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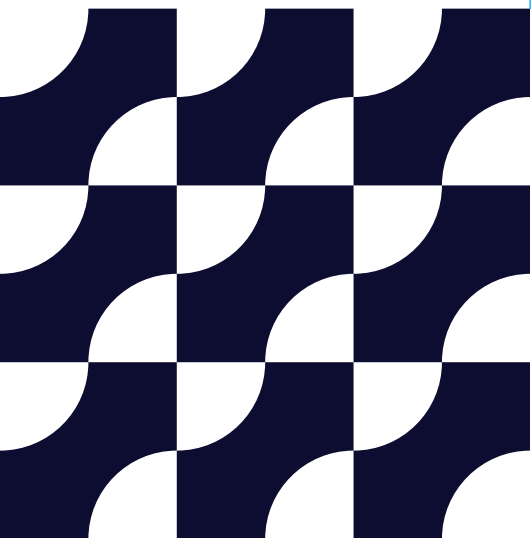
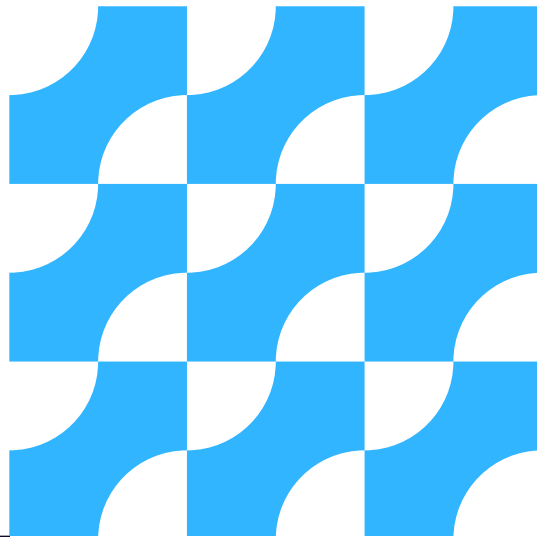
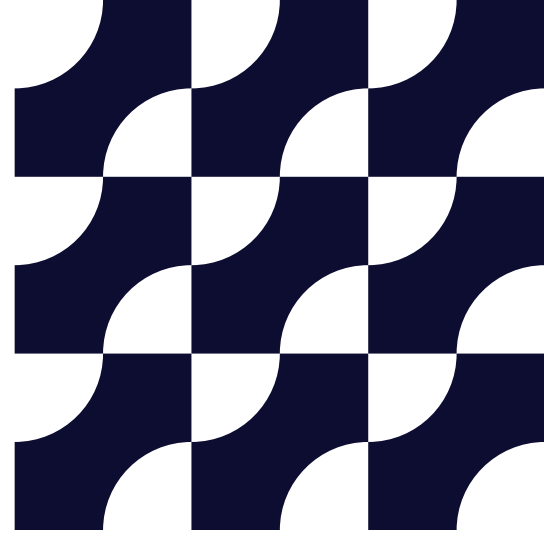
October
2025

Cultural Strategies of States

Soft Power in a
Fragmented World

The Studies and Reports of Institut Choiseul

These publications are the result of meticulous documentation, supported by quantitative and empirical research on societal issues. They explore topics that remain largely underexamined, closely linked to the transformation challenges facing businesses and organizations today. Produced in collaboration with professionals and partners from our network, our studies and reports open the door to new research, areas of reflection and fresh perspectives on the economy of tomorrow.





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Armées du Moyen-Orient face à DAESH, (co-directed with Stéphane Valter), MA Editions Paris, 2016; *La fin de l'Etat-nation ? De Barcelone à Bagdad*, CNRS Editions, Paris, 2016; *L'eau, un enjeu stratégique mondial*, Strategic Note, Institut Choiseul, Paris, 2022; *Clemenceau et les relations internationales, un réaliste dans le tumulte*, Strategic Note, Institut Choiseul, Paris 2024. He has also authored numerous articles on the Arab world, the Mediterranean, and issues of geoeconomics, power, and technological policy.

Introduction

What does the notion of *soft power* encompass in an increasingly fragmented world? This question forms the starting point for this study. Joseph Nye defines *soft power* as a state's ability to use its power to attract and persuade, rather than coerce, constrain, or threaten. Yet, in light of the new forms of global disorder that have characterized Donald Trump's second presidential term, this question has never been more relevant.

Indeed, it is in the very country that forged the model of *soft power* that the concept now appears most challenged. This signals a striking reversal and a radical return to transactional logic and *hard power*. However, as the study's section on *Soft Power in the Trump II Era* will show, this trend deserves nuance: conservative America's cultural strategies are, in fact, being reconfigured.

Following Nye's line of thought, the United States does not, however, hold a monopoly on *soft power*. To varying degrees and in more or less structured forms, many countries practice it in one way or another, including through *nation branding*, cultural diplomacy or other strategies designed to influence other powers and public opinion through attraction rather than force.

Originally tied to states and their exercise of power, *soft power*, when projected by governments, is subject to deep transformations. Institut Choiseul, a pioneer in defining and analyzing the concept of geoeconomics in France and Europe, has long been interested in international relations and their cultural and influence-related dimensions. In 2011, *Géoéconomie*, the journal founded by the Institute, explored cinema as a tool of nations' soft power.

The aim of this study is to offer a renewed perspective on soft power in an age of global fragmentation, social networks, and advanced forms of influence. Beyond the United States, it broadens its focus to three emblematic cases of contemporary soft power: South Korea and the *Hallyu* wave; Algeria and its hybrid forms of information warfare; and India, from Bollywood to *Hindutva*. The goal is to shed light on their recent transformations, highlight their strengths, and examine their limits and contradictions.

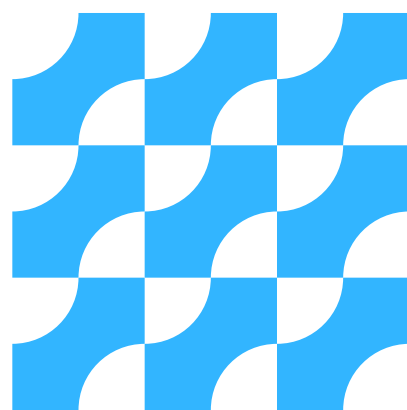
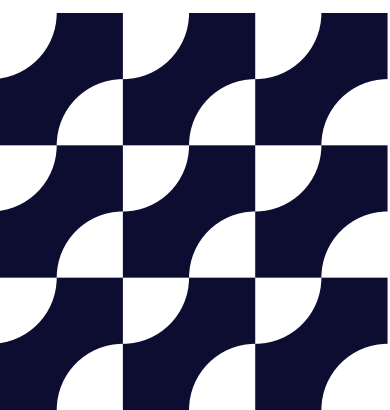
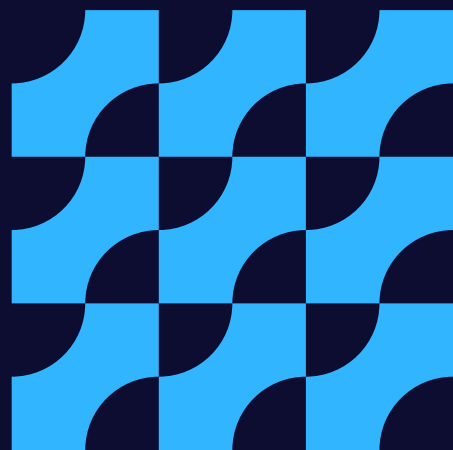
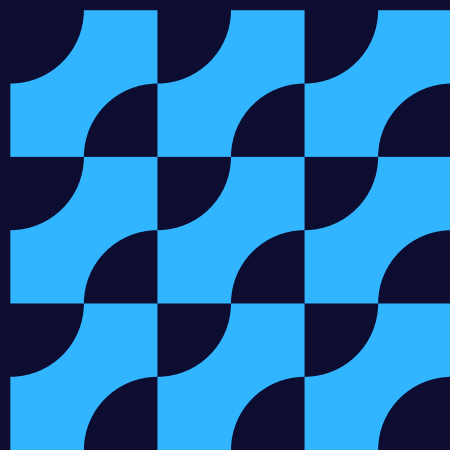


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I. American *Soft Power* in the Trump II era



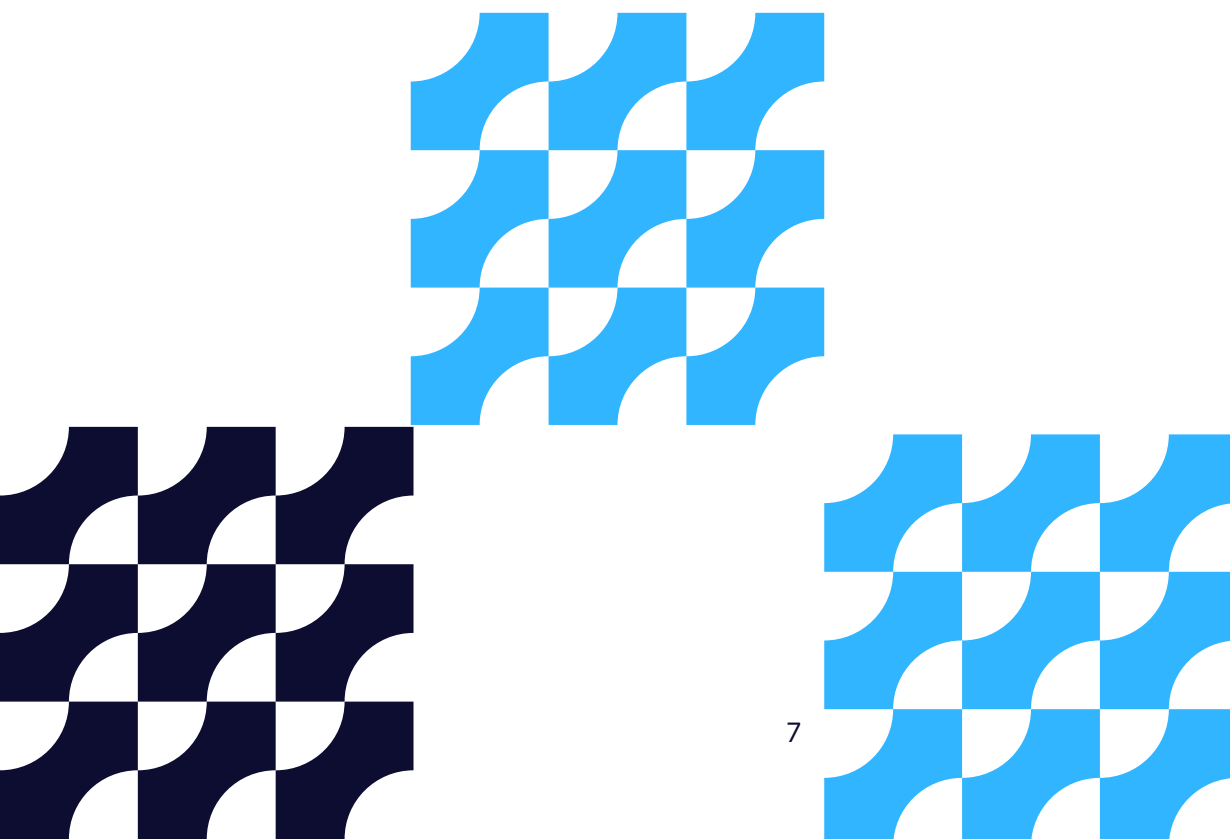
Introduction

Since Donald Trump's return to the White House in January 2025, the foundations of American influence have been profoundly reconfigured. As the heir to a system of public diplomacy built after 1945—including educational exchange programs, international media, cultural institutions, and multilateral cooperation—the soft power of the United States is now undergoing a dual transformation: the rapid dismantling of its traditional instruments and the emergence of new forms of influence driven by Trumpian ideology and private actors.

The first observation is that of structural weakening. The Trump II administration has initiated massive cuts to educational programs (Fulbright, IVLP), weakened international media (Voice of America, Radio Free Europe), announced the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO, and restricted academic and scientific mobility. This deliberate contraction of institutional channels has eroded the United States' reliability as a partner and created room for influence by rivals such as China, Russia, and Turkey.

The second observation, however, is that America's global influence has not ceased; it has been recomposed. The Trump II era is witnessing the export of an assertive MAGA ideology, which projects the American culture war into Europe and seeks to unite a "nationalist international." This is accompanied by a techno-conservative matrix, founded on the fusion of the state and Big Tech around artificial intelligence and reindustrialization. Finally, it expresses itself through alternative cultural narratives—Trump himself as a pop figure, Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, MAGA influencers—which appeal to certain audiences but also reinforce the image of a polarizing and authoritarian America.

The objective of this chapter is to analyze these contrasting evolutions of American *soft power* in the Trump II era: first, the decline of its public and multilateral instruments, and second, the rise of new ideological, technological, and cultural matrices that are redefining the place of the United States in the global imagination.



I. (1) The evolution of American *soft power*

I An ideological rejection of *soft power*

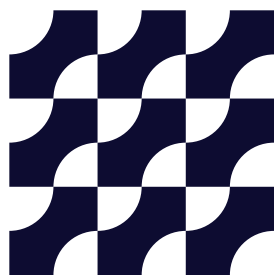
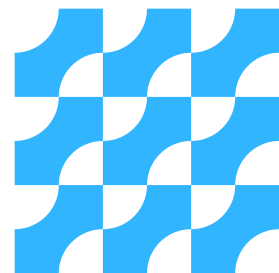
Since his return to the White House in January 2025, Donald Trump has methodically relegated the concept of *soft power*—that is, a state's ability to attract, convince, and rally through the appeal of its culture, values, and model—to the back burner. Whereas his predecessors, both Republican and Democrat, regarded public diplomacy, educational and cultural programs, and international media as essential instruments of influence, Trump is turning away from them in favor of a transactional logic and a constant power struggle.

This stance stems from a profoundly utilitarian view of international relations. As noted by Maud Quessard, Director of Research at IRSEM and a specialist in U.S. strategy, Trump does not see influence as a matter of image or persuasion, but as a confrontation in which only strength matters. In his business-world mindset, inspired by “the art of the deal”, negotiation means imposing his own terms and forcing the opponent to

yield. *Soft power*, viewed as the weapon of the weak, is not a strategic tool but a sign of vulnerability.

This rejection marks a break with the historical use of *soft power*. Under Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, the “America First” rhetoric was accompanied by a vast *nation branding* effort: massive investments in international media, promotion of the American way of life, and the championing of an open and victorious America. Trump reclaims the slogan but empties it of any attractive content: far from “selling America as a brand,” he privatizes the federal apparatus to serve a populist agenda and even temporarily delegates certain prerogatives to private actors like Elon Musk.

Thus, for Trump and his inner circle, soft power is not just ineffective—it is counterproductive, as it weakens the image of strength that the United States seeks to project.



II The dismantling of public diplomacy instruments

This ideological perception has immediate consequences: it leads to a rapid weakening of public instruments for cultural and educational diplomacy. Historically, USAID was a major pillar of American influence, particularly in Africa and Latin America, where its health and development aid programs also served as a counter-narrative to adversarial propaganda. Since 2025, the agency has been integrated into the State Department and largely dismantled, drastically reducing the United States' capacity to project an image of benevolent power.

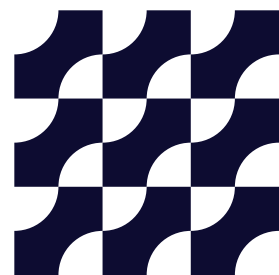
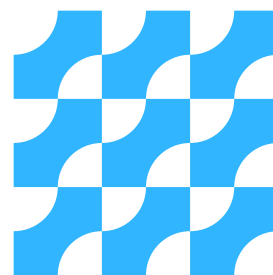
Instruments of influence in the information sphere have also been weakened. The U.S. Agency for Global Media, which oversees Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, suffered massive cuts in March 2025: more than 500 employees were furloughed, regional bureaus were closed, and leadership positions were entrusted to overtly partisan figures. Yet, these media outlets ensured the American presence in strategic areas (Eastern Europe, Francophone Africa). At the same time, the Trump administration eliminated the Global Engagement Center (GEC), the sole federal agency tasked with combating disinformation and foreign interference. This paradoxical choice, amid strategic competition with Beijing and Moscow, deprives Washington of an essential tool of information diplomacy and accentuates the vulnerability of its narratives.

