



HOW CAN A COUNTRY PROJECT ITS SOFT POWER IN THE UNITED NATIONS?



Capstone Consulting Project

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations is the center of international diplomacy. The various bodies and institutions within its framework offer a place for countries to come together on a broad range of issues. In doing so, a country can curate its' international personality. How a country goes about this constitutes soft power. The exercise of soft power is integral to a country's ability to pursue their interests in the UN. This project is an attempt to gain a better understanding of how missions can build, maintain, and leverage soft power, specifically within the UN system.

Based on interviews with Permanent Missions across New York, this report assesses the best avenues for developing and exercising soft power within the UN. While there was geographic and cultural diversity across respondents, there were a number of common threads throughout the interviews which constitute the central elements of a country's ability to build and project soft power in the UN. These centered on the themes of taking the lead, prioritization, personnel quality, working through coalitions, and alignment with capital.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FOSS	Forum of Small States
G20	Group of 20
G77	Group of 77
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WEOG	Western Europe and Others Group

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KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding 1

Countries that are considered to effectively project soft power tend to do so through a focused topic. A Mission should clearly define its focus area, matched to its domestic policy goals.

Key Finding 2

Prioritizing a focused topic is the most efficient use of resources. Missions should align resource allocation with pre-defined priority areas.

Key Finding 3

Countries perform well when they have consciously curated a pipeline of diplomats and local staff that are skilled in multilateralism and have expertise in their domestic priority topic. A country should invest in training its diplomats in multilateral diplomacy and identify opportunities for placement of nationals in the Secretariat.

Key Finding 4

Countries seek out formal and informal groups across topics to strengthen their independent position. A Mission should leverage its alliances and group networks to reach a wider audience.

Key Finding 5

Countries need to have pre-existing bilateral relationships to be able to approach other small states when new topics arise. A Mission should strengthen its bilateral relationships as broadly as possible.

Key Finding 6

A clear alignment between a Permanent Mission and its capital, including visits to the UN, is vital to credibility. A Mission should seek active and public support from its capital.

Key Finding 7

Many small states consider high-level week as a reflection of a country's commitment to the UN and multilateralism. Countries should aim to have either the President, Prime Minister or Foreign Minister consistently attend high-level week.

1 INTRODUCTION

The UN is a microcosm of international relations. Its headquarters in New York are the only place in the world where all 193 Member States are represented. Day-to-day, it offers an opportunity for diplomats to project and advocate their government's foreign policy across a wide array of subjects, as well as foster an international personality.

This project sought to understand what soft power is within the context of the UN and how a country can actively project it. This involved an exercise in first, understanding what soft power is within this environment and, second, if and how it can be measured. Gathering evidence through desk research and informational interviews, this report will find that while soft power is an abstract concept which is difficult to define and measure, there are a number of areas and success stories which can be worked towards.

2 METHODOLOGY

The team began by familiarizing with the makeup and processes of the UN. This included understanding the intersection of different UN bodies and Permanent Missions. We also looked into academic commentary on the operation of the UN and its place in international relations.

With this baseline, the team developed a set of questions designed to understand how Permanent Missions view soft power in the UN. A list of potential interviewees was compiled based on geographic diversity, country size and influence, and experience on the UNSC. With the client's assistance, we approached 16 countries for interview. The team conducted 10 informational interviews with members of Permanent Missions. These interviews were structured against a common set of ten questions, included in Annex I.

The team considered distributing a survey in conjunction with, or instead of, conducting informational interviews. Given the sensitivity of international diplomacy and the time constraints of the relevant stakeholders, it was decided that this would not offer sufficient information within the project timeline.

The interviews were taken without attribution. The notes were collated and coded to ascertain common insights and themes. The research team used this information to identify key areas and make an assessment of which categories are most relevant and influential when speaking of soft power. Our research should be understood to represent only a small portion of countries that are represented at the UN. However, we focused on ideas that were mentioned by a majority, or all, of interviewees to maximize external validity.

