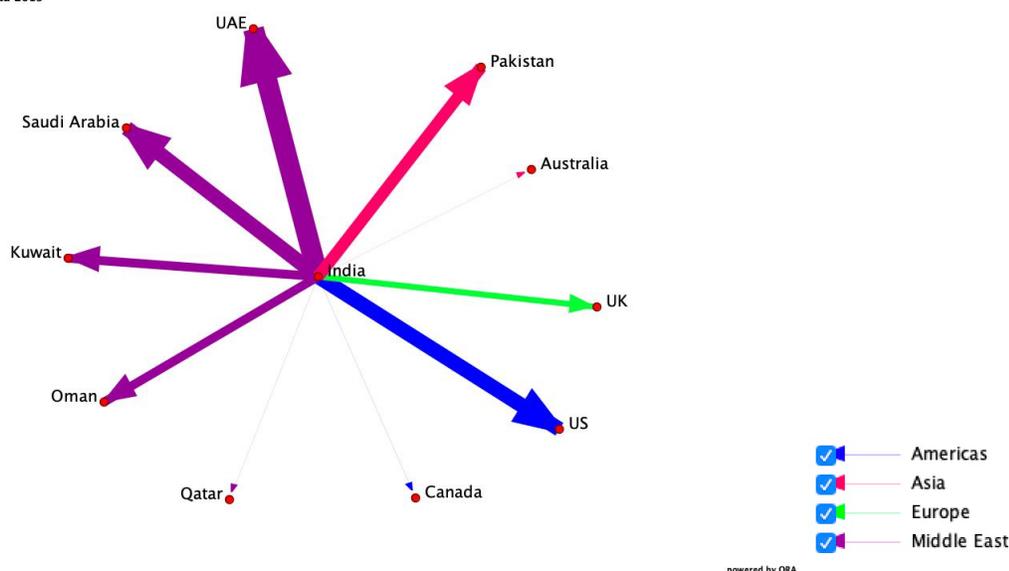
*As submitted to India Review, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>*

February 2, 2021

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**figure 8: Top ten host countries of Indian emigrants abroad, 2019**  
**Source: UN Population Division**

Fig 9 Indian emigrants abroad 2019



In 2019, there were 3.4 million in the United Arab Emirates, 2.7 million in the US, 2.4 million in Saudi Arabia, 1.6 m in Pakistan; and over 1 million each in Kuwait and Oman.

Using the lens of the Soft Power Rubric, India outranks most other countries in terms of the number of students and emigrants abroad. These are the major sources of India’s soft power relationships with other countries. While typically a country’s ability to attract foreigners, through inward visitors, students, and migrants, would be the measure of its soft power influence, India is a special case. For most countries, their best chance of interacting with foreigners is when foreigners visit. For India, however, its community abroad is as large as many countries and represents the main opportunity for foreigners to enjoy social interactions with Indian and Indian culture. Beyond the Soft Power Rubric, there are innumerable areas for transnational social interaction ranging from music to cuisine, and fashion to literature. While for the moment they lend themselves less to quantitative cross-national comparisons, there is ample room for further work.

### Soft Power success, the G20

India’s membership in the leading global leadership group the G20 is an example of its soft power. Perhaps it is overlooked in the India soft power literature because bigger diplomatic prizes – such as a seat on the UN Security Council – still elude it. Nevertheless, a closer inspection of how G20 countries were selected shows that being included is less a matter of economic size and more a matter of political importance, underpinned by soft power.

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India aspires to be part of not just the G20, perhaps, but also of the leading G8 (with Russia's expulsion, now G7). Consequently, for India, getting into the G20 may seem like second best. Parthasarathi Shome in one of two volumes on the G20 development agenda says:

“In the new multi-polar world, India enjoys considerable attention reflective of its integration with the global economy through the current and capital accounts of its balance of payments. However, its growing economic advances are not fully reflected in the prevailing global governance arrangements, beginning with the above-mentioned G8+O5 outreach programme, which did not represent India's interests adequately.”<sup>48</sup>

Shome refers to an effort that began in 2005 for the G8 to include “Outreach 5” countries, India among them. A vignette captures the reality. At the 2005 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, while in principle the O5 were welcome guests, in reality G8 leaders held a summit lunch to discuss outreach, while O5 leaders were kept waiting outside the room.<sup>49</sup> Around this time India and others also sought to reform the United Nations and gain a seat on the Security Council, reforms which today have yet to take place. These frustrations for India may loom larger than the successes – getting into the G20.