Universities, another central pillar of American influence, have also been weakened. After decades of attracting global talent through their resources and academic excellence, institutions such as Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford have faced funding cuts and

ideological interference. Research programs focused on climate change, racial inequality, and gender have been blocked, leading to a growing risk of "brain drain" and a decline in the international appeal of U.S. higher education.

Educational exchange programs, too, are experiencing an unprecedented crisis. In February 2025, the White House proposed a 93% reduction in the budget of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), effectively amounting to the agency's elimination. Although Congress did not approve the cut, the administration nevertheless canceled 22 already-funded programs totaling \$100 million. The prestigious Fulbright Program was directly affected: in June 2025, nearly its entire board of directors resigned, denouncing "ideological vetoes" imposed by the White House. Several grants were revoked at the last minute, damaging the reputation of a program historically seen as a symbol of trust and academic reciprocity.

By undermining the press, research, and educational diplomacy in this way, Trump is not only diminishing the United States' capacity for global influence but also eroding the very foundations of its normative power.



III An increasingly unreliable America: the abandonment of *smart power*

The dismantling of public diplomacy instruments is not limited to the weakening of cultural or educational structures. It is accompanied by an avowed multilateral disengagement and a retreat into a transactional and coercive logic, breaking with the American tradition of smart power—the combination of hard and *soft power* that had hitherto been a consensus. In doing so, Donald Trump weakens the credibility of the United States with its allies and redefines its role in international balances.

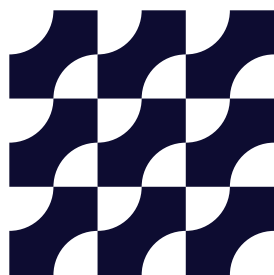
The United States has confirmed its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization, ended its contribution to the UN Human Rights Council, suspended funding for UNRWA, and reduced its engagement with the World Trade Organization. In July 2025, the State Department formalized the American withdrawal from UNESCO effective 2026, ending a cooperation that had been reactivated under Joe Biden. In the same vein, the White House has mentioned reducing contributions to the IMF and the World Bank, while closing several diplomatic posts in Africa and Asia. These decisions reflect a central conviction of Trumpism: multilateral institutions are not a lever of influence but a hindrance to American sovereignty.

This disengagement also weakens traditional alliances, primarily NATO. Trump has repeatedly questioned Article 5 of the treaty, the pillar of Atlantic solidarity, while accusing certain European allies of “parasiting” American power. Under pressure, member states have agreed to increase their military spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2025, but without any guarantee of automatic support in a crisis. Concurrently, plans for the withdrawal of American troops stationed in Eastern Europe have been initiated, with the scheduled closure of certain bases in Poland and the Baltic states.

Even Ukraine, massively supported by Washington since 2022, sees the American commitment becoming uncertain: Trump had promised to “end the war in 24 hours” but has made no concrete commitments and has conditioned his military aid on economic concessions, notably privileged access to strategic Ukrainian minerals.

This withdrawal is coupled with a transactional diplomacy where the economic weapon becomes the central instrument of power relations. The tariff strategy is its most visible symbol. In April 2025, the White House proclaimed a “Liberation Day,” announcing massive tariff hikes on European products (up to +20%). While these measures were partially revised after market panic, they illustrate the Trumpian method: make an extreme demand to force partners to negotiate from an imbalanced power position. The same logic prevails in other areas: threats to reconsider control of the Panama Canal, reactivation of the project to buy Greenland, or the provocative suggestion to integrate Canada as the “51st state” of the United States. These are stunts that blur the line between tactical gestures and long-term strategy but contribute to creating a climate of uncertainty profitable to Washington in its bilateral negotiations.

These practices reflect a paradigm shift: where the United States had long based its power on a combination of seduction and normative leadership, it now appears as an unpredictable, transactional, and coercive actor. For its allies, this shift calls into question the very reliability of the transatlantic relationship. For its rivals, it opens a window of opportunity to present their own models as more stable or attractive.



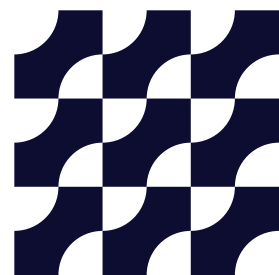
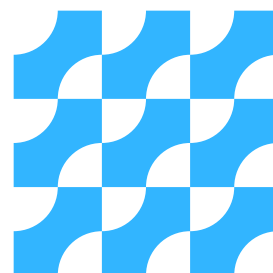
IV A political, symbolic, and economic cost

The decline of American *soft power* is not without consequences on the international stage. Politically, it undermines the trust that allies have traditionally placed in the United States. The withdrawal from UNESCO, the challenges to NATO, and partial pullbacks from Ukraine fuel the perception of an unpredictable partner that is unreliable and focused solely on its immediate interests. In Europe, this distrust has translated into the adoption of the ReArm Europe plan, aimed at reducing military dependence on Washington. In the multilateral arena, the void left by the United States is being quickly filled by other actors: Beijing is expanding its role at UNESCO and in educational cooperation, Moscow is amplifying its narratives through RT and Sputnik, and regional powers like Turkey or Qatar are seizing the opportunity to strengthen their presence.

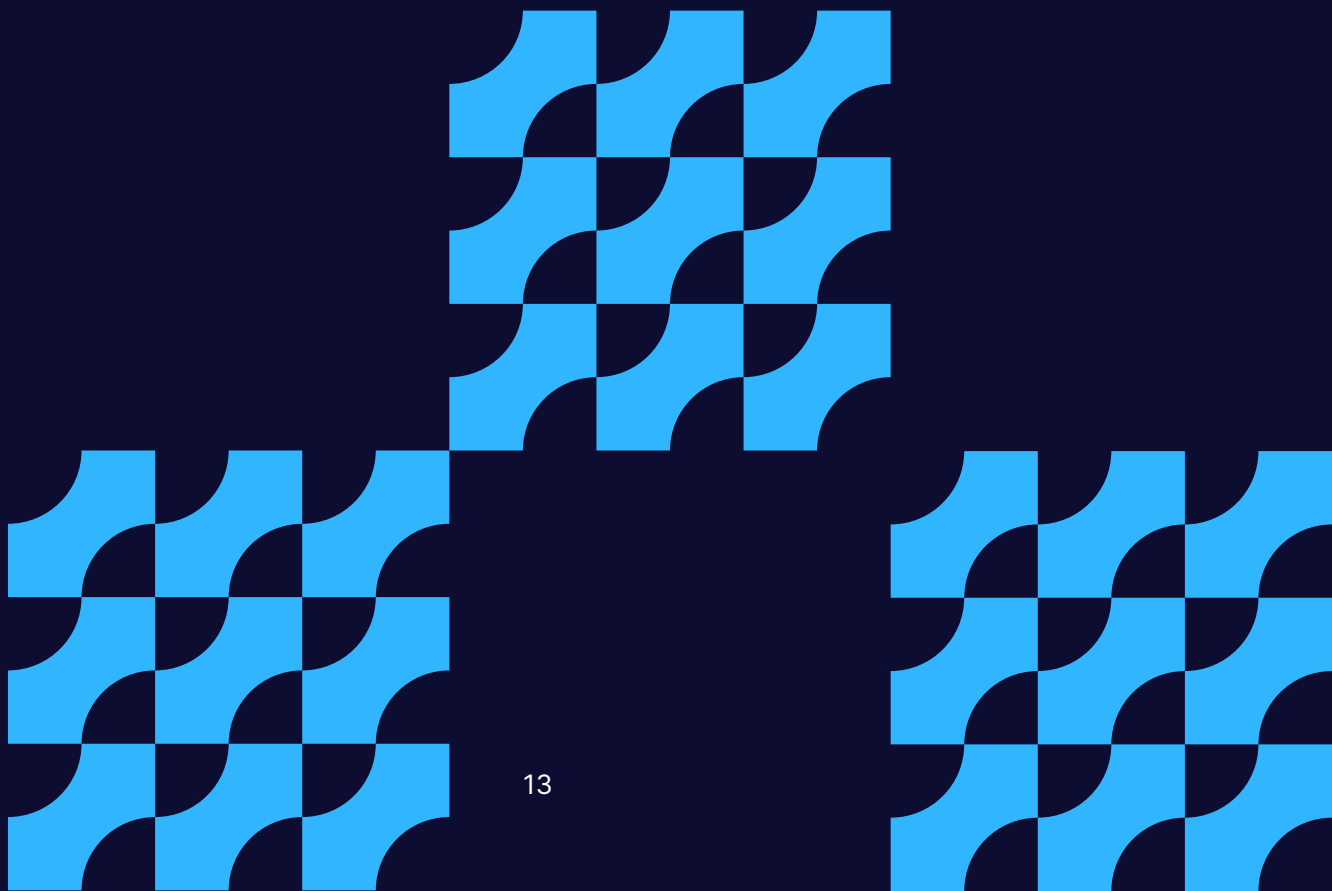
Symbolically, the image of the United States as a model of openness and stability is eroding. The contraction of educational exchanges (cancellation of scholarships, crisis of the Fulbright program), combined with migratory restrictions and the unpredictability of funding, reduces the attractiveness of American universities, long showcases of its influence. More broadly, U.S. cultural diplomacy now projects a blurred image: a country that is politically withdrawn and authoritarian, but still culturally omnipresent through its private industries. This contrast fosters growing doubt among foreign partners, who struggle to identify a coherent line in U.S. policy.

Economic costs further compound the picture. Trade wars and unpredictable tariffs hinder foreign investment and disrupt value chains. Tourism has collapsed, with a 22.5% drop in arrivals in 2025 and an estimated loss exceeding \$12 billion. The defense sector, long a pillar of the U.S. export economy, faces challenges as European states prioritize their own industries. Meanwhile, the country is experiencing a gradual brain drain, with scientists and academics leaving the United States for European programs such as France's Safe Place for Science.

These various costs — political, symbolic, and economic — reflect the retreat of the traditional instruments of American “soft” power. If this trend continues, it could permanently undermine the reliability of the United States as an uncontested international leader.



I. (2) The new frameworks of Trumpian influence



I An exportable MAGA ideology: culture war and revenge against liberalism

Trumpism is not just a domestic political doctrine; it constitutes a truly exportable ideology, with the ambition of remodeling the political and cultural balances of Western democracies. Far from being limited to economic or security isolationism, “America First” is based on a logic of global culture war, where Europe is perceived as the external extension of the American domestic enemy.

As Célia Belin, a researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), observes, Trump does not distinguish between domestic and international spheres: his foreign policy is “the external translation of his fight against liberal elites.” Democrats and progressives in the United States find their mirror in European leaders, accused of embodying the same flaws: paralyzing bureaucracy, multiculturalism, pacifism, ecological obsession. From this perspective, the European Union becomes as much an ideological adversary as a commercial partner.

Trump’s resentment is fueled by an old conviction: America has been continually “robbed” by its allies and competitors. In the 1980s, he denounced Japanese surpluses and NATO costs; in 2025, he applied the same logic to the EU, calling it “worse than China” and likening it to a “Soviet bureaucracy.” Behind this economic rhetoric lies a deeper rejection: that of the European political and cultural model, deemed weak and decadent.

Since Trump’s return to power, this vision has been implemented through a deliberate strategy of building ideological alliances. In the United States, the Heritage Foundation serves as the intellectual hub of the movement, with its ambitious Project 2025. In Europe, the relay is ensured by a constellation of actors: the Tocqueville Exchange, which has trained young French executives with conservative think tanks for twenty years; Hungary’s Mathias Corvinus Collegium, which unites radical right-wing actors; and the major CPAC events in Budapest and Warsaw, hosting leaders such as Orbán, Wilders, Vox, and the AfD. The goal is not

only to share best practices but to form a “nationalist international,” with Washington at the helm.

The ideological offensive is not limited to political or media spheres; it also extends to the corporate world. Since early 2025, several American multinationals—Meta, Google, Amazon, and even Target—have drastically reduced their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, following a trend encouraged by the political climate established by the Trump administration. This retreat from “progressive management” sends a strong signal: official America now embraces an “anti-woke” model, centered on performance and meritocracy, to the detriment of actively promoting diversity. The scope of this shift extends beyond American territory: the European and Asian subsidiaries of these companies are adjusting their practices accordingly, creating a form of reverse cultural diplomacy, where American ideological choices redefine corporate governance norms abroad.

Ideological vehicles are reinforced by concrete pressures. As early as 2025, American embassies sent letters to French companies to compel them to abandon their diversity and inclusion policies, under threat of sanctions. Vice President J.D. Vance denounced the European democratic model in Munich, accusing it of censoring conservative voices. These moves aim to delegitimize the European project and impose an alternative reading grid, where “patriots” oppose the “socialist elites” of Brussels.

This movement is not, however, limited to Europe. In Latin America, two emblematic figures also illustrate the spread of Trumpian ideology: Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, who is experimenting with a techno-authoritarian model based on the centralization of power and intensive use of surveillance technologies; and Javier Milei in Argentina, who has publicly aligned with Elon Musk in defense of free markets and the rejection of bureaucracy.

II A new techno-conservative matrix of influence

This proximity between Milei and Musk illustrates another trend: the ideological export of Trumpism now extends deep into the technological and entrepreneurial spheres.. This second-generation Trumpism indeed relies on a growing fusion between the state and the giants of Silicon Valley, giving rise to a true techno-conservative matrix of influence.

Traditionally wary of federal power and steeped in libertarian culture, a segment of the Silicon Valley elites long represented a potential counterweight to state power. Yet under Trump II, these actors have aligned themselves with a vision of economic patriotism centered on artificial intelligence and national defense.

Figures like Marc Andreessen (creator of Mosaic and Netscape) and Alexander Karp (Palantir) now advocate for “total collaboration” with Washington, including in the military domain. Even Google and OpenAI, whose engineers once refused to work on defense-related contracts, now participate in federal programs. Trump has encouraged this convergence through a series of executive orders (e.g., Removing Barriers to American Leadership in AI, January 2025), which opened public procurement widely to Big Tech.

This shift upends the balance of power: companies once accused of acting like quasi-independent states, are becoming the armed wings of American power—economically, technologically, and militarily.

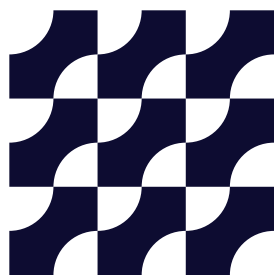
In *The Technological Republic*, Alex Karp outlines a new strategic pact between Silicon Valley and the federal government. According to him, the era of nuclear deterrence is giving way to one of algorithmic deterrence, based on AI and autonomous systems. But the stakes are also cultural and identitarian: Karp denounces Silicon Valley’s “technological agnosticism”,

arguing that it is focused on the consumer and detached from the national project. For him, the survival of the West requires reaffirming a collective identity and a common mission, akin to the great projects of the 20th century (the Manhattan Project, the space race).

This techno-conservative dynamic is also embodied by Peter Thiel, another emblematic figure of American tech and a long-time supporter of Donald Trump. Through Thiel Capital, his investment and incubation “studio”, he has backed initiatives such as the Thiel Fellowship, which encourages young talents to innovate outside the university system, and Breakout Labs, dedicated to breakthrough technologies. Once a symbol of libertarian skepticism toward the state, Thiel now aligns with the Trump II agenda of reindustrialization, technological might, and national sovereignty. His role, at the intersection of venture capital, politics, and entrepreneurial culture, illustrates the privatization of American influence in the service of a techno-patriotic project.

This techno-conservative matrix is not, however, limited to the United States . It also functions as a tool of external influence. As Claude Revel shows, recent transatlantic negotiations have allowed the United States to impose its technological standards and obtain European regulatory easing. The “Joint Statement” of August 21, 2025, formalized this asymmetry: beyond customs duties, the Europeans committed to investing in the United States and adapting their own social and environmental rules to American expectations.