After using interviews to establish key areas of focus, the team attempted to match these with quantifiable data. Data collection was undertaken across a variety of sources including UN databases, news websites, and open source collection. Unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of the project, there was some data that was deemed confidential and could not be provided by the client or interviewees. Soft Power

2.1 What is it?

The concept of soft power was introduced into international affairs literature in 1990 by Joseph Nye.¹ He coined the term following a century where power was measured by traditional military strength. His seminal work argued that factors such as technology, education, and economic growth were becoming more significant in international power. A country's soft power is then "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having

moral authority).”² While these three categories are focused on the global scale, the nature of diplomacy sees them manifest within the UN system. A country – and by extension, its Permanent Missions and diplomats working within it – can influence counterparts through participating in the UN’s multilateral culture while offering consistent policy leadership.

In the UN, hard and soft co-exist, and the line between them is sometimes uncertain. For example, financial contributions which are designed to coerce behavior would likely be considered hard power. Comparatively, there are also many examples of financial contributions which are un-earmarked and therefore soft power. Similarly, a position on the UNSC, a body which makes decisions around security and military force, is a position of hard power. The campaign process to get elected, however, is an exercise in soft power. Likewise, there is a strong interlink between hard and soft power. The UN is a people-centered, resource-limited environment. Some countries can afford to prepare and attend all meetings and events while others have to make trade-off decisions. Having the capacity and resources to be in these spaces is hard power but the day-to-day operations are soft.

2.2 Why is it important?

Recognizing that people and countries tend to seek power for a purpose, the first step is to have a clearly defined set of political values and policy goals. Within the UN, this purpose is to be able to shape an agenda and garner support such that a country is able to advance its own interests and goals through the UN. This has two parts: first, how to engage in the system, for example, as an advocate of multilateralism and consensus building or in a more parochial form; and, second, having a set of policies that are clearly defined.

For some countries, there is no need to rely on soft power as they have sufficient hard power. It

is far more important for small states who do not have the financial and human resources to affect policy by coercion. When interviewees were asked who was the most effective at soft power, the answers were universally small states with key interest areas: for example, Liechtenstein on reform of the veto power in the UNSC, Singapore in the digital space, and Slovenia on bee diplomacy. Each of these aligns with a key domestic priority which carries expertise and credibility.

2.3 Informational Interview Summary

The research team conducted 10 not-for-attribution interviews with diplomats across Permanent Missions in New York. This included at least one country in each of the five UN regional groupings. There is a diversity across the countries chosen in approaches to foreign policy and regional blocs. Each interview was structured around 10 pre-established questions, included for reference in Annex I. These questions were designed to test potential categories of soft power, covering broader topics such as potential mechanisms for soft power whereas other questions were more targeted towards previously identified areas such as the role of social events or financial contributions.

The interview responses were collated and the answers coded into categories in an effort to identify common themes. While these interviews were necessarily subjective based on a country-specific experience, we found five key areas that were consistent across interviews as the best focus areas to leverage soft power: taking the lead, prioritization, personnel, coalitions, and support from capital. Each of these areas builds upon the others; while some advancements can be made in isolation, the most effective way to exercise soft power is at their intersection.

For example, taking the lead on a topic requires prioritizing resources in that area and having personnel with the requisite expertise to appropriately manage it while being supported from government in capital.

2.3.1 Take the Lead

The UN is a complex and sprawling bureaucracy whose different bodies all have their own procedural mechanisms, priorities and cultures. This complexity creates both challenges and opportunities. Because it is almost impossible to work across every topic and be present in all discussions, taking the lead in specific issues can generate more influence for a country.

Interviewees consistently mentioned that taking the lead in a particular topic, including facilitating resolutions, aids in building the reputation of a country, generating soft power. Many of the missions mentioned that, when a country becomes known for a specific issue and has been consistent in their approach, there is a flow-on effect whereby other countries will approach them directly. Being a sponsor or champion offers a lot of visibility and demonstrates a leadership skill set. Interviewees reflected that, in some way, this comes from necessity, as limited resources and competition among 193 Member States requires prioritizing issue areas. However, it is clear that some countries are more effective than others. Small states which focus on one issue and build the expertise over a number of years were considered by interviewees to be the most effective at exercising soft power.

Interviews also suggested that being consistent in a topic helps in building the country's image and reputation. This includes alignment with domestic policy, as well as in all facets of the UN, such as its agencies or through voluntary contributions. Interviewees reflected on examples where a country had been disorganized or let their leadership on topics lapse. The common theme was that soft power

is built up over a long period of time and then requires active steps to maintain.