G-groups are responses to financial crises. The following table identifies the stages of G-group meetings at the leadership and finance minister level.<sup>50</sup> The smaller G7 and G8 leader meetings are more prestigious. The larger G20 began as a lower-level meeting, a gathering of finance ministers in the wake of the 1998 financial crisis. In 2005, concerned it was losing relevance, the G8 created an Outreach program to include Mexico, China, India, Brazil and South Africa (O5). However, G8 countries continued to set the agenda with O5 in secondary roles. Not until the global financial crisis of 2007 was the broad G20 group elevated from finance-minister to leader level.

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<sup>48</sup> Parthasarathi Shome, ed. *The G20 Development Agenda: an Indian Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Tristen Naylor. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20*. Routledge, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Wade. “From Global Imbalances to Global Reorganisations.” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*. Vol. 33 (2009):539-562.

<sup>50</sup> Colin I. Bradford and Johannes F. Linn. “A History of G20 Summits: the Evolving Dynamic of Global Leadership.” *Journal of Globalization and Development*. Vol. 22. Issue 2(2011): Article 8.

*As submitted to India Review*, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>

**Table 3: Brief history of G-group meetings**

Stage	Leader level	Finance Minister level
Building to G8	1973: After the collapse of the Bretton Woods foreign exchange regime and the onset of a global oil crisis, a group met as the “Library” group, and included the US, UK, France and Germany. Japan joined later in 1973, Italy in 1975, Canada in 1976, making it the G7. The European Community in 1977; Russia joined in 1997, now it was the G8.	
G20 created		1999: The 1998 financial crisis triggered in Southeast Asia led to the creation of the first G20 finance ministerial-level meeting – a lower level meeting compared to the leaders meetings
G8+O5	2005: G8 added the Outreach 5 (O5), Mexico, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa.	
G20 elevated	2008: After the global financial crisis of 2007, the G20 was elevated from finance minister to leader level in 2008.	
G8 becomes G7	2014: Russia cast out of G8 after its invasion of Crimea. Back to G7.	

In 1998, the formal decisions on creating the ministerial-level G20 were made by US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers and Canadian Finance Minister Paul Martin.<sup>51</sup> A more informal accounting of events suggests that they were selected by US Treasury official Timothy Geithner and his German Finance Ministry counterpart Caio Koch-Weser.<sup>52</sup> The incumbent members of the G8 were all included, and the group expanded to encompass systematically significant countries that subscribed to a liberal economic agenda with a domestic standard of good governance.<sup>53</sup> However, this definition is more honored in the breach, as Tristen Naylor argues.

<sup>51</sup> Tristen Naylor. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20*. London: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Wade. “From Global Imbalances to Global Reorganisations.” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*. 33(2009):539-562.

<sup>53</sup> Tristen Naylor. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20*. London: Routledge, 2019.

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“Despite original club members no longer being undisputedly larger economies than others, they remain in the top-tier group. G7 members have not maintained the relative economic power that they enjoyed in 1975. Within only five years both China and Brazil had displaced Italy to make it ranked eighth in 1980. By the time the G20 was established at the ministerial level in 1999, India had achieved the rank of being the seventh largest economy. Despite club members’ declining rank, their status was unaffected. This was particularly so for Italy and Canada. Indeed, Canada has never ranked as a top-seven economy and Italy has not been worthy of the distinction since 1980. They were able to maintain their spots because of precedence. As a result, having gained inclusion they could not lose it.”<sup>54</sup>

Jose Antonio Campo and Joseph Stiglitz also raise concern that the G20 membership is limited. Countries with large population and GDP like Nigeria have been excluded; the Arab members fall short in meeting the criteria; the Europeans are overrepresented; and least-developed countries are unrepresented.<sup>55</sup> In short, there is widespread agreement in the scholarly literature that inclusion in the G20 has less to do with the size of a country’s economy and the democratic and good governance values of its political system than with customary diplomatic influence, a version of soft power.

At the time of G20’s formation 1998, India was the 13th largest economy.<sup>56</sup> In Table 4, the shaded countries were not included despite their large economies. In particular, several of the smaller European economies in the top 20 rank were excluded. Countries like South Africa and Indonesia were included in an effort to be more representative.

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<sup>54</sup> Tristen Naylor. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20*. Routledge, 2019. P43-44.

<sup>55</sup> Ocampo, Jose Antonio and Joseph E. Stiglitz. ‘From the G-20 to a Global Economic Coordination Council.’ *Journal of Globalization and Development*. Volume 2, Issue 2(2011): Article 11.