Thus, AI and reindustrialization are not just economic or military issues: they are becoming vectors of political and legal normalization, allowing Washington to extend its global influence despite the decline of its traditional *soft power*.



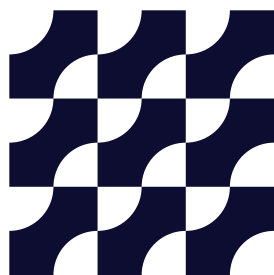
III An alternative, yet polarizing, *soft power*

Although Donald Trump has weakened the traditional instruments of American cultural diplomacy, this has not led to the disappearance of U.S. *soft power*. On the contrary, it has been reconstituted in a more diffuse and privatized manner, revolving around media personalities, charismatic entrepreneurs, and alternative cultural narratives. This “new” *soft power* remains potent, but it is marked by strong polarization, at times functioning more as a source of repulsion than attraction.

On one hand, Donald Trump himself embodies a paradoxical form of *soft power*. As Olivier Fournout, a researcher at Télécom Paris and a specialist in cultural and managerial imaginaries, points out, Trump is not an anomaly but rather a typical product of the American imagination: heir to the Hollywood culture of the lone and resilient hero, adept at a managerial language based on power dynamics, he condenses the dominant traits of globalized capitalism and American cultural industries. His outrageous speeches and his aesthetic of excess are not foreign to the grammar of marketing and spectacle that have made the cultural power of the United States. From this perspective, “trumpization” appears as a logical extension of American *soft power*, not its negation.

On the other hand, this alternative *soft power* acts as a polarizing mirror. For a segment of foreign opinion, it embodies the vitality of a rebellious, iconoclastic, and powerful America, capable of seducing with its brutal frankness. For others, it becomes a repellent. As Maud Quessard explains, the brute force and authoritarianism claimed by the Trump administration feed the idea of a liberal democracy in crisis, whose international image is degrading. The privatization of soft power thus leads to fragmentation: the United States continues to fascinate and inspire, but it simultaneously elicits defiance and rejection.

This polarizing *soft power* is therefore a double-edged sword. It expands American influence through new cultural and digital channels, but it undermines the coherence of the national narrative and blurs the image of the United States abroad. America remains omnipresent in the global imagination, but more as a controversial power than as a universal model.

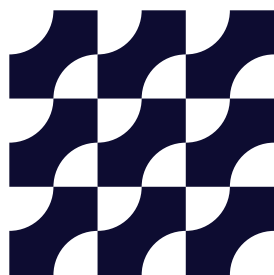
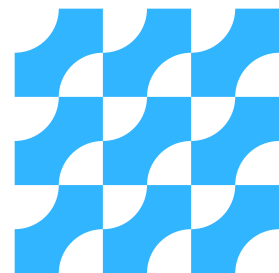


Conclusion

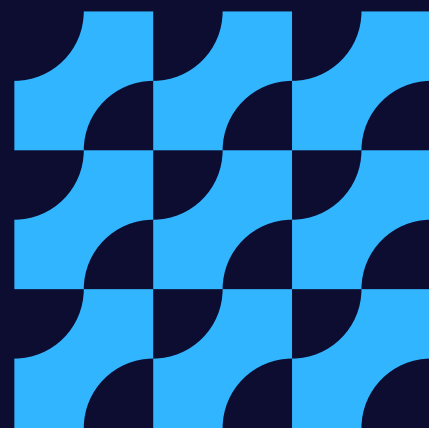
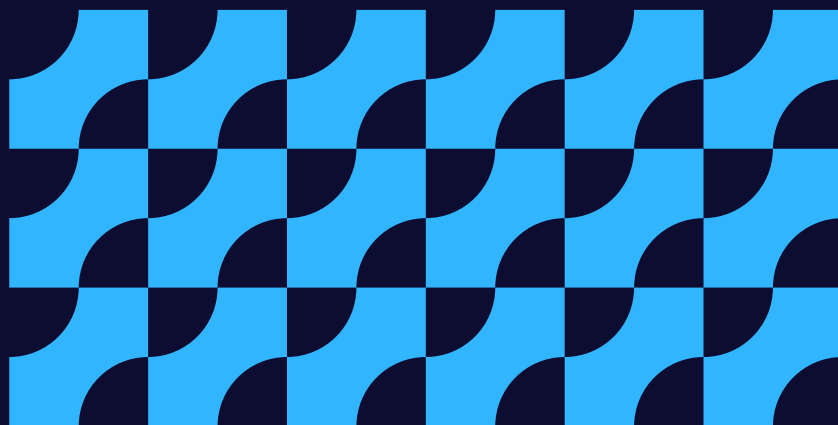
Donald Trump's second term marks a decisive turning point in the history of American *soft power*. By dismantling traditional public diplomacy instruments—educational programs, international media, and multilateral cooperation—the administration has weakened the credibility and attractiveness of the United States in the eyes of part of the global public. This retrenchment fosters a perception of unpredictability and leaves greater room for rival powers such as China and Russia to assert themselves. The assertive diplomacy of these actors, particularly through BRICS summits and other alternative forums, exemplifies this shifting balance.

Yet, what we are witnessing is not a disappearance, but a recomposition. Trumpism exports a polarizing ideology through the MAGA sphere and its European relays. It relies on a techno-conservative matrix in which Big Tech and the federal state converge around artificial intelligence and industrial sovereignty. Finally, it manifests through alternative cultural narratives that both attract and repel.

The United States therefore remains omnipresent in the global imagination, but its influence is now fragmented, privatized, and contradictory. More pervasive than ever in terms of diffusion, it has become less controllable from Washington and increasingly polarizing for its partners.



II. Offensive cultural strategies: an expanding practice

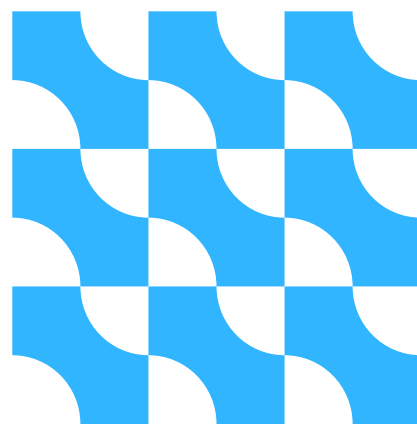
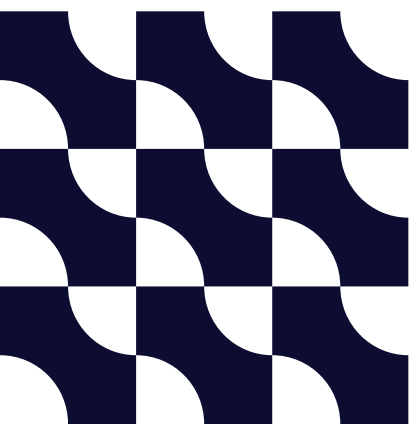


General Introduction to Part II

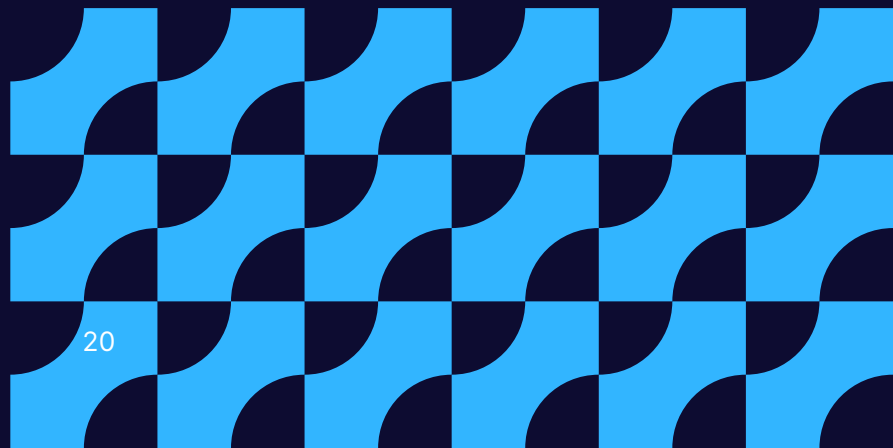
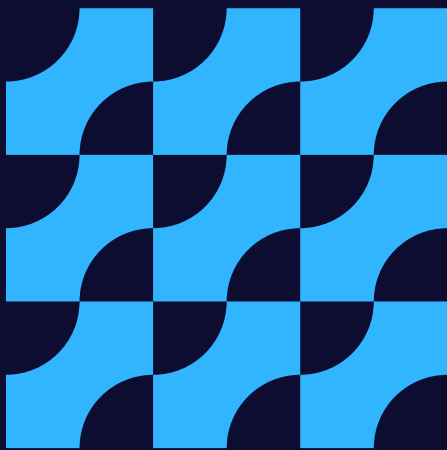
Today, *soft power* is no longer the exclusive domain of great powers. The accessibility of new social media platforms, combined with their inherent fluidity and dynamic potential, allows middle powers and emerging states to leverage the same tools as the major powers, and often with real effectiveness. These so-called “micropowers,” as described by Moisés Naím (former Venezuelan minister and former editor of *Foreign Policy*), are capable of challenging the “megaplayers” represented by traditional powers.

Initially autonomous—comprising “insurgents, extremist political parties, innovative start-ups, hackers, semi-organized activists, opportunistic citizen media, isolated and often marginalized youth... and charismatic individuals who appear out of nowhere”—this seemingly uncontrollable mass of actors can, when guided by clever authorities, be harnessed into highly effective state strategies.

**We will illustrate this assertion through three distinct examples:
South Korea, Algeria, and India.**



I. (1) Introduction to Hallyu: South Korea's cultural influence

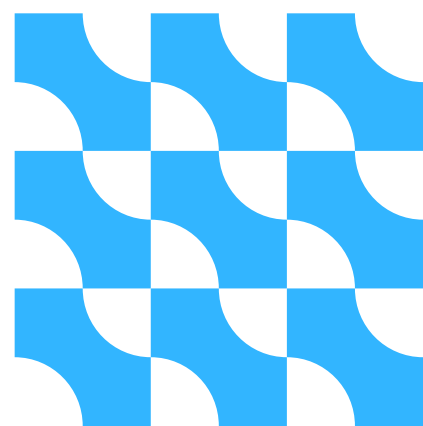
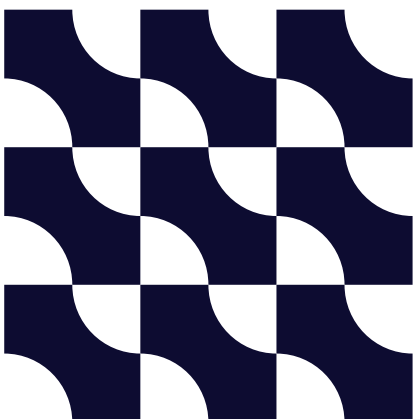


Introduction

Hallyu (a Chinese term meaning “Korean Wave”) refers to the growing global interest in South Korea and its popular culture, including music (K-Pop), films, television (K-Dramas), fashion, cosmetics, and cuisine. Initially coined in Chinese magazines to describe a sense of “concern” over the import of Korean cultural products, the term was later adopted by both the media and the South Korean government, becoming a strategic tool for national development.

This rapidly expanding phenomenon carries significant political, economic, and cultural implications. Once one of the poorest countries in the world after the 1953 civil war, South Korea has emerged as a major player not only in the global economy but also on the international cultural stage. The success of *Hallyu* is analyzed through the lens of *soft power*, a concept developed by Joseph Nye, which emphasizes the ability to influence the behavior of others through attraction and co-optation rather than coercion or bribery.

Fully understood and strategically deployed by South Korea, this phenomenon is the result of close collaboration between the government and its agencies, alongside private actors within Korean society.



II. (1) (i) Origins and areas of application of Hallyu



I Implementing *Hallyu*: state interventionism and collaboration with the economic world

The South Korean government has played a decisive role in the emergence and development of *Hallyu*. The concept is generally traced back to the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, when President Kim Dae-Jung decided to invest in cultural products as a strategic lever. Already in the 1990s, the government introduced measures to strengthen the cultural industry through multiple channels: tax incentives to attract investment; the creation of a Cultural Bureau and an Investment Fund for the development of popular culture; and investments in infrastructure and professional training. Since the 2010s, *Hallyu* has become a global phenomenon, driven in large part by the intensification of digital technologies and the expansion of cultural sectors, including K-pop, films, video games, cuisine, cosmetics, fashion, language, and history.

While South Korea remains the primary market for its cultural industries, its strength lies equally in the growth of its exports worldwide. The country has built a globally positive brand image, projecting itself as an attractive and *soft-powerful* nation. Achieving this has required creating strong synergies between public policies and the private sector.

Encouraged to diversify by the Asian financial crisis and supported by government subsidies and tax incentives, major South Korean conglomerates, or *chaebols* (Samsung, LG, Hyundai, SK Group, etc.), invested heavily in the production and distribution of cultural content from the 1990s onward. Early Korean TV series and music, often reflecting traditional values, first gained traction in neighboring markets such as Japan and China, before expanding into Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the Western world.

In summary, *Hallyu* is the product of collaboration among several key actors:

- **The South Korean Government:** Actively supporting *Hallyu* for *nation branding* and international image promotion. From 1997, the cultural budget increased by **600%**. Cultural industries were identified as growth engines, leading to legislation (e.g., the 1995 Film Promotion Act and the 1999 Cultural Industry Promotion Act) and the creation of institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency), and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange). Korean Cultural Centers (32 centers worldwide) and cultural agencies promote Korean culture globally. The government has also invested in the promotion of the Korean language (Hangul) through Sejong Institutes (244 in 84 countries). **A notable feature of Korea's cultural policy is the funding of initiatives without interfering in production.**
- **Entertainment Companies:** They are responsible for training and promoting idols and actors. The historic "Big Three" (SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, JYP Entertainment) and HYBE Corporation (BTS's company) dominate the industry.
- **Chaebols:** Major conglomerates like Samsung, LG, Hyundai, and Lotte leverage *Hallyu* by featuring Korean personalities (actors, singers, idols) to advertise their products (smartphones, home appliances), creating a synergy between cultural and industrial products. These conglomerates also sponsor tours and integrate product placements within K-Dramas.



II Hallyu encompasses various cultural sectors

“K-culture” fascinates audiences far beyond its country’s borders. According to the Korea Foundation, there are now over 225 million “members” worldwide organized into fan clubs. This is twice as many as in 2020 and 24 times more than in 2012.

- **Cinema:** In the late 1990s, South Korean cinema achieved a national box-office success greater than that of Hollywood films, largely thanks to screen quota laws that limited the public distribution of foreign films. South Korean films began to attract international attention in the 2000s, partly thanks to director Park Chan-wook, whose film *Oldboy* (2003) won the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival and was praised by American directors like Quentin Tarantino. In 2019, Bong Joon-ho’s *Parasite* became the first South Korean film to win the prestigious Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. At the 92nd Academy Awards, *Parasite* became the first South Korean film to be honored at the Oscars, with six nominations. The success of the Korean film industry has now earned it the nickname “Hallyuwood.”

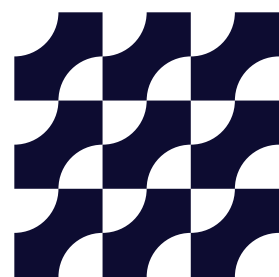
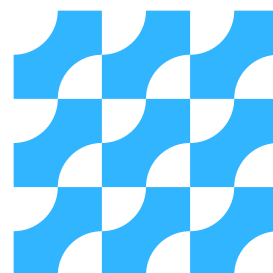
- **K-Beauty:** Once unknown to the international general public, Korean skincare brands have been flourishing for a decade in Western markets. The pioneer in France is the brand Erborian. Introduced in 2007, the brand successfully integrated into the French cosmetics landscape, notably with the BB cream, a trend from Korea that has conquered international markets. The Korean cosmetics industry is now a major market, ranked among the top 5 globally, with export revenues of \$10.2 billion in 2024 (The Korea Herald). In France, brands like Sulwhasoo, Laneige, and Dr. Jart+ are now present in major retailers (Galeries Lafayette, Sephora). The physical appearance of Korean stars contributes significantly to their popularity, as they adhere to a rigorous, twice-daily skincare routine that is very popular on the other side of the globe. E-commerce has

also been a catalyst for Korean beauty brands. Aware of the potential of its products abroad, Korea imposes no export tax on companies, a policy that benefits online ordering sites and the wave of South Korean *soft power*.

