

## **"Canada is Back!"**

Several days after the United States elections of November 3, 2020, President-elect Joe Biden declared, "America is back in the game." By this he intended his fellow citizens, but also and importantly populations and their leaders across the world, to know that under his leadership the United States would return to a more globally engaged foreign policy than had been pursued under President Donald Trump.

When the Liberal Party of Canada returned to power in 2015, after ten years in opposition, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said and meant something rather similar when he proclaimed, "Canada is back!" By this he presumably meant that under his leadership Canada would recover the global standing and moral and diplomatic influence on the world stage that he and other critics of the Conservative government's foreign policies argued had been lost under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Canadians have long thought of themselves and their country as "punching above our weight" when it comes to global influence. Indeed this boxing term was regularly used by one-time Minister of External Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy (1996-2000), to characterize what he and some others believed to be Canada's ability to leverage its soft power attributes into global influence. These attributes were believed to include admiration in the eyes of many populations and their leaders throughout the world, moral and diplomatic leadership on issues of human rights, a multicultural model of democracy based on accommodation and respect for differences, and a tradition of peace-keeping.

In fact, this Canadian self-image goes back several decades to the 1950s, when the Canadian Secretary of State, Lester B. Pearson, was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in creating the United Nations peacekeeping force during the Suez Crisis. The Nobel Committee that chose Pearson said that he had, in its words, "saved the world."

Well, that's a lot to live up to. In the decades since then those who study or even just pay attention to Canada's role in the world have used such terms as "middle power," "honest broker," and "moral superpower" to describe their country's role in the world. There have been dissenters and debunkers, of course, but there cannot be much doubt that most Canadians are inclined to believe that the world recognizes their country's virtues and influence on the global stage.

And so it was a cause of disappointment, consternation and even anger, among some, when Canada's bid for one of the ten temporary seats on the UN Security Council failed in 2010 and then again in 2020. On both occasions there were partisan and ideological recriminations at home. Critics of the 2010 failure were quick to blame the foreign and domestic policies of the Conservative government. The more recent failure to win a seat on the exclusive and influential Security Council was attributed by critics to the Liberal government's foreign and domestic policies.

Winning a temporary seat on the Security Council is not something that can be reduced to a simple formula. The UN member-states who vote in these elections, most of whom are not particularly democratic and many of whom are egregiously undemocratic, have various

motivations that can have little or nothing to do with the causes pointed to by domestic critics of Canada's recent failures to win a coveted seat at the table.

Lost in all of this, perhaps, is the possibility that Canada's role and influence in the world are not as significant as many Canadians have long imagined. Indeed, how do we know when a country is influential on the global stage?

In fact, efforts to measure this influence have been undertaken by many researchers. But we should first distinguish measures of *global influence* from measures of what some call a country's *national brand* or *global standing*. The latter two involve international perceptions of such things as a country's culture, its system of government, quality of life, and economic metrics. (see, for example, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/Germany-Retains-Top-Nation-Brand-Ranking-the-United-Kingdom-emerges-ahead-of-Canada-to-Round-Out-the-Top-Three-US-and-China-Experience-Significant-Drop> and <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/methodology>)

Measuring global influence is the goal of the Elcano Global Presence Report, published by a Spanish think tank since 2011. The report produces an index for over 100 countries that is based on 9 measures of soft power that together comprise 40 percent of a country's index score, 5 measures of economic power that account for 40 percent of the index, and 2 measures of military power that account for the remaining 20 percent of the index. (

[https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/data/Global\\_Presence\\_2018.pdf](https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/data/Global_Presence_2018.pdf)) Its ranking for 2017, the latest available, placed the United States far ahead of all other countries,

followed by China, the UK, Germany, France, Japan and Russia. Canada was in 8th place, but well behind the first six countries in the Elcano Global Presence ranking.(Ibid., 13)

One might object that Canada's global influence is based principally on soft power attributes that are undervalued by the Global Presence Index. The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania produces an annual ranking of global cultural influence whose most recent report ranks Canada 11th, just behind Brazil, Australia, Singapore and Switzerland.(<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/influence-rankings>)

Another ranking that relies entirely on soft power measures is published annually by the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy.( <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf>) It combines objective metrics that include educational exchanges, a country's global diplomatic footprint, the measured quality of a country's universities, attracting tourists, and cultural exports such as music and film with subjective assessments based on national surveys in 25 countries. Canada is ranked 7th in the USC's 2019 report on soft power, behind France, the UK, Germany, Sweden, the US, and Switzerland, in that order.(Ibid., 40)

A third and rather intriguing measure of global soft power is offered by the Higher Education Policy Institute, or HEPI, a think tank based in Oxford. It uses the number of world leaders who were educated in a country as a proxy measure for what is arguably an important aspect of soft power. The author of its 2020 annual report writes, "When a country has educated a relatively high number of people who go on to lead their own countries, this is thought to reflect the influence of the host country and it may bring diplomatic and trade

benefits. International students have been called 'The best ambassadors a nation has'."

(<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HEPI-Soft-Power-Ranking-2020.pdf>, 1)

On this measure of global influence, the US, the UK and France are head and shoulders above other countries, followed distantly by Russia and Australia. Canada is far down the table, although the most recent annual HEPI Soft Power Ranking acknowledges that Canadian universities, along with those of New Zealand and some European Union member-states, have seen a sharper increase in international student enrollment that could, eventually, move Canada up the rankings.(Ibid., 5)

None of this answers the perennial and perhaps unanswerable question of what attributes, hard or soft, contribute to a country's global influence, and in what circumstances. But what do you think? Is Canada a "moral superpower" in the eyes of others? Do we punch about our weight in global affairs? How would we know for sure? And are these questions that should concern us?