<sup>56</sup> India’s rank as 13<sup>th</sup> largest economy in 1998 is based on GDP (current US\$) as reported by the World Bank, downloaded in November 2019, which reflects, among other things, data as routinely revised by governments to provide the most accurate economic data possible.

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**Table 4: Top Countries by GDP 1998<sup>57</sup>**

Rank	Country	1998 GDP (current US\$)
1	United States	9,062,818,202,000
2	Japan	4,032,509,760,873
3	Germany	2,238,990,774,703
4	United Kingdom	1,650,172,242,464
5	France	1,503,108,739,159
6	Italy	1,270,052,525,928
7	China	1,029,043,097,554
8	Brazil	863,723,411,633
9	Canada	631,813,279,407
10	Spain	619,214,834,614
11	Mexico	526,502,129,378
12	Netherlands	438,008,220,395
<b>13</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>421,351,477,505</b>
14	Australia	398,899,138,574
15	Korea, Rep.	383,330,931,042
16	Argentina	298,948,250,000
17	Switzerland	295,045,151,745
18	Turkey	275,967,393,985
19	Russian Federation	270,955,486,862
20	Sweden	270,809,066,781
21	Belgium	258,528,339,631
22	Austria	218,259,904,402
23	Denmark	176,991,934,993
24	Poland	174,685,791,564
25	Hong Kong SAR, China	168,886,163,222
26	Norway	154,163,364,303
27	Saudi Arabia	146,775,498,093
28	Greece	144,428,172,489
29	South Africa	137,774,755,609
30	Finland	134,038,718,291
31	Portugal	123,946,327,916

<sup>57</sup> Data from World Bank, World Development Indicators. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>. Downloaded January 26, 2020.

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32	Israel	115,932,846,767
33	Thailand	113,675,561,057
34	Iran, Islamic Rep.	110,276,913,363
35	Colombia	98,443,739,941
36	Indonesia	95,445,547,873

In Table 4, countries highlighted were not included in ministerial-level G20 when created in 1999. Spain, Netherlands, Switzerland, and Sweden were excluded even though at the time they were among the top 20 largest economies. They had insufficient soft power to get themselves included. In addition, there are 13 excluded economies larger than Indonesia, which was included.

The language used by various country scholars in Hoffmeister’s collected volume on perceptions of the G20 reflects their knowledge of how precarious their membership is. Turkey is aware it might have been excluded, following a pattern that it is often isolated in the international community, say Huseyin Bagci and Ilan Turan. Indonesia is grateful to be included, especially as a representative of Southeast Asia and ASEAN in particular, writes Zamroni Salim. South Africa, is willing to be a responsible stake holder, but also notes that the job of representing all of Africa in its diversity is an onerous responsibility, writes Laurence Bourelle. All these scholars note that membership in G20 is affirmation of a country’s political importance – not just its economic significance – an opportunity to take part in setting the rules of global governance rather than simply being subjected to them.<sup>58</sup>