- **K-Dramas:** Korean series are also a significant part of the exportation of Korean culture worldwide. Initially popular in neighboring Asian countries, with major successes like *Winter Sonata* (2002), it is estimated that the first mentions of the *Hallyu* actually referred to Korean television programs exported to China. More recently, the series *Squid Game* (2021) became the most-watched Netflix series, with 111 million views in one month, and season 2, released at the end of 2024, broke the platform’s record again with 68 million views in one week. In 2020, Korean series already accounted for 13% of imported series worldwide, placing Korea in third place in the global market. The Netflix platform announced in 2023 that it would allocate a budget of 2.3 billion euros over four years to produce “made in Korea” content, double the total amount invested in seven years.

- **K-Pop:** Korean pop music, also known as K-pop since the 1990s, is a music industry that, over the last two decades, has established itself as one of the most flourishing and profitable in the world. South Korea, the 6th largest music market globally, exports its musical goods worldwide, for a foreign revenue approaching one billion dollars. The rise of groups like BTS and BLACKPINK has had a ripple effect on tourism, education, fashion, and dining. BTS became the most-streamed group in the world in 2020 (Billboard) and contributed \$4.9 billion to South Korea’s GDP that year. State-sponsored projects and programs have also contributed to this dynamic, viewing celebrities as informal ambassadors who engage more effectively in public diplomacy than traditional political tools. For example, the group BTS took on the role of diplomatic envoy to the UN, alongside President Moon Jae-in, to speak about the sustainable development goals (Korea Times, 2021), and also during an address at the White House during Joe Biden’s presidency.

- **K-Food:** South Korea has pursued an ambitious strategy to promote its cuisine, or K-Food, internationally. The government has set clear targets for the sector, including doubling its market size by 2027. Since the 1988 Seoul Olympics, K-Food has risen steadily to become a key vector of South Korea's *soft power*. Achieving international recognition, kimchi (fermented cabbage) is now listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (2015). The government aims to increase the number of Korean restaurants worldwide, from 9,923 in 2020 to 15,000 by 2027, with the broader goal of doubling the global Korean cuisine market from €100 billion to €200 billion by 2027.



III Strategic interests of *Hallyu*

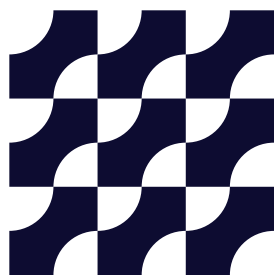
Government support for *Hallyu* is driven by economic, cultural, and political interests.

Hallyu is an engine of economic growth. The cultural content industry spans 11 sectors, including publishing, music, video games, cinema, and animation. According to data from Statistics Korea, the revenue of this industry reached \$114.36 billion in 2021, an increase of 9.4% from the \$104 billion of the previous year. This growth surpassed the overall growth of the Korean industry, which stood at 3.3%. Annual exports of cultural content increased by 6.3% in 2022 compared to the 12.5 billion recorded in 2021. This figure is higher than that of secondary batteries (9.99 billion), electric vehicles (9.8 billion) and home appliances (9.8 billion).

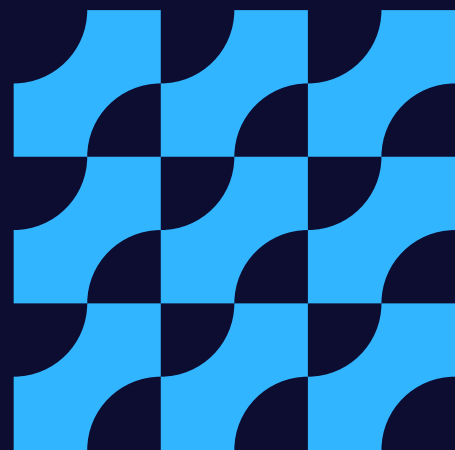
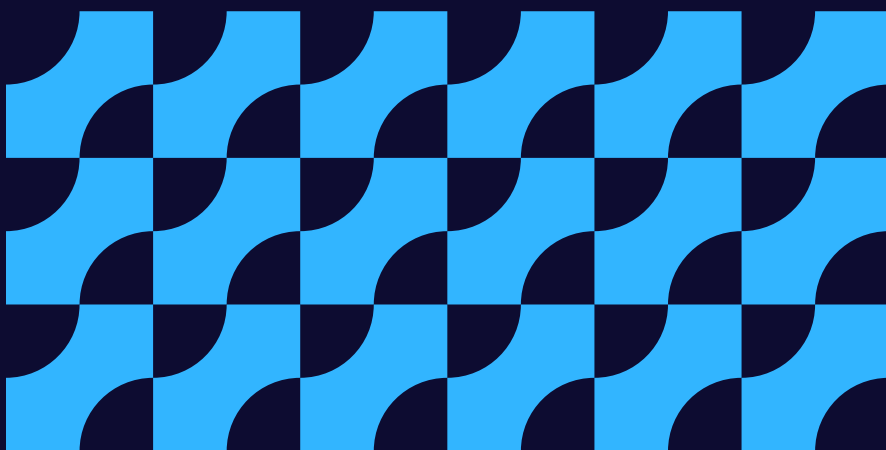
Consumption of *Hallyu* creates a virtuous circle, as many consumers are often willing to pay more for these products. Tourism is also a major indirect benefit, with a record number of 17.5 million tourists in 2019. The economic impact of the group BTS alone was estimated at \$4.9 billion in 2020. This phenomenon promotes “nation branding” and a particular vision of the world, accrediting the image of a modern, prosperous, cosmopolitan, peaceful country and a global cultural actor.

As such, several recurring narratives are present in Korean cultural productions: the exaltation of the greatness and heroism of the Korean people; the staging of a happy and cutting-edge technological modernity at the service of the community; the presentation of a harmonious society, promoting values such as “respect for elders and the collective, family piety, rejection of the hypersexualization of male-female relationships.”

South Korea is thus positioning itself as one of the countries with the strongest cultural influence in the world, being the 7th global cultural power with an annual growth rate of 4.87%.



II. (1) (ii) Case study: Fashion Week



I Case Study: Korean soft power

at international events *(Paris and Milan Fashion Week)*

Beyond the economic, political, and cultural organization of *Hallyu*, its strength lies in the organization, number, and determination of its fan communities. As previously noted, the development of social networks has been a driving force for South Korean *soft power*. First, through the promotion of the country's culture, its artists, and cultural productions, but also through the highlighting of these aspects within foreign events. One of the most striking examples concerns the Fashion Weeks, events centered around fashion, generally biannual, and organized in several cities emblematic of their industry and influence in this domain (Paris, Milan, New York, London).

For several years, one can observe the power of Korean culture fan communities around these events, mixing K-Beauty and K-Pop, to the point that their resonance sometimes eclipses the visibility of the host countries and their celebrities.

The perception of Fashion Week by the public varies between France and the international community. In France, the event is often seen as a showcase of national *savoir-faire*. Internationally, particularly in South Korea, Paris Fashion Week is perceived as a prestigious stage. The participation of Korean celebrities, such as Jisoo of BLACKPINK in 2025, attracted considerable attention, reinforcing the presence of K-Pop on the world stage. South Korea actively uses Paris Fashion Week to extend its influence. In 2023, the city of Seoul set up a stand dedicated to Seoul Fashion Week at the Tranoï trade show, an official partner of Paris Fashion Week, to promote six Korean designer brands. In 2024, the "Y3K Fashion Corée" event at the Palais Brongniart merged K-Fashion and K-Pop, featuring emerging designers and artists like the dancer AIKI, attracting the attention of media and influencers.

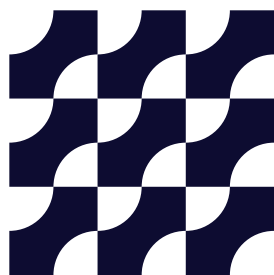
Online, the South Korean presence dominates. Social listening analysis by Onclusive showed that Paris Fashion Week 2024 generated 11.5 million social media mentions, 64% of which featured South Korean celebrities such as Lisa, Jennie, Jisoo (BLACKPINK), or

Jin (BTS). In Milan, this figure reached 74%, highlighting *Hallyu*'s significant impact on the visibility of even European-hosted events.

Paris Fashion Week is traditionally a major instrument of French *soft power*, allowing France to fuel its cultural and economic influence on a global scale. It attracts creators, brands, and international media, thus consolidating Paris's image as the epicenter of fashion. However, online, the spotlight remains on personalities, then brands, and these tend to be overshadowed by South Korea's massive communication strategy on social networks.

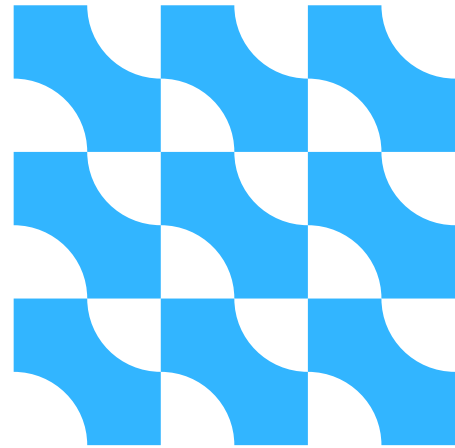
K-Pop stars play a crucial role in attracting media attention and generating engagement on social networks. Their presence at fashion shows in Paris and Milan considerably increases the visibility of brands and events. For example, members of groups like BTS and Blackpink have been brand ambassadors for fashion houses, which has reinforced the impact of the Fashion Weeks. Collaborations between Korean fashion brands and international haute couture houses are also frequent. These partnerships allow Korean designers to gain notoriety on the world stage. South Korea invests massively to promote its fashion designers internationally. Initiatives like "Seoul's 10 Soul" present the collections of young Korean stylists in Paris, thus strengthening the presence of Korean fashion on the global market. South Korean shows often incorporate technological elements aimed at attracting the attention of the media and the public.

Secondly, it is a matter of a showcase issue aimed at promoting Seoul Fashion Week through K-Fashion. The strategy behind Seoul Fashion Week is based on systematic reasoning. Seoul Fashion Week is supported by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Design Foundation. The goal is to make this event one of the most influential in the world, in line with the Fashion Weeks of New York, Paris, London, and Milan.



This event aims to increase the global competitiveness of K-fashion by attracting international buyers and organizing forums and showrooms for local brands. The event highlights emerging and established creators, offering a platform to present their collections to an international audience. This includes fashion shows, showrooms, and collaborations with influencers and celebrities.

The Korean strategy is thus well-established. By deploying its influence, mainly through fan communities and social networks, at well-established international events, South Korea and its celebrities take center stage, attracting major brands and prestigious collaborations. In a second step, this popularity allows the country to develop its own fashion-centered events, already benefiting from a strong reputation.



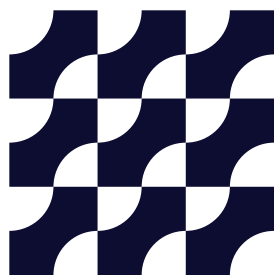
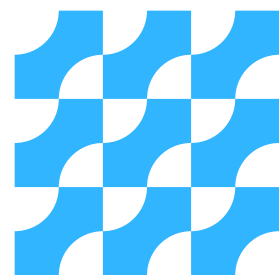
Conclusion

Hallyu is inseparable from South Korean *soft power*. The success and influence of *Hallyu* are the result of an active government policy to support the development of cultural industries, encompassing investments, the creation of a favorable institutional framework, talent training, and sophisticated diplomatic promotion.

Far more than a mere cultural export, it has become an essential driver of the South Korean economy and a powerful instrument of its *soft power*. By changing the international perception of the country, it sparks a curiosity that translates into an increase in tourism, university exchanges, and a growing interest in the Korean language and culture.

The success of *Hallyu* is the result of a deliberate and coordinated strategy between the government, the chaebols, and entertainment companies, relying on investment in creative industries and high technologies.

Despite criticisms regarding the potential idealization of the country or the thin line between promotion and propaganda, *Hallyu* offers a diverse showcase of South Korea, capable of generating global engagement and energizing local spaces. The phenomenon demonstrates how a nation can assert itself on the international stage through cultural appeal and turn it into a major geopolitical asset.



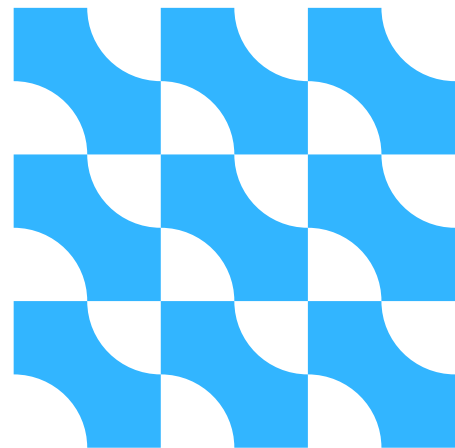
II. Algeria's hybrid framework: emotional polarization and the use mobilization of cultural symbols

Introduction

For several years, Algeria has sought to develop a cultural *soft power* strategy that combines digital tools, the appropriation of traditional cultural symbols, and economic and industrial levers. This hybrid approach aims to strengthen the country's influence both regionally and internationally, all while polarizing cultural and identity debates.

By leveraging social networks, cultural heritage, and economic dynamics, Algeria aims to assert its national identity and economic strength, but it also turns it into an offensive tool used against its adversaries. This approach contributes to heightening tensions in the region, particularly with its neighbors.

Understanding this policy of influence requires analyzing the mechanisms at play: the exploitation of cultural symbols, the use of digital platforms to amplify nationalist narratives, and the economic and industrial strategies that underpin or accompany this approach.



II. (2) (i) An Identity, Cultural, and Economic Affirmation Through Hybrid Vectors



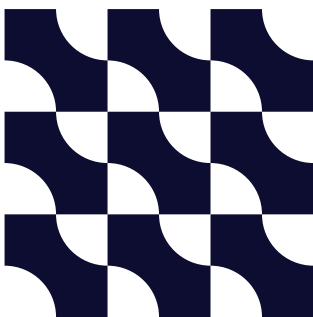
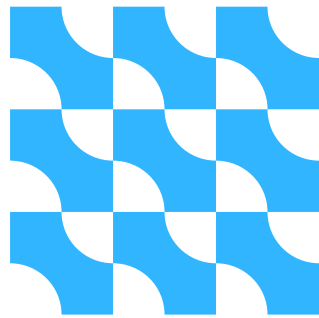
I Algerian cultural *soft power*: between heritage and polarization

Algeria has made it a priority to transform its cultural heritage into a tool of *soft power*, leveraging strong symbols such as traditional clothing, music, and cultural practices, particularly those recognized as intangible heritage by UNESCO. These elements are celebrated not only for their intrinsic cultural value but also for their potential as levers of regional influence.

This awareness of Algeria's traditional heritage is a recent development. Under the presidencies of Boumediene and Benjedid, this dimension was perceived as archaic at a time when the country was forcefully striving for modernity. This new approach is intended to allow Algeria to enhance its international visibility while consolidating a sense of national pride among its citizens and its diaspora. On Facebook, the coordinated nature of the campaign has been illustrated by the dissemination of identical messages, talking points, and visuals.

Influencers play a key role in this dynamic. They amplify nationalist discourses, mobilize online communities, and create a sense of urgency around defending Algerian heritage. Their actions are part of a broader strategy of emotional polarization, where cultural symbols become stakes of sovereignty and national identity. This approach allows Algeria to strengthen its international visibility while consolidating a sense of national pride among its citizens and its diaspora. On Facebook, the coordinated nature of the campaign was evident through the circulation of messages, talking points, and identical visuals.

An emblematic example of this strategy is the controversial inscription of the Gandoura and Melahfa from Eastern Algeria on the UNESCO intangible heritage list in 2024, even though these garments are found across the vast territory stretching from the Maghreb to Central Asia.