By repeatedly taking the lead on advocating for and centering certain issues, countries are able to both build a reputation as leaders on a specific topic and develop the institutional knowledge to navigate specific bodies and procedures. This procedural and technical know-how, developed by tabling resolutions and leading to their passing, is integral to the development of influence within the UN, as it allows a mission to develop a reputation of competence and collaboration. As one interviewee noted, the UN in New York is a small universe, and everyone knows what is happening and who is doing their part.

Key Finding 1

Countries that are considered to effectively project soft power tend to do so through a focused topic. A Mission should clearly define its focus area, matched to its domestic policy goals.

2.3.2 Prioritize Resources

The category of priorities is closely related to that of taking the lead. While a handful of larger countries may be able to commit the manpower and financial resources to be everywhere at once, all others deal with the reality that having limited personnel and resources requires prioritization.

The need to prioritize was universally mentioned by those who were interviewed with multiple interviewees using the figure of speech "pick your battles". The countries which are most effective have clear priority issues which they then direct human and financial resources towards. They have been conscious about which forums to be present and participate in, and where to target collaboration. This, combined with the consistency and leadership mentioned

in the above section, demonstrate visibility and credibility.

Necessarily, this requires defining the issues and spaces which are priorities of the country. For some countries, they look at this in the longer-term, building up expertise at home to be available to the UN. For others, this may be a short-term reallocation to run an effective election. It requires an understanding of your own limitations, as taking something on and performing poorly can result in high-profile setback.

Key Finding 2

Prioritizing a focused topic is the most efficient use of resources. Missions should align resource allocation with pre-defined priority areas.

2.3.3 Invest in Personnel

Diplomacy is a world where the individual person matters and this is exacerbated by the New York ecosystem. The ability to hire and retain talented and personable staff, at the Permanent Mission level as well as within the secretariat, will influence a country's soft power.

Staff at Permanent Missions tend to be experienced diplomats posted from their country to undertake this specific role. Day-to-day, they represent their country in UN forums and in bilateral conversations. Interviewees emphasized how these individuals' capacity to develop and maintain relationships translates directly to soft power. This was considered across a spectrum of topics. For example, multiple diplomats spoke of fostering personal rapport, while another mentioned the value of these relationships when delivering bad news or discussing difficult subjects. The need for a pre-existing relationship transfers to areas such as campaigning and vote trading; one interviewee noted the need to have a bilateral relationship to then be in a position to ask for a

vote. They continued that there is a visible correlation between people that are well-liked on an individual level and how that country performs in UN forums. At least one interview highlighted that the quality of diplomats was more important than the quantity and another interviewee offered: "No matter what you do, it depends on how many friends you have at the UN".

This extends to the role of the Head of Mission. While other officials may be more involved in the day-to-day and person-to-person contact, an Ambassador remains the authoritative reflection of a country. In this case, interviewees reflected on how tenure and reputation become important. The institutional knowledge that is developed over a period of time is valuable when trying to navigate the bureaucracy of getting things done.

Finally, personnel quality and quantity is also relevant for secretariat posts and elected positions. Feeding nationals into these positions can further create a positive perception of the country, as well as provide a mechanism for informal information flow about the inner workings of the UN. For example, four countries referenced the ICJ as a difficult and important election to win. Even though the judges are independent once they begin the role, there is a certain status associated with the position which reflects positively on the country they are a national of.

At the Secretariat level, interviewees spoke of efforts to encourage nationals to apply for positions or, in some cases, identifying themselves the positions for which they want nationals to apply. This creates a capacity to "influence from within".

Key Finding 3

Countries perform well when they have consciously curated a pipeline of diplomats and local staff that are skilled in multilateralism and have expertise in their domestic priority topic. A country should invest in training its diplomats in multilateral diplomacy and identify opportunities for placement of nationals in the Secretariat.

2.3.4 Build Coalitions

The UN is a multilateral forum. It is difficult, if not impossible, to advance work without support from others. With a one-country one-vote system in the UNGA, this places all countries in an equal position and makes reaching a majority an exercise in coalition-building. When asked what the most important mechanism for soft power in the UN is, over half of the interviewees mentioned the role of coalition-building. Countries that independently emphasize the importance of multilateralism and know how to leverage this are consistently considered to have greater soft power.