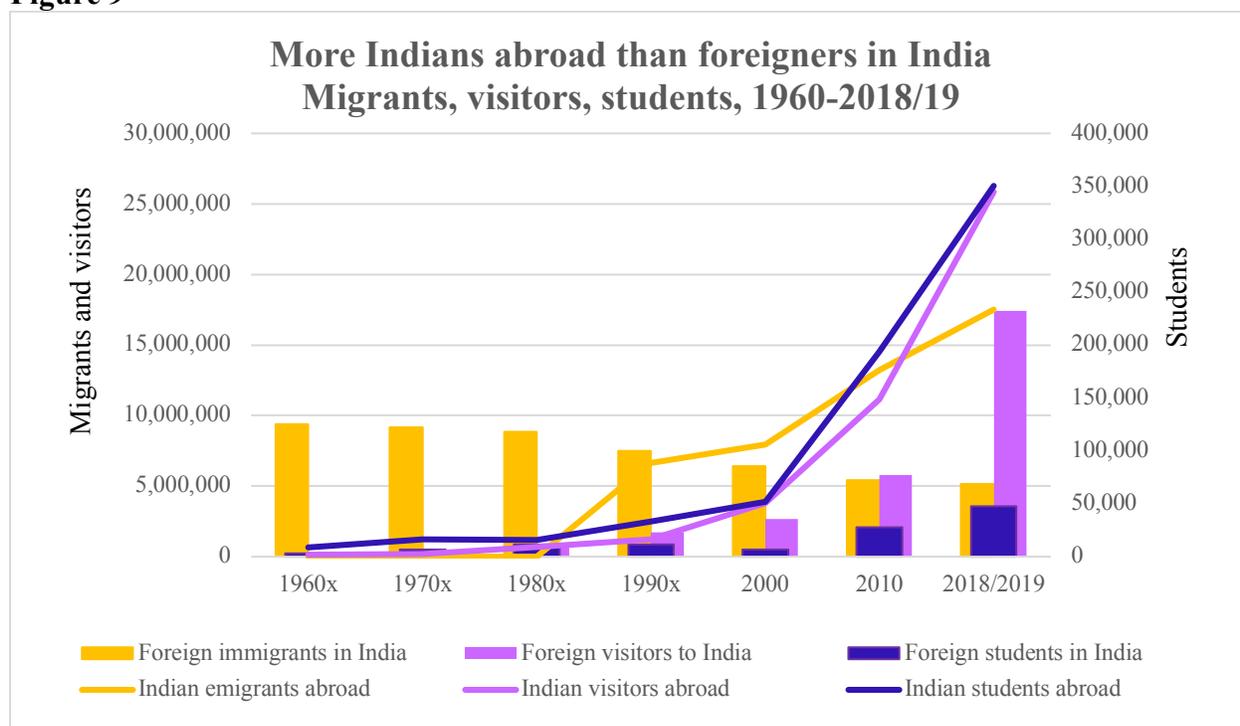
Economic size alone does not determine membership in the G20 or G7. Therefore, India’s successful membership in G20 reflects the soft power it exercises, in addition to its growing economic influence. A summary of India’s Soft Power Rubric data show that in the period leading up to the late 1990’s when the G20 was formed, India became more outward facing. The Figure 9 below shows an increase in nearly every metric of Indians’ social interactions with foreigners. Foreign visitors and Indian visitors going abroad rise sharply from 1960 forward. Indian emigrants and Indian students abroad grow tremendously from 1980 forward. From 2010 the number of foreign students attracted to India also rises. The only indicator that declines is the number of foreign immigrants in India; explained earlier as the advancing age of immigrants who arrived during Partition.

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<sup>58</sup> Wilhelm Hofmeister, ed. *G20: Perceptions and Perspectives for Global Governance*. Singapore: Konrade-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011.

*As submitted to India Review*, see <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1958581>

Figure 9<sup>59</sup>



<sup>59</sup> When data for specific years are missing, I pulled data for nearby years.

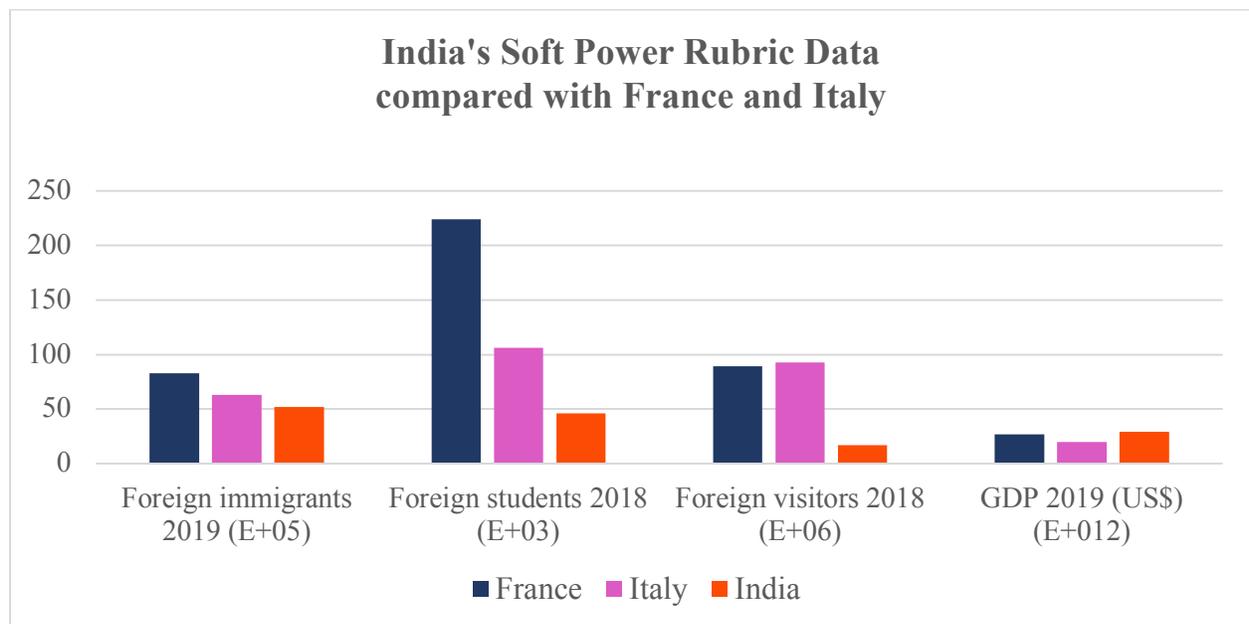
	Source	1960x	1970x	1980x	1990x
Foreign students	UNESCO			1978	1986
Foreign visitors	UN World Tourism Organization	1961			
Foreign immigrants	UN Demographic Yearbook and UN Population Division	no data	1971	1981	
Indian visitors abroad	UN World Tourism Organization	1961		1979-1980	1989-1990
Indian students abroad	UNESCO	1961-1962		1980-1981	1988-1991
Indian emigrants abroad	UN Demographic Yearbook and UN Population Division	1955-1961	1970-1973 only a few countries reporting	1980-1986 only a few countries reporting	