II Digital Strategies and Social Media Manipulation

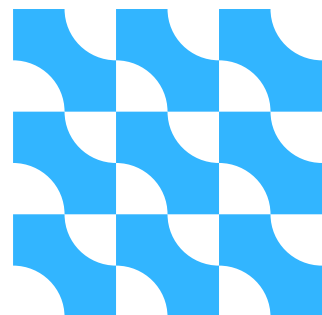
With over 25.6 million active social media users in 2025, the country possesses a powerful lever to disseminate its messages and influence public opinion, both nationally and internationally. Platforms like X, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube are particularly exploited to promote Algerian culture, but also to conduct influence campaigns and counter adverse narratives.

A striking feature of this strategy is the use of bots, fake accounts, and coordinated influencers to amplify pro-government messages. These digital actors play a central role in disseminating nationalist content, promoting Algerian cultural successes, and neutralizing critical voices. For example, during a controversy (2022-2023) surrounding the Caftan, networks of influencers were mobilized to defend the authenticity of Algerian models while discrediting Moroccan claims. These often-viral campaigns aim to create a mass effect that reinforces the idea of popular support for the government's cultural policy.

Social networks are also used to target political opponents and dissenting voices. Influencers close to the Algerian government have been accused of harassing activists, journalists, and critical artists,

using tactics of disinformation and discredit. These practices, reminiscent of the methods used during the Hirak—the popular and peaceful protest movement in Algeria in February 2019 to denounce Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth presidential term—show how digital tools can be diverted to serve political and repressive objectives.

Finally, Algeria actively uses social networks to extend its influence abroad, particularly in France, where the Algerian diaspora is targeted by the government as a strategic relay for disseminating pro-government messages. Algerian influencers based in Europe, such as Doualemn, recently released from a detention center in France after controversial remarks, or Zazou, Youcef, and Imad Tintin, often cited for their nationalist stances and polarizing discourses, play a key role in this dynamic. These figures are mobilized to relay official narratives, organize campaigns in support of the Algerian regime, and counter criticism from the media or opponents. This digital soft power strategy allows Algeria to project a positive image abroad while seeking to neutralize dissenting voices and influence public opinion, especially within Algerian communities in Europe.



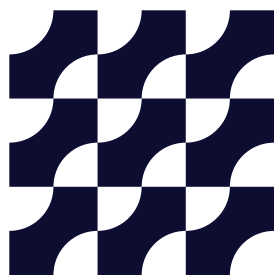
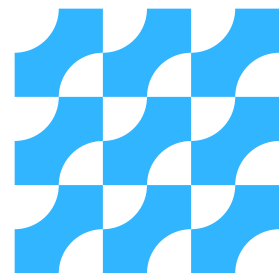
III Economic and industrial dimension of Algerian *soft power*

Algeria's cultural *soft power* strategy goes beyond promoting national symbols or leveraging social media. It also serves national economic interests by developing a competitive creative and textile industry. The strategy explicitly aims to capture market share by flooding local and international circuits with "*made in Algeria*" products, thereby strengthening the country's economic competitiveness while sidelining competitors in this promising sector. By linking cultural heritage with industrial development, Algeria seeks to transform symbolic influence into a tangible lever for economic growth.

In parallel, the Algerian government also announces investments in cultural and industrial infrastructures to support this strategy. Their objective is to multiply textile factories, craft workshops, and training centers that play a key role in the production and promotion of cultural symbols. These investments would not only create jobs but also enhance Algeria's competitiveness on the regional and international stage.

The Caftan industry, in particular, has become a major economic stake. Algeria spares no effort to assert legitimacy in this sector and the associated craftsmanship, organizing festivals and competitions such as the "Caftan Challenge 2025" to showcase what it presents as original creations and attract international media attention. These events are not merely cultural showcases; they are also commercial opportunities for local artisans and businesses. By capitalizing on the global interest in traditional garments, Algeria aims to position its products in international markets while reinforcing its image as a country rich in heritage and artisanal expertise.

By associating cultural heritage with industrial development, Algeria seeks to transform its symbolic influence into a lever for economic growth.



VI UNESCO as a Battlefield

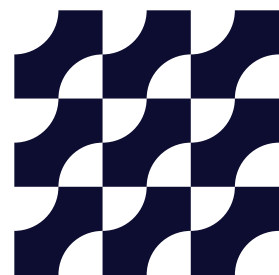
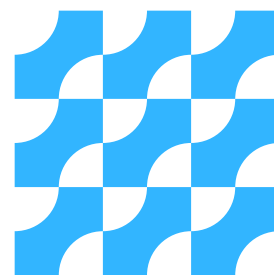
Historically, UNESCO has played a key role in the recognition and protection of cultural traditions, offering an institutional framework intended to be neutral and legitimate for evaluating and inscribing elements of intangible heritage. However, with the emergence of new non-state actors—such as non-governmental organizations, private foundations, digital influencers, and even corporations—its impact is increasingly diminished. These actors, often linked to national or economic interests, divert UNESCO's mechanisms to serve specific agendas, thereby challenging the institution's monopoly on cultural legitimization. In this context, the Algerian strategy aligns with the trend of politicizing UNESCO's bodies, which is now well-documented; the inscriptions on the World Heritage list are one example (see *Meskeil, 2014, States of Conservation: Protection, Politics and Pacting within UNESCO's World Heritage Committee*).

Since its creation, UNESCO has always been an arena where, behind the universal mission, national strategies clash (the integration of Palestine in 2011; the withdrawal of the United States; battles for the Director-General position, etc.). However, the cultural offensives by Algeria and other actors reveal an acceleration that contributes to the general weakening of the international organization. This context poses a threat to the credibility of UNESCO's decisions, but also to its ability to play a central role in the protection of world cultural heritage, reducing it to an arena where national interests and logics of power assertion confront each other.

This fragmentation is particularly pronounced. Cultural NGO networks, private foundations, and influencer collectives are mobilized to promote the inscription

of national dossiers on the intangible heritage list, sometimes bypassing UNESCO's official procedures. Similarly, social media allows influencers and activists to construct their own cultural narratives, often in opposition to the organization's official positions. The 2003 Convention, intended to serve as a safeguard against attempts at cultural appropriation, also shows very clear limitations in protecting intangible heritage. For example, it does not require international experts to travel to candidate countries to observe firsthand the elements being proposed for inscription in their local context. This gap allows some states to submit incomplete dossiers or even fabricate pseudo-evidence in order to claim heritage that does not actually belong to them.

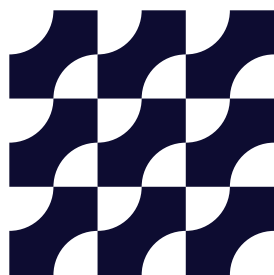
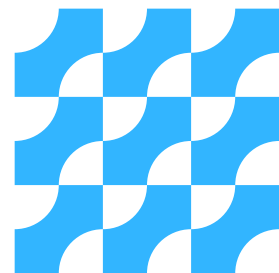
To address this challenge, several countries are opting for a strengthened legal strategy to safeguard their intangible cultural heritage. Among the tools used is registration with the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), which provides a more robust protection than that offered by UNESCO. Indeed, WIPO allows heritage elements to be registered in the form of geographical indications, collective trademarks, or appellations of origin, criteria that ensure legal recognition and protection against unauthorized use. Algeria's neighbor, Morocco, has notably developed a dedicated strategy to secure its traditional know-how, centered around the OMPIC (Moroccan Office of Intellectual and Commercial Property), which has maintained a close relationship with WIPO for several years. The inscription of a cultural element on UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List is no longer just a symbolic recognition of its universal value. It has become a political and economic lever. For Algeria, each inscription of an object or cultural practice is framed as a diplomatic victory, enhancing its international



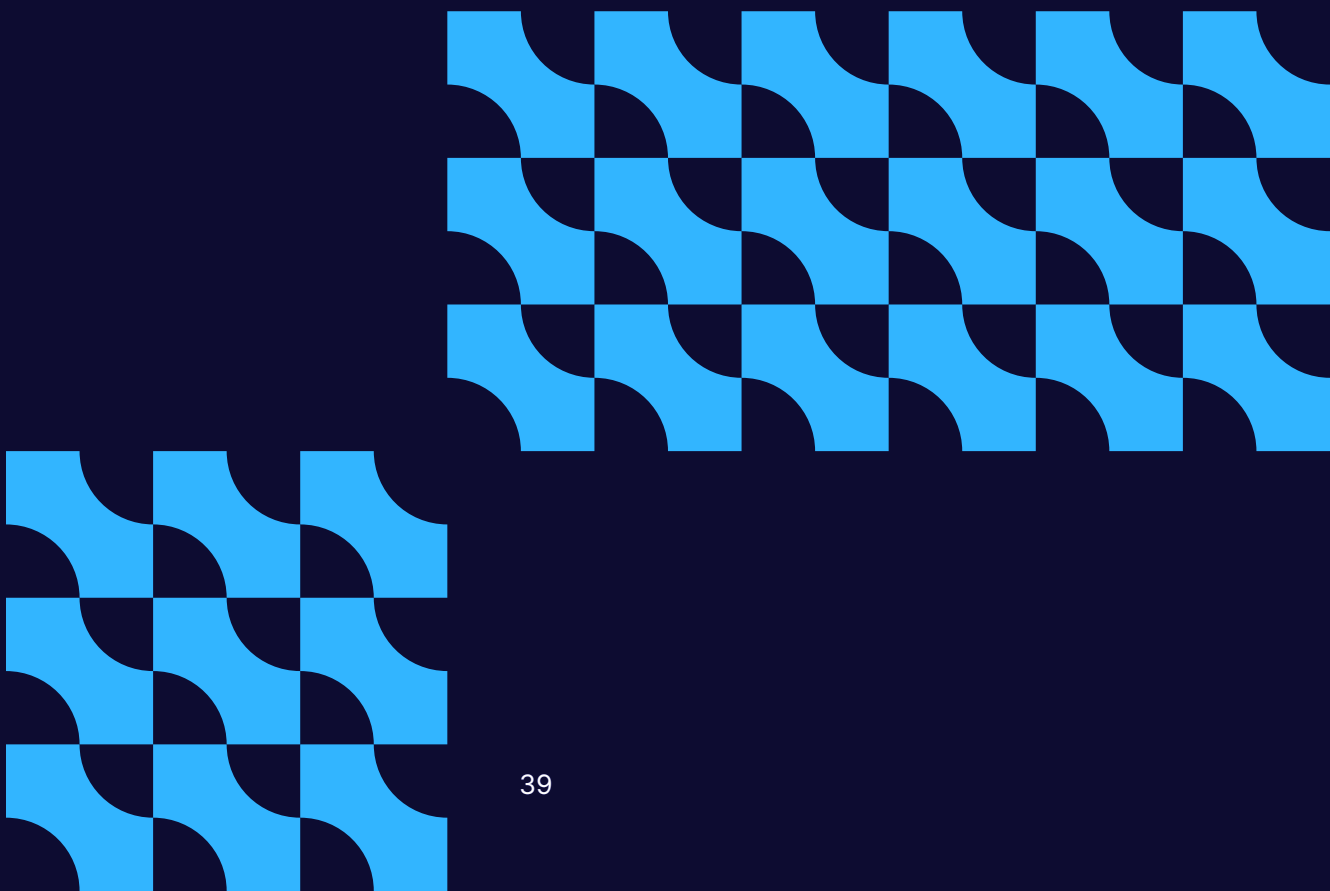
credibility and attracting investment in cultural and tourism sectors. However, this instrumentalization of UNESCO raises several fundamental issues:

- Politicization of cultural cases: Cases like the Caftan and the zellige (traditional ornamental mosaic) are leveraged to assert exclusive national ownership.
- Commercialization of cultural heritage: UNESCO inscriptions are increasingly used to stimulate local cultural industries, such as textiles, craftsmanship, and tourism.

More broadly, Algeria actively uses social media to extend its influence abroad, particularly in France, where the Algerian diaspora is targeted by the government as a strategic relay for pro-government messaging. Influencers based in Europe—such as Doualemn, recently released from a detention center in France after controversial statements, as well as Zazou, Youcef, and ImadTintin, often cited for their nationalist and polarizing discourse—play a key role in this dynamic.



II. (2) (ii) Expanding the Battlefield: A Growing Strategy of “*Sharp Power*”



I A strategy primarily targeting France

Algeria's soft power toward France— if it can be described as soft—has developed largely as a discourse of opposition to France

As early as 2021, during the canceled visit of Jean Castex, Algerian Prime Minister El Hachemi Djaâboub described France as a “traditional and eternal enemy.” Denis Bauchard, a former diplomat, wrote in the journal *Esprit* that “the best way to disqualify a man, a political party, or a newspaper is to accuse it of belonging to the ‘party of France’.” The Algerian government’s recurring anti-French rhetoric serves as internal political legitimation, often placing diplomacy secondary to domestic politics.

This hostility towards France is primarily manifested through the erasure of any reference to Algeria’s French heritage. A key point of contention is the French language: Algeria is not a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), and successive governments have waged a campaign against the use and teaching of French. Since 2023, English has replaced French in universities and has been introduced in graduate programs on an equal footing. Moreover, Algeria has only one French school (compared to 35 in Morocco and 10 in Tunisia).

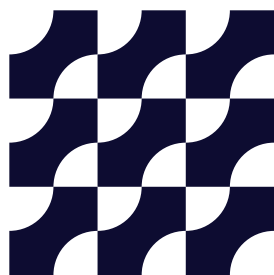
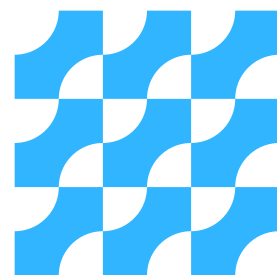
This situation is paradoxical: the single French lycée largely serves the children of political elites who are simultaneously pushing to reduce French influence. Despite efforts to minimize the presence of French, Algerian youth remain oriented toward France, with more than 30,000 Algerian students studying there—roughly 90% of Algerians studying abroad.

These virulent outbursts against France do not come exclusively from the Algerian government. Social networks are also the ground for expression for users who relay and amplify discourses that antagonize France.

Recent and emblematic cases concerning bi-national athletes and the El Mordjene chocolate spread have been the theater of discourses presenting Algeria as the victim of a conspiracy by French authorities. Indeed, on social networks, Algerian accounts have several times accused French officials of preventing bi-national athletes from choosing Algeria.

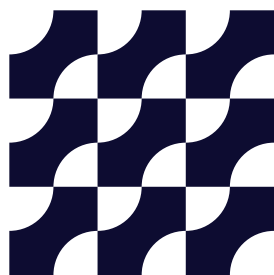
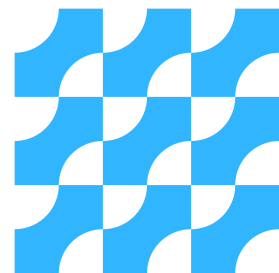
Rayan Cherki’s decision to join Les Bleus (France’s national team) was poorly received on X. The Lyon-trained player had been courted by several national teams (France, Algeria... and even Italy) following an outstanding 2024-2025 season. Selected for the first time by Didier Deschamps, the young player’s choice sparked strong reactions among Algerian fans. Some internet users accused the coach of “locking” his situation, meaning selecting him solely to prevent another nation from calling him up. More recently, the social media buzz erupted again on September 19, 2025, when it was announced that Zinedine Zidane’s second son, Luca, had qualified to play for the Algerian national team.

Some Algerian users also mobilized to defend the El Mordjene chocolate spread. This hazelnut spread became a sensation on social networks in 2024, after it gained popularity through tasting videos. The craze quickly led to stock shortages. But very quickly, the press reported the seizure of several pallets in Marseille due to the product’s non-compliance with European regulations. This import ban was perceived as a protectionist measure by the Algerian media. They accused the Italian group Ferrero (producer of Nutella) and the European authorities of being behind



this ban. The president of the Algerian Consumer Protection Association (Apoce), Mustapha Zebdi, argued that “the product was entering and circulating, and when it became a danger to their beloved product, they conducted all the tests and brought out all the standards.” The product having gone viral, Algerian internet users saw in it a form of soft power and gastronomic diplomacy, like @iyasoony who published several videos on this topic on YouTube.