Groupings can exist in both formal and informal formats. In the former category, this includes regional groupings such as CARICOM or ASEAN, as well as topical groupings such as the G77 or SIDS. Unique to the UN, FOSS plays a role in leveraging the soft power of small states. Although members of this forum do not vote together, it creates another space for engagement and relationship-building.

In the informal category, coalitions are built issue-by-issue. The UN is a space where blocs are created based on topic and can shift dramatically depending on the subject-matter. Some of these blocs are well-established while others are around new ideas. This, at times, leads to unlikely groupings and further demonstrates the need to have ongoing effective bilateral relationships. Interviewees

reflected that small states seem particularly effective at leveraging coalitions per topic.

Aside from being a member of a coalition, interviewees reflected on the soft power that comes from being the leader of such a group. Singapore was consistently referred to as an example in this space due to its convener role in FOSS. Likewise, multiple interviewees mentioned Cuba in the role of Chair of G77 in successfully promoting its own agenda.

Another element of the UN environment is Groups of Friends. There are over 100 of these Groups, covering a wide array of topics. The coordinator, a single country or set of countries, largely determines the frequency and goals of the Group. As such, while almost all interviewees noted their importance within the UN system, they qualified that the Groups vary in their effectiveness.

Finally, coalitions are effective at addressing resourcing limitations. For example, while a single Permanent Mission may not have the resources to cover all committees of the UNGA, by teaming up with other countries, they can ensure that between them they are following all active discussions.

Key Finding 4

Countries seek out formal and informal groups across topics to strengthen their independent position. A Mission should leverage its alliances and group networks to reach a wider audience.

Key Finding 5

Countries need to have pre-existing bilateral relationships to be able to approach other small states when new topics arise. A Mission should strengthen its bilateral relationships as broadly as possible.

2.3.5 Align with Capital

Permanent Missions are essentially an organ for a country to operate within the UN. They are designed to be an extension of the government. Because of this, it is vital that the narrative coming from representatives based in New York aligns with that coming from the capital. Interviews reflected the importance of a national government delivering on commitments that have been made at the UN; the parallel being that missteps between the two locations have the danger of undermining credibility within the UN system.

In addition to simply aligning priorities, interviewees mentioned the value of high-ranking officials visiting the UN. Many saw it as a way to confirm the priority of issues and give certain topics additional weight. Those countries that have been seen as successful tend to include involvement from capital, particularly high-ranking officials such as Ministers. This has the additional benefit of being first on a speaking list, further drawing attention to the country.

Interviews consistently mentioned the role of the annual high-level week in showing support from capital. It has the additional benefit of enhancing bilateral relations. For countries with a limited travel budget for officials, this high-level week is an opportunity to meet leaders across the world. Having the Head of State or Foreign Minister present is, for many, a reflection of the government's commitment to multilateralism. Multiple interviewees noted that not having a Minister attending can reflect poorly on the country and, by extension, diminish soft power.

Key Finding 6

A clear alignment between a Permanent Mission and its capital, including visits to the UN, is vital to credibility. A Mission should seek active and public support from Lisbon.

Key Finding 7

Many small states consider high-level week as a reflection of a country's commitment to the UN and multilateralism. Countries should aim to have either the President, Prime Minister or Foreign Minister consistently attend high-level week.

2.4 Category Analysis

While there was consistency across the interviews regarding the above key areas, the main hurdle remains the ability to measure each of these ideas. Some areas were easier than others to quantify and collect data and, as such, the distribution of categories is uneven.

Take the Lead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal and resolutions initiated by a country 	Prioritize Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size and resources of a Permanent Mission Assessed contributions Voluntary contributions 	Invest in Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN personnel by nationality Senior positions by nationality Elections and nominations Tenure of Permanent Representative
Build Coalitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal and formal alliances used in the UN system 	Align with Capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visits to UN by officials from capital 	

2.4.1 Proposal and resolutions initiated by a country

The number of proposals and resolutions that a country sponsors at UN bodies is an expression of its involvement and priorities. If a mission is able to sponsor and recruit other countries to pass resolutions, this demonstrates an ability to communicate and further its interests. When done well, it has an added effect of demonstrating to other missions its competence and impact within the UN system.