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Figure 9 shows that the period 1980 to 2000 marks the start of more Indians going abroad and foreigners coming into the country. For people across the globe, at a personal level, global awareness of India grew significantly, and this would be one factor influencing India's inclusion in the G20 at the finance minister level in 1998 and again at the leader level in 2008.

Should India seek membership in a re-fashioned G7, another set of data lays out the challenges ahead. Figure 10 compares India's Soft Power Rubric data to France and Italy, both G7 members. Whereas in terms of GDP size, in 2019, India is already at level comparable to France and Italy, in the other arenas of hosting foreign immigrants, foreign students, and foreign visitors, it is evident how much more foreigners are attracted to French and Italian culture and society than to India's.

**Figure 10<sup>60</sup>**



	Foreign immigrants (2019)	Foreign students (2018)	Foreign visitors (2018)	GDP (US\$) (2019)
France	8,334,875	224,101	89,322,000	2,715,518,274,227
Italy	6,273,722	106,117	93,229,000	2,003,576,145,498

<sup>60</sup> In Figure 10, each data series is followed by scientific notation in order for all four series to fit on a single y-axis. For example, India hosts 5.2 million or  $52 \times 10^5$  noted as E+05 immigrants and 42 thousand or  $42 \times 10^3$  noted as E+03 foreign students.

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India	5,154,737	46,007	17,423,000	2,868,929,415,617
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In 2019, India’s GDP is larger than both Italy and France. However, in terms of hosting foreign immigrants, India is 1 million behind Italy and 3 million people behind France. In terms of hosting foreign students, Italy hosts double and France five times more students than India. In terms of attracting foreign visitors, France and Italy each host over four times more than India. The Soft Power Rubric data is one way to capture the intangible attraction that foreigners have for a particular country and is a useful tool for measuring a country’s cultural influence.

## Conclusion

The Soft Power Rubric data builds a picture of a country’s relationships with the rest of the world by examining data on its people-to-people interactions with foreigners – from what foreign movies are watched, and from where do foreign visitors, students, and immigrants come. Seen through the prism of the Soft Power Rubric, India has exceptional soft power resources. Ordinarily, soft power is understood as foreigners’ interest in a country, which would make foreign visitors, students, and immigrants coming into India as the natural place to look for influence. For example, the best chance for a foreigner to meet at Dane is in Denmark, a chance encounter outside of Denmark is less likely. In the case of India, however, its large population abroad is an outstanding soft power asset. The most likely opportunity today for foreigners to interact with Indians is to meet an Indian who is abroad – as an immigrant, student, or visitor.

When compared to China, in the 1980’s, Indians had more social interactions with foreigners – whether as visitors, students, or immigrants – than China, but by 2000 China had opened up more to the outside world than India. When compared to G7 nations, India’s economy is already of similar size. However, countries like France and Italy have deeper people-to-people relationships with a wider array of countries.

What would increase India’s soft power in the future? On the movie front, India is certainly one in a very small set of countries that has a successful export industry, which is a major achievement. However, compared to the US industry’s level of foreign policy impact, India’s is still a distance away. Keep in mind the studies that show foreigners have the most accurate impression of a country when they have multiple and different social interactions with people from that country. When foreigners both watch Indian movies *and* have opportunities to meet Indian people, that is the most potent formula for growing soft power relationships.

In other arenas, initiatives that would bring more foreigners to India – as visitors, students as immigrants – would also help build its soft power relationships with other countries. These, of course, are classically domestic policies, and not usually undertaken as foreign policy initiatives. However, should domestic political conditions align to make India easier for foreigners to access, there should be a foreign policy payoff, a soft power bonus.

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