Despite the export potential of this product, the Cebon brand will not be able to enter European markets due to a lack of agreement. Ironically, the Nella brand, registered in Algeria and a competitor to El Mordjene, has decided to produce its chocolate spread in Turkey to be able to export it to Europe. Its success was no less significant; at the International Gastronomy Village, Nella managed to attract attention to the Algerian stand. However, it is difficult to assess the impact of this product for Algeria once its production is relocated abroad.



II A strategy of *sharp power*?

The significant mobilization of actors within Algeria itself illustrates the transformation of Algerian influence in France. Through the antagonism directed at French authorities, both in official statements and on social media, a form of Algerian *sharp power* emerges.

The Algerian influence strategy qualifies as sharp power because government decisions have political consequences on French domestic life.

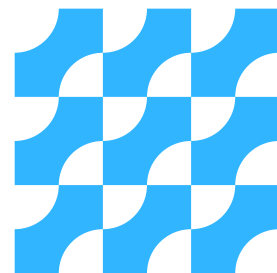
On the one hand, Algerian policy targets the diaspora, which, as mentioned, represents 3 million people. According to former ambassador Xavier Driencourt, 10% of the French population has ties to Algeria. Algeria can therefore theoretically exert influence over a significant portion of the French population. The sharp power strategy became evident during the influencer episode: in early 2025, several influencers were placed under investigation in Grenoble, Brest, and Montpellier for publishing hateful, belligerent, and threatening content against Algerian opponents in France and the Jewish community. One of them, known as Doualemn on TikTok, received a five-month suspended sentence and was denied entry into Algerian territory due to the lack of a consular pass. Similarly, during the Amir DZ case (an influencer opposing the Algerian government), three Algerian nationals, including a consular officer, were arrested

and placed under investigation for kidnapping, unlawful detention, and arbitrary imprisonment in connection with a terrorist enterprise.

The most significant manifestation of *sharp power* remains the arrest of the writer Boualem Sansal in November 2024, given the scale of reactions within civil society and French political circles. Sansal was accused of “undermining national unity” for statements he made to the media outlet *Frontières* that challenged Algeria’s borders. The case received extensive coverage in the media and on pro-Algerian networks, which relentlessly targeted the writer with labels such as “traitor,” “false patriot,” and “deserving only exemplary punishment”—these being the mildest of the epithets.

In the same way, sports journalist Christophe Gleize was incarcerated and sentenced to seven years in prison on June 29, 2025, for “apology of terrorism” when he had come to interview a director of a Kabyle football club.

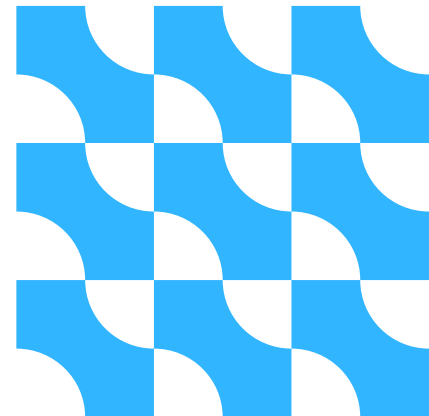
Thus, Algeria has learned the lessons of its faithful Russian ally. Well beyond the military aspect (for which it is more than well-equipped), this country is pursuing the extension of the domain of struggle (to paraphrase a famous novel), like Russia, through an offensive use of media and cultural means. The question remains as to how successful this strategy will be in the medium and long term.



Conclusion

The Algerian hybrid approach to cultural *soft power* relies on a skillful combination of traditional symbol creation, the sometimes aggressive use of digital tools, and economic levers funded by gas revenues. By leveraging these three channels, its cultural heritage, social media networks, and creative industry development, Algeria seeks to strengthen its regional and international influence, often at the expense of peaceful relations with its neighbors, who are involuntarily drawn into identity debates.

While this strategy may be effective in the short term, it is not without risks. Controversies over the authenticity of cultural symbols and the spread of disinformation on social media could, in the long term, undermine the country's credibility and limit the impact of its *soft power*.



II. (3) India, from *Incredible India* to *Hindutva*: Between Power Assertion and Polarization

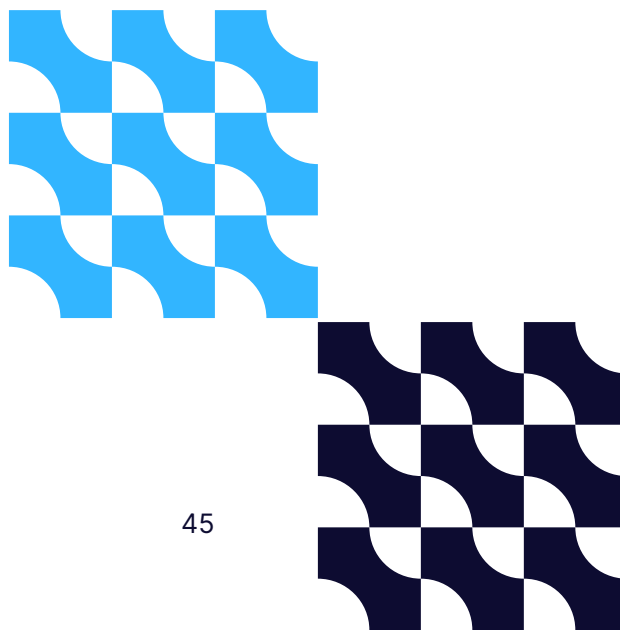
Introduction

Heir to a millennia-old civilization, India leverages an array of channels to strenghten its influence: the global dissemination of its spiritual and philosophical traditions (yoga, Buddhism, Hinduism), the appeal of its cultural industry (Bollywood cinema, music, literature), the expansion of its diaspora which acts as a bridge for ineuence, and its image as the world's most populous democracy, embodying pluralistic and democratic values.

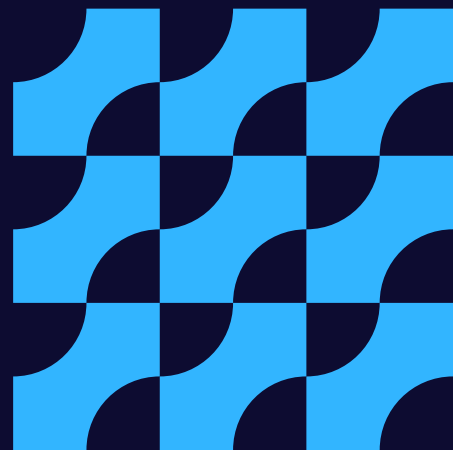
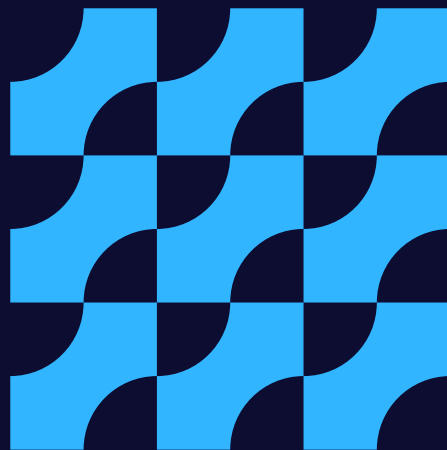
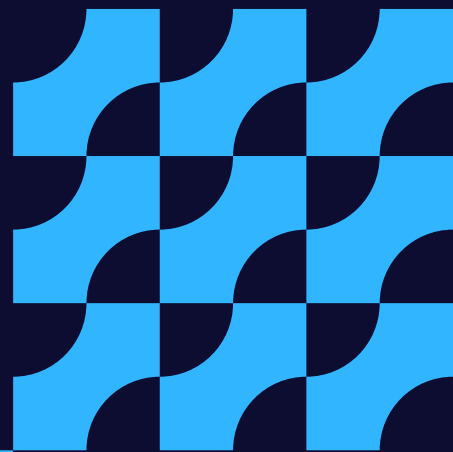
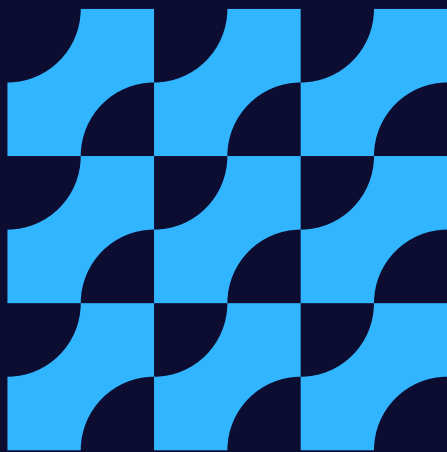
Added to this are its technological and scientific successes, particularly in digital innovation and space exploration, which help project a modern and innovative image. In this way, India combines cultural heritage with contemporary dynamism to assert a distinctive soft power capable of attracting and uniting audiences far beyond its borders.

However, Indian *soft power* faces several limitations that reduce its effectiveness. The image of India as an exemplary democracy is tarnished by communal tensions, restrictions on press freedom, and persistent social inequalities, all of which weaken its appeal. Culturally, while Bollywood enjoys strong recognition, it is sometimes seen as too focused on the domestic market, with international influence less universal than that of Hollywood or Korean cinema.

Moreover, the mobilization of the diaspora can be ambivalent: although it serves as a relay of influence, it is sometimes associated with political or identity controversies that limit its unifying role. Finally, India's technological and scientific ambitions are still hampered by unequal access to education and infrastructure, reducing the reach of its model. Thus, India must overcome these internal contradictions and contrasting perceptions in order to sustainably strengthen its *soft power*.



II. (3) (i) Traditional Cultural Channels



I “Bollywood” India and Independent Regional Cinema

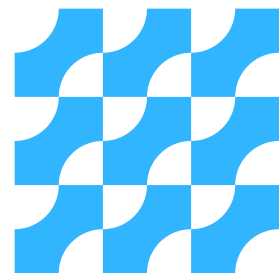
Indian cinema is a soft power asset due to its ability to disseminate Indian narratives, music, fashion, and lifestyles. This dissemination targets both the diaspora and non-diasporic markets (Asia, Middle East, China, etc.).

India is among the countries that produce the largest number of films (thousands certified and produced each year). According to UNESCO, Indian cinema is one of the most prolific in the world. The national Indian *box office* is also one of the most significant. In 2023, with post-COVID recovery, Indian cinema generated 1.3 billion USD. Some Indian films are also international successes: *Dangal* was a massive hit in China; *RRR* generated significant international revenues, and the film's original song *Naatu Naatu* had a symbolic impact abroad. These successes reflect the ability of certain Indian films to cross linguistic and cultural barriers.

Beyond *box-office* success, independent Indian cinema is also carving out a place in cinephile circles.

In 2024, *All We Imagine As Light* marked the return of Indian cinema to competition at Cannes. The film left with the Grand Prix, the second-highest distinction after the Palme d'Or. (It should be noted that this was a Franco-Indian co-production). Cinema shapes the imagination: fashion, music, aspirations (family, success, modernity), and it creates “entry points” to the language, gastronomy, tourism, and sympathy for India. Successes outside the diaspora (e.g., China, Japan, certain Southeast Asian markets) show that cinema can change perceptions on a large scale.

The great international visibility remains largely carried by a few “big budget” films. Most productions remain national or regional. *Soft power* thus depends on a small number of films that manage to be exported. The linguistic barrier is also significant for breaking into markets where the dubbing industry does not exist, and where English-language films dominate the *box office*. While Indian cinema is useful as a *soft power* vector, the effect is discontinuous and dependent on a small number of international successes, good distribution, and a durable public image.



II Yoga: The Art of Well-being as a Tool of the State

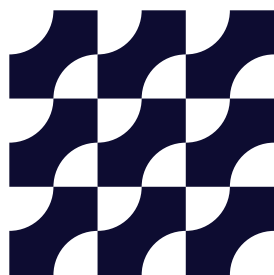
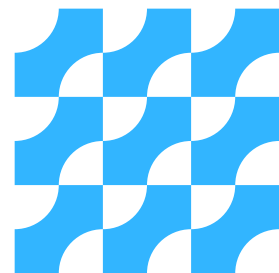
Since coming to power in 2014, Narendra Modi has made the promotion of yoga a major axis of his cultural and diplomatic policy—a tool of Indian *soft power*. One of his first actions after taking office in 2014 was to create a Ministry of Yoga and Traditional Medicines and to advocate for the establishment of an International Yoga Day by the UN.

Yoga has thus become the most visible example of “civilizational” *soft power*: a mass practice, an instrument of public health, and a diplomatic milestone. The formal adoption by the UN and the annual celebration (June 21) have given India a universal platform to display an intangible heritage. Recent estimates speak of several hundred million practitioners worldwide and a global yoga market valued in the tens of billions of USD. This shows that yoga is not just a symbolic practice, but also an industry. Yoga promotes a positive image (well-being, peace, “light” spirituality), it attracts audiences who have no political commitment, and it facilitates university, tourism, and commercial partnerships (training, certifications, products). The UN initiative has transformed a cultural practice into an annual diplomatic tool.

The Indian government’s support for yoga also aims to boost tourism and present India as tolerant and as a promoter of peace. In the global “well-being” market, India has thus secured a prime position thanks to yoga (as well as Ayurveda).

However, there are several limitations. Yoga, as it is massively “consumed” (fitness, brands), is often stripped of its philosophical framework, fueling debates over significant cultural modification.

These debates can weaken the message: instead of being admired as *soft power*, some see it as commodification. A large market (products, training) does not automatically guarantee lasting political or strategic influence, and popularity does not always translate into political goodwill.



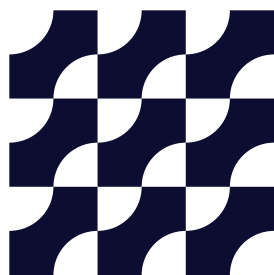
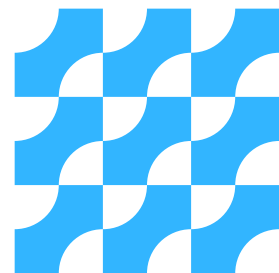
III Indian Cuisine or “Gastronomic Diplomacy”

Indian cuisine is among the most popular in the world.

Over the past few decades, it has become a key channel for India’s international recognition, actively contributing to its *soft power*: through restaurants, “chef-ambassadors,” exports of ingredients (spices), participation in diplomatic events (official menus), and campaigns promoting sustainable foods (such as millets). Beyond being a marker of cultural recognition, Indian cuisine also has significant economic weight: in 2023/2024, Indian spices alone represented a value of \$4.46 billion USD. Dishes such as chicken tikka masala, biryani, or masala dosa have become global culinary symbols, with chicken tikka masala even considered a national dish in the United Kingdom.

India also relies on internationally renowned chefs as culinary ambassadors. Figures such as Vikas Khanna, Vineet Bhatia, Gaggan Anand, and Manish Mehrotra have made their mark on the global culinary media landscape. More recently, the first Indian restaurant, Trèsind Studio in Dubai, led by chef Himanshu Saini, earned three Michelin stars—a first for an Indian restaurant.

However, several limitations can be noted. The international spread of Indian cuisine is often driven more by diaspora communities than by structured government initiatives. In countries like the United Kingdom, Indian cuisine has historically been represented by Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. In many cases, the cuisine is heavily adapted or “westernized,” which can dilute its cultural authenticity.