While this metric is considered important, simply sponsoring as many resolutions as possible is not expected to be a successful strategy. Passed resolutions are likely to be more indicative of a country's soft power in the UN system than unsuccessful resolutions, as this would show commitment and support from other countries. Additionally, it is important to distinguish between tabling resolutions as the lead sponsor, which is likely to have a high level of impact, and signing on as a co-sponsor, which is likely to have less influence.

Interviews confirmed that initiating proposals and resolutions is an effective way to generate soft power in the UN. One interviewee mentioned that starting a resolution or being the one to propose it confers visibility. Another interviewee added that visibility through sponsoring resolutions or initiatives can bolster a country's influence within the UN. By taking the lead on important issues and driving an agenda forward, a country can leave a lasting impression and shape the discourse.

The UN Digital Library includes voting data for UN resolutions.³ In the calendar year 2023, which included the 77th and 78th sessions, there were 338 UNGA resolutions passed (this does not include resolutions which were proposed but did not pass). This included resolutions on administrative topics, such as topics decided in committees, as well as topics proposed by Members. 2023 saw a variety of topics, including support for Palestinian refugees, measures on outer space, and the International Day of Potato. 250 resolutions were passed without a vote with the remaining 88 put to the Member States.

2.4.2 Size and resources of a Permanent Mission

The size of a Permanent Mission is the number of diplomatic staff that are employed by a country. Interview responses confirmed that this category, as a reflection of resources, is one of

the most important factors in a country's ability to project soft power in the UN. The more people who work within a mission, the more time that can be dedicated to building these relationships with other diplomats and UN employees. Additionally, the UN is a complex bureaucracy in which an understanding of procedures and systems is essential. The larger the staff of the mission, the more human capital and expertise the mission can amass with regards to its institutional knowledge and information on the UN system.

While having a larger mission is beneficial to a mission's ability to project soft power in the UN, it should be noted that this category is an expression of human capital. While increasing the number of staff is helpful, the quality of the staff – something that is much harder to measure – is an equally integral factor. The number and quality of interpersonal connections that a mission's staff can create and the technical expertise that they have developed will play a major role in a mission's ability to leverage its staff to exercise soft power. Additionally, just as the tenure of the Ambassador is a factor, staff turnover rates will likely have an influence on a mission's ability to exercise soft power. Having high levels of staff change leads to challenges in maintaining and building the institutional knowledge and relationships that are vital to being an effective diplomat in the UN system.

2.4.3 Assessed contributions

Assessed contributions are the mandatory financial resources provided by countries to support the UN. These contributions are determined by the Fifth Committee of the UNGA and are mandatory for all Member States according to Article 17 of the UN Charter.

Assessed contributions are calculated by a formula with countries (by GDP) having larger contributions. The interviews suggested that the act of fulfilling assessed contributions does not

directly contribute to a country's soft power within the UN.

2.4.4 Voluntary contributions

Voluntary contributions refer to the contributions that a country makes in addition to the assessed contributions. Voluntary contributions are divided into voluntary core (un-earmarked) contributions and voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions. The difference between the two categories is that earmarked contributions are devoted to specific projects.

There was some hesitancy among interviewees to consider earmarked contributions as a form of soft power as they have some aspect of control. For example, contributions may have a direct influence on executive board seats and leadership positions. Some interviewees had a policy of avoiding earmarking while others see a place for it. In the latter case, it was done to demonstrate support or provide leadership on a particular topic.

2.4.5 UN personnel by nationality

Data on the number of UN personnel is collected and published by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.⁴ It categorizes all permanently employed UN staff by their nationality. Statistics are not available for each post and it is therefore difficult to understand how many staff are based in New York HQ.

A country that has nationals working as permanent staff is important for soft power for a number of reasons. First, it creates a presence in UN work. Second, it is an opportunity to reflect the culture and personality of a country. Finally, assuming there is a relationship between the Permanent Mission and nationals in the Secretariat, there is a flow of information. If a country can increase its representation within the UN, this will have a positive impact on its soft power. Interviewees recognized that larger

countries have more of their citizens employed at the UN, creating an informational advantage. There is also a slight advantage for countries which have their national language represented at the UN.