IV State Structures for Projection: ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) and Other Mechanisms

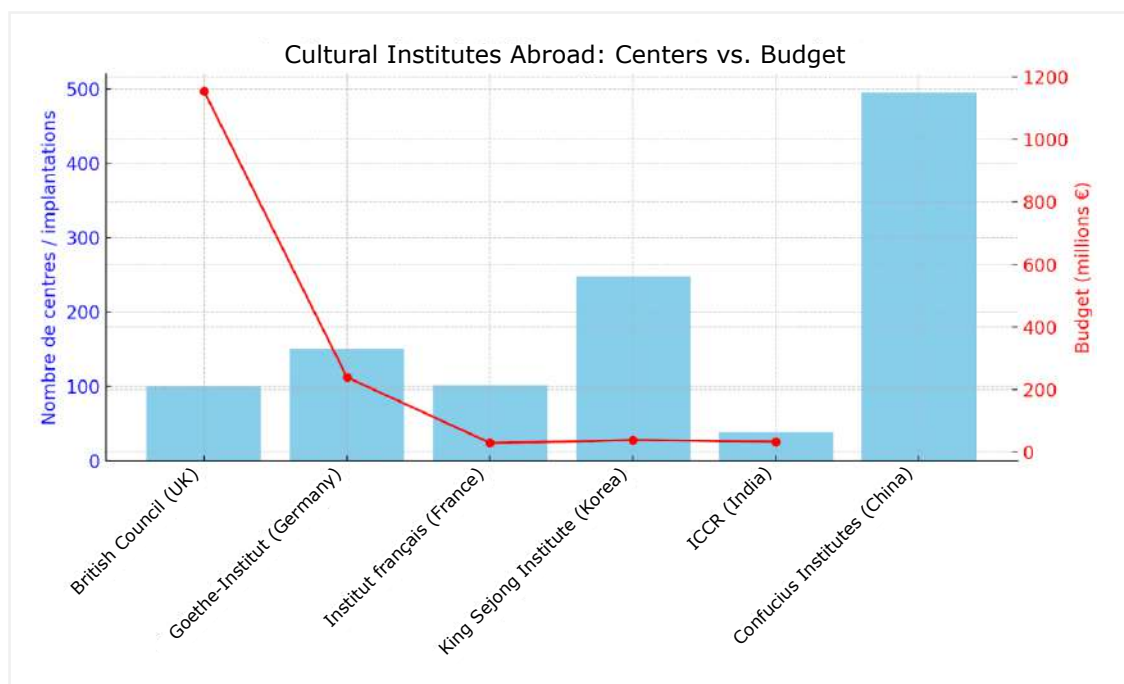
The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established and officially inaugurated in April 1950. Its objectives, as defined in the founding act, were to establish, revive, and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; promote cultural exchanges with other nations; and take any other measures necessary to achieve these goals.

The ICCR is the main public agency responsible for India's cultural diplomacy: cultural centers, scholarships, festivals, artist sponsorships, and university chairs are all instruments used to institutionalize India's cultural *soft power*. The ICCR manages approximately 38 cultural centers and a wide range of programs, including scholarships and artistic tours.

State structures allow for sustained, long-term action: they run educational

programs, maintain spaces for cultural exchange (cultural centers), and cultivate alumni networks (former scholarship recipients) that are favorable to India.

However, tools like the ICCR have limitations when compared to equivalents in other countries. In terms of budget, the ICCR is less well-funded than cultural promotion organizations in nations such as France, the United Kingdom, China, or even South Korea. There is also a noted lack of coordination between agencies and operational capacity that is lower than that of counterparts like the British Council or the Alliance Française, which reduces the overall scale and reach of India's structured influence.



Source: Annual and financial reports of the cultural institutes (British Council, Institut Goethe, Institut français, ICCR, King Sejong Institute, and Confucius Institute) 2023-2024

II. (3) (ii) Indian Influence in the Age of *Hindutva*

Introduction

The election of Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister in 1998 marked the first stable rise to power of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), following an unsuccessful attempt in 1996 due to a fragmented parliament. The Vajpayee government initiated the first shifts in how India projected its influence abroad. However, it was the rise of Narendra Modi to power in 2014 that marked a clear turning point. The broad majority enjoyed by the conservative and nationalist coalition during the 2014 and 2019 legislative terms, along with Modi's long tenure, now allows us to measure the effects of Hindu nationalism on India's cultural influence and *soft power*.

The BJP is the political wing of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Organization), of which Narendra Modi is a product. Having joined the Hindu nationalist movement at the age of eight, Modi rose through the ranks as a *pacharak* (full-time worker) until age 30, when he entered politics within the BJP. Founded in 1925 in India, the RSS emphasizes the predominance of Hinduism in Indian identity and represents the main force of nationalism in the country.

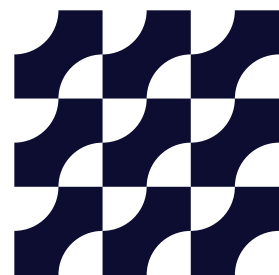
The movement reportedly has 8 million members organized across more than 80,000 local branches (*shakhas*) throughout India. The "*Sangh Parivar*" ("*Sangh Family*"), for which the RSS originally served as the educational core, comprises a network of organizations spanning different aspects of social and political life, including a student union, a labor union, a religious organization, and a political branch—the BJP.

The "*Sangh*" family is driven by Hindu nationalism advocating *Hindutva*, an ideology founded in 1922 by nationalist and anti-colonial thinker Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Historically, *Hindutva* frames India and Hinduism as repeatedly oppressed by foreign invaders: primarily the Muslim Mughal Empire (16th–19th centuries) and British colonial rule (18th–20th centuries).

Throughout its history, the RSS has been at the center of significant tensions in contemporary India. Gandhi was assassinated by a former member, and in more recent history, RSS members participated in anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002. According to political scientist Scott W. Hibbard, BJP militants allegedly "systematically murdered a large number of Muslims in their community." The movement has been banned several times in modern history: in 1948 after Gandhi's assassination, in 1975 during the state of emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and in 1992 after members participated in the destruction of the 16th-century Babri mosque in Ayodhya.

The influence of *Hindutva* on India's external projection runs counter to the image of a federal, multicultural country, characterized by deep cultural disparities across 3.3 million square kilometers and 1.42 billion inhabitants. Between the exacerbation of community tensions as part of an identity-assertion project and Narendra Modi's desire to present himself as the "strongman" affirming India's power on the international stage, Hindu nationalism and the Prime Minister's tenure have consequences at multiple levels: India's regional diplomacy, the mobilization of the diaspora as an influence relay, and even its film production.

In the era of social media, clashes with its neighbor Pakistan between April and May 2025 also revealed India's propensity to integrate hybrid approaches to conflict, particularly in the informational dimension, where Hindu nationalism plays a key role.



I A New Political Impetus for Regional Diplomacy?

In the 1990s, the socialist Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao promoted closer ties with ASEAN countries through the “Look East Policy”.

The main objective of his government was to anchor the northeast regions of India to the economic dynamism of the East Asian region: attractiveness of foreign direct investment, joint infrastructure projects with neighboring countries like Burma, increase of trade flows in the area...

Upon taking office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to give this approach a new direction. The Look East Policy thus became the Act East Policy. The focus was no longer limited to building economic partnerships—it now encompassed a strategic and power-oriented dimension.

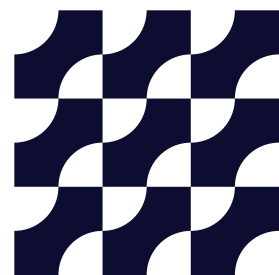
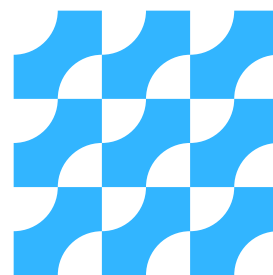
According to the *Observer Research Foundation* report “From ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’: Mapping India’s Southeast Asian Engagement”, Indian regional diplomacy has developed along four main axes over the past decade. The first concerns maritime cooperation with neighboring powers—particularly those engaged in territorial disputes with China, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Joint military exercises and diplomatic visits have strengthened these maritime partnerships, serving two objectives: to position India as a reliable partner, and to exert pressure on China by countering its assertiveness in regional waters.

The second axis involves institutionalizing diplomatic and military relations with countries across the region. Notable examples include the inaugural CINBAX (Cambodia–India Bilateral Army Exercise) with Cambodia in 2024, and the first bilateral security dialogue with Malaysia in early 2025.

The third axis reflects India’s growing engagement with smaller and newer Southeast Asian states—such as Brunei and Timor-Leste—which were both visited in 2024 by the Indian Prime Minister and President respectively.

Another regional policy to which the Modi mandate has given a notable inflection is the “Neighbourhood First Policy,” aiming to strengthen India’s relations with its immediate neighbors in Southeast Asia—Nepal, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. Modi was the first Indian leader to visit Nepal and Sri Lanka in 20 years. It is manifested by an increase in partnership projects, digital connectivity, infrastructure and development projects, financial aid, loans, and investment flows. By deepening interdependence with its immediate neighbors, India seeks to consolidate its regional sphere of influence—while simultaneously counterbalancing China’s growing presence.

Yet despite tangible progress, several enduring challenges—some rooted in historical grievances—continue to strain India’s relations with its neighbors and tarnish its image in the region. Examples include the 2015 Nepal blockade, India’s recent claim over Katchatheevu Island north of Sri Lanka, and ongoing diplomatic tensions with the Maldives.



II The Diaspora as a Vector for *Soft Power*

India's efforts to harness its diaspora as an instrument of power projection are not a formal innovation of Narendra Modi's government. As Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath analyze in their 2007 article "Le Sangh Parivar et la diaspora hindoue en Occident : Royaume-Uni, États-Unis et Canada", since the late 1990s and the first BJP government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004), Indian diasporas have been conceived by the state as a diplomatic lever.

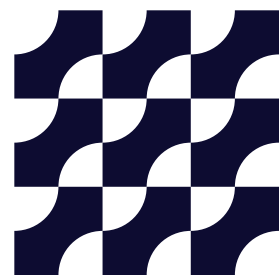
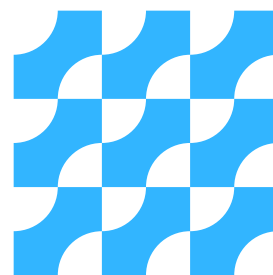
This orientation was clearly expressed by then-Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh, who declared that members of the Indian diaspora should "spread the message that India is preparing to take its place as a significant global power—not in a confrontational sense, but as a cultural and economic superpower." The authors note that this first "incursion" into diaspora politics under the BJP transcended partisan lines. The social-democratic government of Manmohan Singh (2004–2014) pursued the same path, not only by continuing to hold the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Non-Resident Indian Day, instituted by Vajpayee and celebrated on January 9, the date of Gandhi's return to India in 1915), but also by appointing a dedicated Minister for Overseas Indians, Jagdish Tytler, whose rhetoric remained very similar to that of his predecessor.

As *Le Monde* reported, Narendra Modi recognized the strategic potential of the diaspora as a *soft power* instrument from the very beginning of his tenure. Four months after his election in May 2014, he addressed members of the Indian diaspora at Madison Square Garden in New York. The event gathered some 20,000 participants, and since then, nearly all of Modi's foreign visits have included large-scale diaspora rallies.

According to *The Economic Times*, Modi's success in mobilizing the diaspora abroad stems largely from a sense of renewed national pride—fueled by India's economic growth, investment potential, and technological achievements, particularly in the IT sector. On a more personal level, Modi has tapped into identity dynamics within the diaspora: individuals who once felt torn between two worlds—not fully American, British, or Canadian due to their immigrant status, yet no longer entirely Indian after leaving their homeland—are now reimagined as "brand ambassadors" of India. This symbolic repositioning provides both pride and purpose, transforming migration itself into a source of collective dignity.

The Modi administration also stands out for being the first to implement targeted programs for overseas Indians. The Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) scheme, created in 2005, allows individuals of Indian origin to obtain a form of permanent visa, with conditions defined by the Indian government. The definition of "Indian abroad" has been interpreted broadly: in overseas territories such as Guadeloupe, Martinique, or Trinidad and Tobago, eligibility for OCI status has been extended to "persons of Indian origin" up to six generations back.

As BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav put it in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2015, "We are redefining the contours of diplomacy and looking for new ways to advance India's interests abroad," referring explicitly to what he called a "diaspora diplomacy."



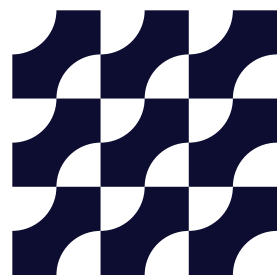
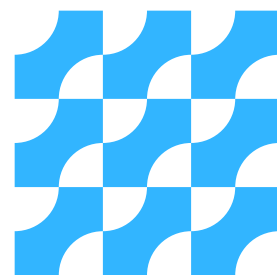
In the age of *Hindutva*, the Indian diaspora has also become a key target of investment by the nationalist movement Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS – “National Volunteer Organization”). This development is neither contradictory to nor in competition with the Indian government’s approach; rather, it complements it. From its inception, the RSS has sought to preserve a strong sense of cultural and national belonging among Indians abroad. Its founder, Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar, viewed members of the organization as ambassadors of their homeland.

As early as 1966, the RSS established formal branches in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom under the name Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). By 2023, the HSS claimed over 230 local chapters in the United States and around a hundred in the United Kingdom. These centers foster a strong sense of community and cultural continuity through yoga sessions, religious and cultural events, and charitable initiatives.

This associative network has become a channel for the diffusion of Hindu nationalism abroad. It serves as a vector for spreading *Hindutva* beyond India’s borders and redefines the role of the diaspora as more than a mere financial contributor to the homeland. While it contributes to what Benedict Anderson calls a “long-distance nationalism,” its actual influence remains uneven.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, a 2022 YouGov poll cited by The Guardian found that 37% of the Hindu community approved of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s actions, while 43% disapproved.

Thus, the reassertion of a national identity beyond India’s borders may strengthen India’s soft power but also risks generating nationalist tensions that harm its international image. The violent clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester in 2022 raised questions about the role of local HSS networks in spreading religious extremism. Similarly, the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen and prominent Sikh separatist leader, in June 2023, escalated into a major diplomatic crisis between India and Canada amid strong suspicions of Indian intelligence involvement, prompting reciprocal expulsions of ambassadors.



III Nationalist Cinema

“Bollywood” has not escaped the reach of the Hindutva nationalist project.

Once perceived abroad as a reflection of India’s cultural and religious diversity, the country’s film industry has increasingly become an instrument of ideological influence under the nationalist majority in power. Several recent Indian blockbusters exemplify this governmental investment in cinema as a vehicle of political messaging.

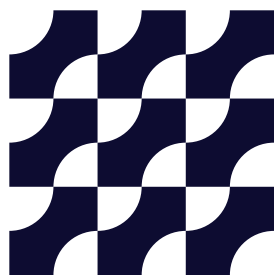
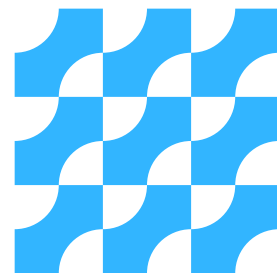
In 2022, *The Kerala Story*—purportedly based on true events—depicted the radicalization of three Hindu and Christian students who joined Daesh after being seduced by Muslim men. The film drew on a conspiracy theory popularized by Hindu nationalist circles: the so-called “Love Jihad,” a largely unfounded notion that Muslim men systematically convert Hindu women to Islam through marriage. The Kerala Story received strong political endorsement from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); in at least three Indian states, cinema tickets for the film were exempted from taxes.

Beyond the controversy surrounding its factual accuracy—one trailer, later withdrawn, claimed that 35,000 Hindu women had been “recruited” into Daesh

in this way—the film sparked international concern. Bangladesh, fearing sectarian unrest, banned its screening nationwide.

On the historical and ideological front, the 2023 biopic Vinayak Damodar Savarkar—dedicated to the founder of *Hindutva* and a key intellectual figure of contemporary Hindu nationalism, to whom both the BJP and Narendra Modi trace their ideological lineage—stands as another emblematic example.

Bollywood has also been mobilized to narrate and legitimize geopolitical and security issues aligned with the government’s discourse. The action films *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and *Article 370* (2024) both center on the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of 2019, which effectively dissolved the region’s autonomous status under Modi’s government. Set against the backdrop of a territory long disputed between India and Pakistan, these films resonated strongly with nationalist sentiment, especially after the April–May 2025 conflict triggered by an Islamist attack in the region. *Article 370* even received direct promotion from Narendra Modi himself, further blurring the lines between cinema, propaganda, and politics.



IV Use of Social Networks as a Vector of Hybrid Influence

The promotion of the Indian government's actions action has also successfully adapted to the strategic use of social media as a lever of influence. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the G7 Summit in Canada (June 15–17), an intense social media campaign was launched to amplify his image and international stature. On X and YouTube alone, 116,500 posts originating from Indian accounts were recorded, generating over 2.1 million engagements (*likes*, *shares*, *comments*).

Pro-government and BJP-affiliated accounts actively circulated content showcasing Modi's leadership, particularly through videos highlighting informal exchanges with other heads of state, as well as posts celebrating India's growing international aura. These networks were equally mobilized to counter controversy. As pro-"Sikhistan" activists protested Modi's presence in Canada, Indian nationalist accounts mocked what they described as weak turnout. For the influencer "Face to Face" (1.7 million subscribers), Modi's meeting with Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney represented a "major diplomatic victory" and proof of India's emergence as an indispensable global power.

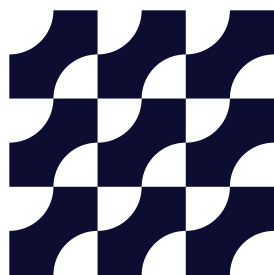
While several militants of an independent "Sikhistan" were organizing demonstrations against the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Canada on the occasion of the G7, several Indian nationalist accounts published mocking posts in the face of the alleged low mobilizations. For the Indian influencer "Face to Face" (1.7 million subscribers), the meeting between Narendra Modi and the new Canadian Prime Minister Mark Karney constituted a "major diplomatic victory" for the Indian head of government, proof that India had managed to impose itself as an undeniable global power.

The clashes between India and Pakistan between April and May 2025 around Jammu and Kashmir further illustrated the central role of social media in shaping competing nationalist narratives. Several reports account for the massive use of social networks by both camps to win the battle of narratives, spread false information, and amplify the virality of the content. The discourse around the human and material losses of India and Pakistan, for example, took on a crucial

stake. On May 8, 2025, for example, an Indian user relayed on X a supposed television intervention by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani army, Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, announcing in a press conference the loss of two F-16s by the Pakistani army. The publication, seen more than 760,800 times, turned out to be a deepfake generated by artificial intelligence. The video, viewed more than 760,000 times, was later exposed as an AI-generated deepfake and flagged by a "Community Note." Despite being debunked, it was nonetheless relayed by several Indian media outlets...

The nationalist online ecosystem played a decisive role in amplifying such narratives on social media. Between April and May 2025, the hashtag *#OperationSindoor*, the name of India's military operation, generated more than 906,000 unique posts on X and YouTube, which generated a total of 87.9 million engagements. The campaign saw strong mobilization from influencer and activist accounts close to the BJP, supporting the Indian government's institutional communication strategy. Journalist Shubhankar Mishra, with 6.63 million YouTube followers, published a video the day after the Indian army's May 6–7 airstrikes, emphasizing the "strategic and measured" nature of Operation Sindoor, while high-reach nationalist accounts continued to fuel discussions by posting content — authentic or otherwise. The editorial war between Indian and Pakistani accounts was also reflected in the thousands of comments exchanged, as well as in the circulation of images and videos across platforms.

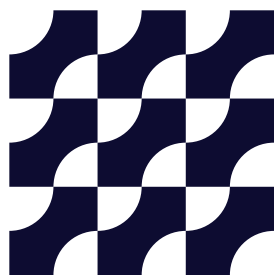
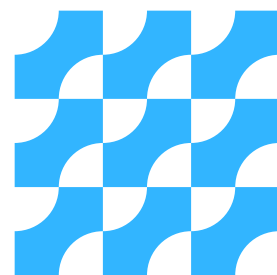
The resulting online "editorial war" between Indian and Pakistani accounts took shape through thousands of comments, AI-generated videos, and manipulated images. The images and videos generated or transformed by AI disseminated by nationalist militants of both camps have become a central aspect of the online confrontation. Besides the diffusion of fake content intended to deceive or sow trouble, the "memetic" uses of the generated content are various: discrediting the adversary through mockery, or on the contrary, heroizing one's own side.



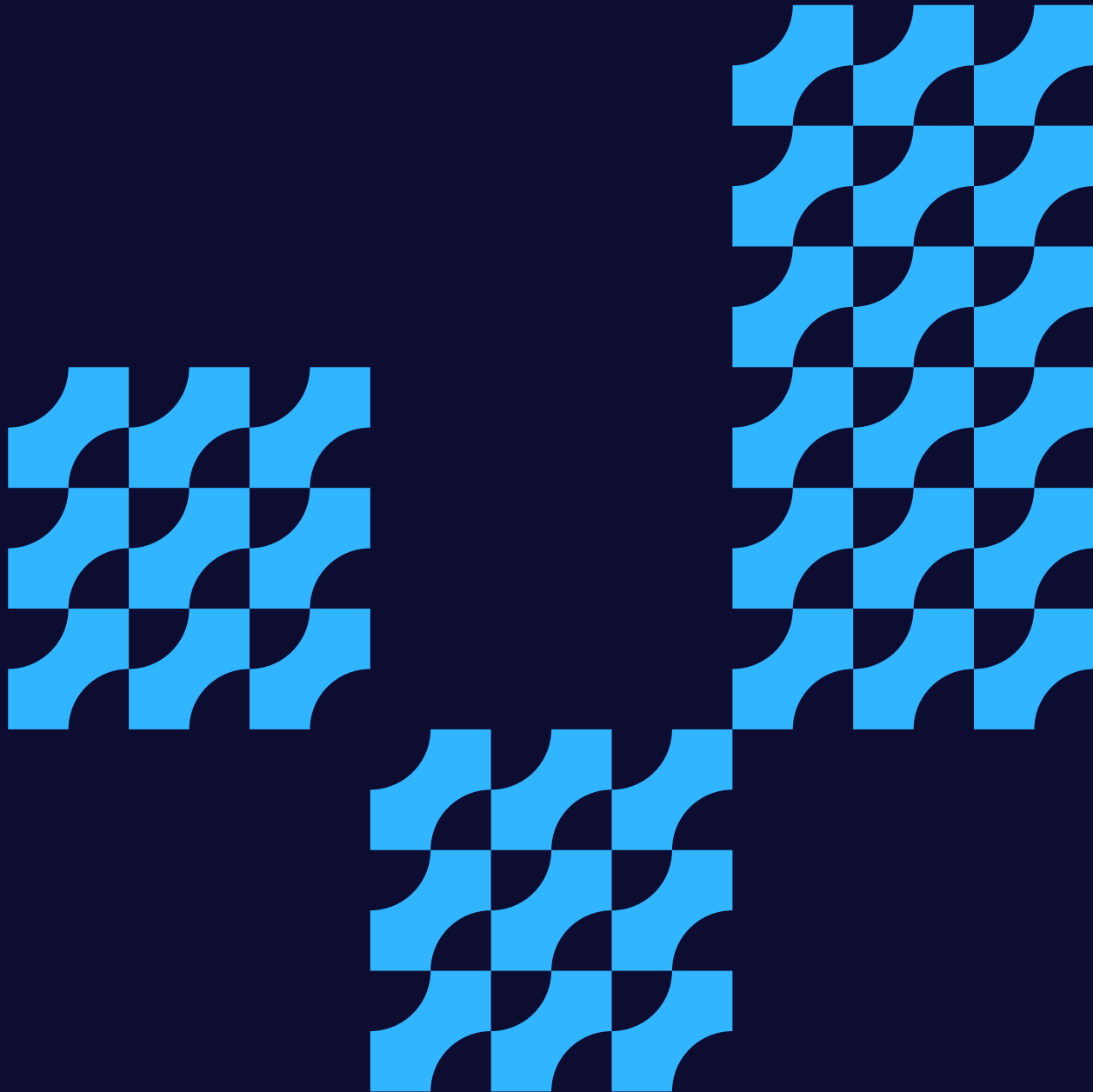
Conclusion

India has historically possessed multiple assets that can be leveraged as part of an attractive and effective *soft power* strategy. Its cuisine, a particular vision of well-being embodied by yoga, and its Bollywood film industry have all contributed to its global reach. Civilizational influence, a positive image as the “world’s largest democracy” at the crossroads of multiple cultures — these elements have long shaped the perception of an open and appealing India. Yet certain intrinsic limitations remain to be overcome: the absence of a fully coordinated state approach; the dilution of some messages (is yoga still perceived as distinctly “Indian?”); and the limited international dissemination of its vast cinematic production.

The influence of *Hindutva* and Narendra Modi’s style of governance have produced ambivalent and contested effects. While they reflect a clear will to assert India’s place on the global stage — in line with its rise toward becoming the world’s second-largest economy — the cultural and diplomatic tensions generated by Hindu nationalism now represent a new challenge, if not a contradiction, facing the Indian government.



Conclusion



General Conclusion

In 1992, U.S. Vice President Al Gore, liberalized the American military internet system, envisioning it as a universal means of communication: a limitless, point-to-point system transcending borders, fostering culture and exchange. This model was meant to multiply knowledge, advance research and science, and be a breaker of censorship. And for a time, it did. But it was gradually overtaken by regressive phenomena. Withdrawal into oneself became a reality, and the multiplication of social networks turned it more into a weapon of influence than a vehicle of universalism. Authoritarian states, too, learned to control the system.

The same period saw the proclamation of the *“End of History”* (Francis Fukuyama), implying the end of war and the dawn of a new, peaceful era in which borderless economies would ensure fluidity and prosperity. Some thirty-three years later, it is clear that the hoped-for model never materialized.

Dreams of world peace have shattered against the ambitions of national and transnational actors. The attacks of September 11, 2001, reminded us that revolutionary transnational movements — jihadism, in that instance — were on the rise. More recently, the war in Ukraine revealed that for some, warfare remains a legitimate means of conflict resolution, even territorial expansion. The events of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war in Gaza confirmed that violence — even extreme violence — could once again be considered legitimate in pursuit of political objectives.

Yet international relations in the first half of the 21st century cannot be reduced to the military sphere alone. As this report has shown, the dizzying expansion of social networks and accompanying technological capabilities has opened new avenues of action for both states and activist groups. The cultural dimension of influence can no longer be ignored.

As early as 1970, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser had underlined the importance of the *“ideological state apparatuses,”* showing that coercion was not the only way for dominant classes to maintain their power. The cultural sphere, he argued, was part of this domination. That intuition appears even more relevant today. State and non-state ideological apparatuses, through social networks, now play a major role in defending religion, ideology, *“civilizational”* worldviews, and political agendas — as well as in attacking perceived adversaries. The *“micropowers”* mentioned earlier may not win wars, but they can effectively disrupt and destabilize in support of broader state strategies.

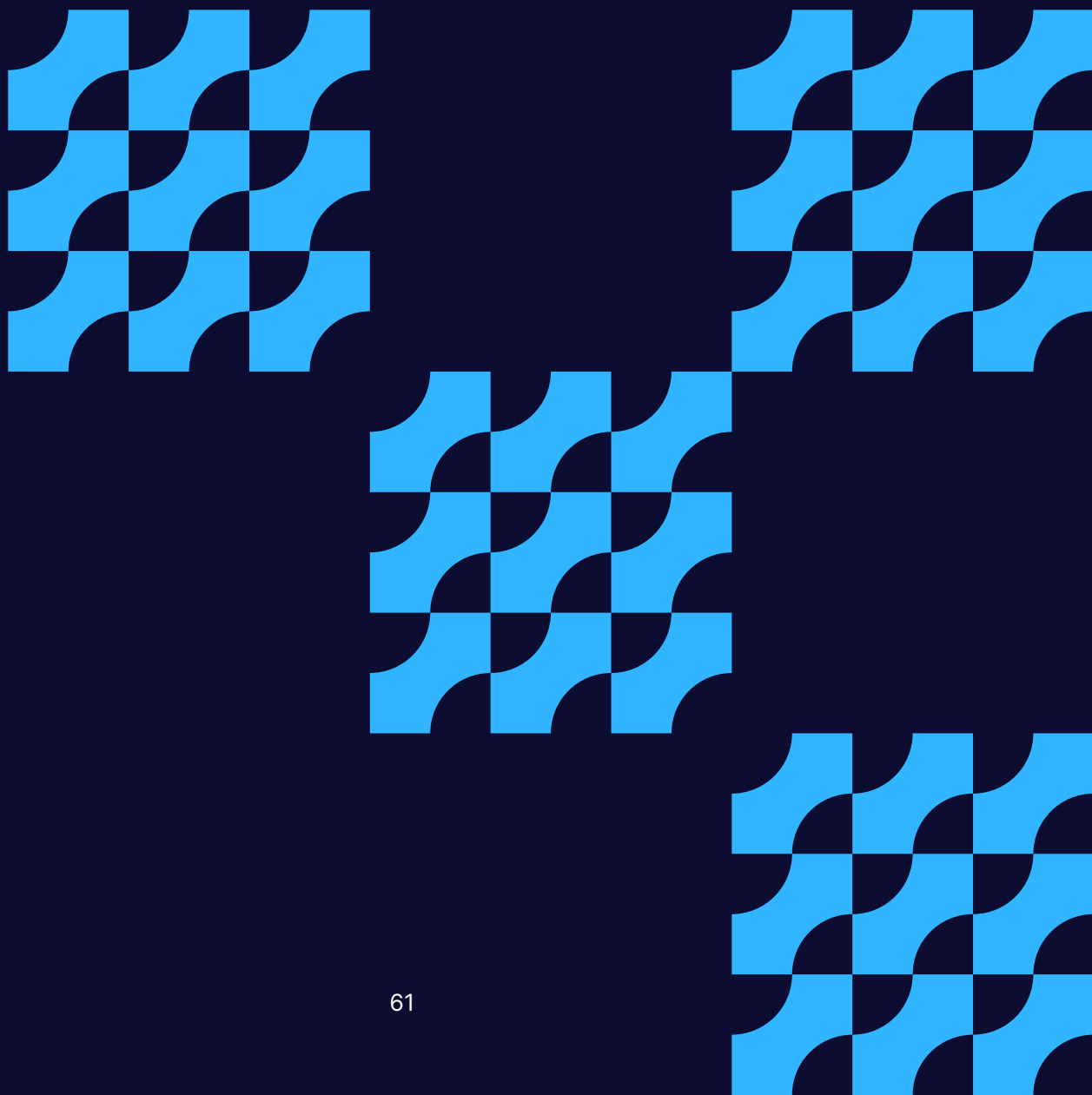
In 2008, international relations scholar Dominique Moïsi developed a powerful intuition about the *“geopolitics of emotion.”* He suggested that the era of cold, rational international relations had given way to one driven by heightened feelings — emotions overtaking reason. In a sense, today’s cultural influence strategies are built on this model: overemphasis on national and heritage identity, victimization, and the designation and vilification of an enemy — each actor applying its own balance of these elements.

The war in Ukraine has shown how Russian-aligned social networks can accompany military action, including attacks against adversaries. The re-election of Donald Trump was facilitated by the MAGA *“war machine,”* spreading a conservative and ultra-patriotic ideology. Other nations are following suit: South Korea promotes its *“way of life”* as both a cultural and economic asset; Algeria sees in this approach an offensive political and economic tool; India conceives of it as a major communication instrument to assert and promote a unified Indian identity — including religious patriotism — to its diaspora and beyond.

Faced with this acceleration of influence, both unregulated and targeted, the countries that were once culturally dominant, particularly in Europe, now seem unprepared. Their influencers may reach millions, but often in service of the cosmetics or fashion industries rather than political projects. And when political influence does occur, it may even challenge official authority — as with far-right influencer Tommy Robinson in the United Kingdom. Some states also use these influencers as conduits for disinformation, whether out of conviction or for financial gain. Countering this cultural and economic influence, which often operates quietly, is far more difficult.

Efforts to combat disinformation and fake news have, after a slow start, now been taken seriously. What remains is the need for a genuine strategic reflection — not to create national *“influence agencies,”* which rarely function in democratic systems, but to develop the capacity to design and deploy effective tools of action. This may include building European-scale mechanisms capable of mobilizing national influencers and responding to what now constitutes, depending on the target and the objective, a new form of threat.

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