There was some mention of the JPO program in facilitating a pipeline for UN staff. One interviewee highlighted the importance of nationals being integrated into the system and emphasized the talent pipeline provided by the JPO program, enabling individuals to ascend within the system and exert influence from within. Conversely, an interview with a small state indicated minimal participation in the JPO program, suggesting that there are more cost effective ways to ensure representation of their nationals within the system. While the JPO program serves as a valuable tool for introducing young talent to the workings of the system and increasing the presence of national personnel, its overall effect seems minimal.

2.4.6 Senior positions by nationality

Senior officials within the UN System have more influence compared to the average staff role in the specific committee and within the UN system. One interviewee mentioned that it is important to ensure that the seat is occupied by a national representative who stands for your interests. The corollary is that they hold more soft power for the nationality they hold.

The nationalities of senior positions in the UN demonstrate the country's power and control through participation in the decision-making process. Over time, this has shifted from predominantly Americans to major positions obtained by other Western European countries.⁵ The presence of senior staff conveys influence within the UNHQ which should translate as an element of soft power.

2.4.7 Elections and nominations

In the UN system, country-related elections and nominations involve selecting representatives,

delegates, or officials for various UN bodies and committees to ensure fair representation of Member States in decision-making processes of the UN. By involving Member States in these processes, the UN aims to create a more inclusive, effective, and equitable international system. By participating in elections and nominations, countries are subject to scrutiny from their peers. This accountability helps promote transparency, good governance, and responsible behavior among countries. Elections and nominations allow countries that have demonstrated a commitment to upholding and advancing these norms to be actively involved in shaping the global agenda. This metric measures how often a country has been nominated and selected for key positions.

The selection of candidates for the ten non-permanent seats on the UNSC takes place within five groups representing different geographic regions. WEOG consists of 29 members, which includes Western European countries (including Turkey), as well as Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, and the U.S.. The Group is unique in that its membership is not solely determined by geography; membership also hinges on Western democracy.

Some anecdotal evidence from interviews suggest that an election is not only confined to a nominating country, but also to its competitors. One interesting example involved the UNSC election when Mozambique was elected. Despite receiving the highest number of votes, Mozambique did minimal lobbying, did not engage in vote swaps, and did not host receptions, but is considered well-liked across the UN. In contrast, Japan spent a significant amount of money and was highly active in campaigning.

Resources are a key factor to the elections and nominations as well. One interviewee summarized that strategies for election vary among different countries. Larger countries aim

to be elected to as many positions as possible, both significant and minor, leveraging their resources and expertise. However, for developing countries, while they may have individual experts in certain fields, they may lack the resources to cultivate expertise on a larger scale.

2.4.8 Tenure of Permanent Representative

The tenure of a Permanent Representative impacts relationship building and standing within the UN community. The tenure of a Permanent Representative allows the position holder to gain a deeper understanding of the diplomatic system and foster stronger relationships. A balance needs to be sought between institutional knowledge, connection to capital, and expertise from other realms.

The List of Permanent Representatives to the UN in New York provides the start date of Heads of Mission for Member States and observers.⁶ The current median representation is approximately 2 years and 7 months.

While extended tenure, such as that of Turkmenistan's current representative – who was appointed over 29 years ago on February 23, 1995 (approximately 10,629 days as at March 31, 2024) – may not be recommended, it often results in greater influence. One interviewee provided the example of Liechtenstein's Ambassador Christian Wenaweser, who has been at the UN since 2002 and has developed an intricate knowledge of international law systems. Due to his extended tenure, he has become the go-to person on both the ICC and the issue of reforming the veto.

2.4.9 Informal and formal alliances used in the UN system

Formal alliances and Groups of Friends refer to cooperative relationships and agreements formed between Member States to achieve common goals, address shared concerns, or advance mutual interests within the framework of the UN. Effectively leveraging these relationships, particularly for small states, can help countries advance their goals and build soft power.

Joining the EU as a voting bloc in the UN offers advantages such as increased influence on the global stage, cohesive negotiation, access to shared resources and expertise, strengthened alliances, and alignment with EU values. However, this comes with drawbacks including compromise of national interests, limited flexibility in decision-making, disproportionate influence favoring larger countries, and reduced visibility for individual countries within the bloc.

Counting informal alliances and Groups of Friends can be challenging. While these informal groups can enhance a country's soft power, formal alliances are typically more cohesive and influential. One interviewee mentioned the advantages of Groups of Friends, noting their varying degrees of usefulness, with some being active and others dormant. Such forums enable dialogue with countries otherwise not engaged and it is considered better to be part of a group to have a stronger position.

2.4.10 Visits to UN by officials from capital

This metric measures the frequency of visits by a nation's government officials to the UN. This metric also takes into account the types of visits, the reasons for them, and the rank of the officials visiting. While not expected to be one of the most important metrics for generating soft power, this is still expected to be an effective tool for a mission to use. Due to the fact that a mission's policies and priorities originate in

their nation's capitol, a visit by a high-ranking official in the government such as a head of state or foreign minister is an effective way to show backing for the mission and its initiatives. Additionally the presence of high-ranking officials can allow the mission staff to more easily communicate needs for resources and policy shifts to the central government, thus helping the mission align government policy with its needs.

Various methods of leveraging high-level visits were discussed throughout the interview. The concept of high-level week was mentioned by most interviewees with one interviewee noting that attending high-level weeks and meetings with senior UN staff undoubtedly aids in running successful campaigns.

ENDNOTES

¹ Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft Power. *Foreign Policy*, 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

² Nye, J. S. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25097996>.

³ *Voting Data*. (2024). UN Digital Library. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?cc=Voting+Data&ln=en&c=Voting+Data>.

⁴ *Personnel by Nationality*. (n.d.). UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. www.unsceb.org/hr-nationality.

⁵ Novosad, P., & Werker, E. (2018). Who runs the international system? Nationality and leadership in the United Nations Secretariat. *The Review of International Organizations*, 14, 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-017-9294-z>.

⁶ *Permanent Missions*. (2024). UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/protocol/permanent-missions>. Information correct as at March 15, 2024.

ANNEX I: LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What do you see to be the most important mechanisms/ strategies through which countries exercise soft power in the UN?

Which countries do you think do the most effective job of exercising soft power? Are there behaviors that they share, or do they do so in their own unique ways?

How important do you think it is for countries to work through multinational groupings (such as EU, ECOWAS, ASEAN) to leverage their soft power?

How much do you think that visibility through sponsoring resolutions or initiatives aid a country in generating influence in the UN?

Which UN bodies, such as the GA, ECOSOC and the UNSC, do you think offer countries the most leverage for soft power at the UN?

Do you think countries should prioritize political resources on fewer large elected bodies, or try to be elected to as many bodies as possible?

Do you think that soft power translates into better electoral results in UN processes and what are the best strategies / initiatives for a good election campaign?

How do countries leverage social events most effectively to build relationships with other missions? Do certain types of social events generate better results than others?

What do you think are the most effective ways for countries to leverage their financial contributions to the UN?

Do you see participation of a country's central government in the UN to be helpful in a nation's ability to increase its influence?

ANNEX II: EXCLUDED CATEGORIES

In preparation for interviews, the research team compiled a list of categories that may be relevant to soft power in the UN. Only those that were supported by the interviews were included in the report. The following are the categories that were excluded as they were not considered relevant based on advice from Permanent Missions.

Peacekeeping contributions

Peacekeeping has proven to be one of the most effective tools available to the UN to assist host countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace. UN peacekeeping is a unique global partnership. It brings together the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat, troops and police contributors and the host governments in a combined effort to maintain international peace and security. Hence, contributing to peacekeeping is rather important to exercise greater soft power.

This category was excluded as peacekeeping was not mentioned in interviews. We suggest this is the case for two reasons. First, given it is undertaken by military forces, it may be considered an exercise of hard power. Second, although it is facilitated through mechanisms that are based in New York, specifically the UNSC, it is not as strong a topic for Permanent Missions as is largely facilitated by capital.

Events hosted by a Mission

Events hosted by a mission is a measure of the number and type of events that a mission organizes within the UN system. This may include social gatherings, cultural promotions, or side events to larger gatherings. Hosting events is an integral part of the UN diplomatic culture and allows a country to build connections to diplomats of other missions, and creates a forum for countries to build support for their causes. Events also allow missions to gauge their standing in the UN system by seeing which diplomats choose to attend their events, and which abstain.

This category was excluded as results from interviews focused on the attending of events rather than the hosting of them. While the two ideas are evidently interconnected, it appeared that the hosting element was less relevant to soft power.

Perceived soft power in international relations

This report is interested in soft power within the UN context. The term itself is more commonly used on the international stage. Given foreign policy and diplomacy are an element of soft power, we theorized that a country's soft power on the international level will have an impact on how they engage within the UN system.

This category was excluded as it became clear from interviews that the UN is its own ecosystem which is not actively influenced by soft power on the international stage (acknowledging there may be passive influence). There were some specific examples provided in the interviews which mentioned that countries considered effective at soft power in the UN may not have this same influence in other international organizations such as the World Trade Organization.

UN employees based in-country

This factor measures the number of UN officials working in offices outside of New York based on their nationality. We included this category as employees within other UN offices may help promote their country's soft power in the same way as we found in UNHQ. That is, through daily interactions with diplomats, citizens capacity building, and informal communication. This can help impact the perceptions of diplomats, experts, and staff from other countries about

the values and culture of the nation through daily interaction.

This category was excluded as it became clear from interviews that the interaction element of soft power is limited to being present and available in New York. UN employees that are elsewhere do not offer leverage points. However, there may be some value in the experience they are building if they then take a post in UNHQ, but this is a second-order effect which cannot be measured.

Cultural impact in UN sponsored spaces

Soft power can manifest in the physical space of UNHQ. The UN has a curated gifts collection, including artworks, historic objects and architectural components which have been officially donated to the UN and on display across HQ. There are exhibitions held in the lobby area of UNHQ which are open to the public. They feature displays covering topics that the UN works on including human rights, sustainable development, and the environment. Another example is performances at the UN Day Concert, held annually.

This category was excluded as none of the above were mentioned in interviews as having an impact on a country's soft power within the UN.

Social media

In an age of social media, most Permanent Missions are now represented on social accounts. This includes Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn. Having more followers on these platforms implies a certain audience.

Social media is unlikely to, in itself, have an impact on soft power, and this category was not mentioned as important in interviews. However, because all Permanent Missions have a social media presence, maintaining some level of activity becomes necessary.

Universities in the UN Academic Impact program

This category was intended to measure participation in the UN Academic Impact initiative. The program currently includes 1,603 member institutions across 153 countries. It supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and joint efforts to achieve them, including members publishing papers in collaboration with the UN and serves as hubs for exchanging ideas.

This category was excluded as it was not mentioned in interviews and is largely based outside of New York.

Attendance at, and contribution to, official UN body meetings and committees

This category looks at attendance at, and contribution to, official UN body meetings and committees. This includes the UNGA, UNSC, and ECOSOC. The Trusteeship Council was not included as it meets infrequently and the ICJ was not included as it does not operate based on a meeting format.

Interviewees mentioned the UNGA, UNSC, and ECOSOC as being important for soft power, though the extent to which each body is important differed. The UNGA, as the only forum in the UN with every Member State, is the most relevant. Regarding the others, countries agreed that it largely depended on how an individual country exercised themselves. For example, some did not consider ECOSOC an important forum while others mentioned that Chile, for example, had exercised the position of Chair in a meaningful way that successfully enhanced its soft power. Interventions in UNSC were considered less relevant for this topic as it was widely seen as a forum of hard power. However, one interviewee mentioned that, for EU Members, the UNSC offered an opportunity to have a voice that is separate from the Brussels position.

While this category consistently came up as important for soft power, in both interviews and other research, it is difficult to quantify. The UN does not provide attendance records or meeting notes in an easily accessible format.

Attendance at informal events hosted by other countries

Interview responses highlighted attending informal events as crucial to soft power, particularly in strengthening ties with other countries. However, it cannot be quantitatively measured. Although tracking attendance is challenging, this metric is interrelated to the resources of the mission, with a high number of staff assisting in facilitating attendance at as many informal events as possible. Therefore, missions with more resources will be able to attend more events while small missions may find it difficult to attend many events happening at the same time. The corollary of this is that smaller states that make an effort to attend everything are recognized as doing so.

Types of events mentioned throughout interviews include happy hours, private dinners, and coffee catch ups. These gatherings are instrumental in building personal relationships that can influence diplomats' perceptions about a country or on specific topics on which they are interested. They also serve to connect diplomats from various countries which further aids in building relationships.