

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

United States of America

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report



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1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

The United States is the world's largest economy and 3rd largest by population. It also possesses the world's most powerful military, surpassing many of its next closest rivals combined in defence spending. On diplomacy and share of world trade, it does slightly worse, placing second in both (down from 1st in both categories since 2015). Its soft power trails its other rankings, placing 5th in the Soft Power 30's 2019 rankings, a drop of two places since 2015. Indeed, the report cites "confirmation of a trend spotted in 2018: the continued erosion of American soft power," largely due to declining perceptions of the US abroad as a result of Donald Trump's presidency (Portland, 2019).

Table 1: The geopolitical and geo-economic position

	2019	2015	
Hard power rank	1 st	1 st	-
World trade rank (\$ million)	2 nd / 4,808,015	1 st / 5,050,758	↓
Soft power rank	5 th / 77.40	3 rd / 73.68	↓
Diplomacy rank	2 nd	1 st (2016)	↓

According to the U.S. State Department, public diplomacy is primarily "intended to support the goals of U.S. foreign policy, promote national interests, and improve national security by informing and influencing the public abroad, and by developing and strengthening relations between the U.S. government and the population and citizens of other countries" (ACPD 2016b, p. 4). Compared to many other countries, the support of US citizens abroad plays a much smaller role in the American strategy (Fisher 2014, p. 8). Despite the relatively hands-off approach, the US has ECP activities in at least 180 countries and spends nearly \$1.5 billion per year. Upwards of 7000 employees, about a third of whom are local staff, partake in ECP-related work.

Table 2: Economy of the US

	2019	% change since 2015
Population (millions) / ranking	328.23 / 3 rd	320.63 / -
GDP ranking	1 st	1 st
GDP per capita	65,297	4
Cultural economy (%GDP)	0.20	0
Education economy (%GDP)	4.77	-0.19
R&D economy (%GDP)	2.83 (2018)	0.11
Media economy (%GDP)	n/a	n/a

Sources: World Bank, OECD, BEA

Relative to GDP, the US government spends fairly little on culture. At .61%, it trails other advanced countries like Germany. Research and development is roughly comparable, at 1.7%, but education is much higher, 14.4% compared to 9.40%. Given the massive size of the US economy, however, all of these figures represent large absolute sums.

Table 3: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays

	2019	% change since 2015
Culture ¹	0.61	0.01
Education	14.4	-0.53
R & D	1.69 ⁽²⁰¹⁵⁾	-
Media	n/a	n/a

Source: BEA

In general, American foreign cultural and educational policy is seen as playing a subordinate role to the pursuit of US national interests. This is also due to the American understanding of culture. Art and culture are often understood as an expression of individual rather than national identity, which may account for the relatively small share of government outlays on culture. This philosophy has been somewhat validated in the US case, as American culture has an enormous influence worldwide, despite lacking broad state support. Examples include the music and film industries, which are strong exporters.

A similar picture emerges in language promotion. Over the course of the 20th century, the English language developed into the most important *lingua franca*. In the eyes of many US politicians, comprehensive language promotion abroad is therefore superfluous and is used instead specifically in focus regions (Fisher, 2014, p. 8).

The Trump administration has been inclined to cut funding for efforts like cultural diplomacy. The incoming Biden administration, with its focus on bolstering “American global leadership,” may be inclined to reverse budgets cuts, but will maintain the previous administration’s focus on “great power rivalry.”

2. External cultural policy: an overview

The cultural diplomacy of the United States is characterized by public-private partnerships and the initiatives of largely independent actors. This system reflects the way in which Americans tend to understand culture, which is critical of state influence. Still, there are some notable government activities. Primarily, this report focuses on the cultural and educational initiatives of the U.S. State Department and the foreign media under the supervision of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) – the successor organizations to the USIA.

¹ General government expenditure by COFOG function “Recreation, culture, religion”, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

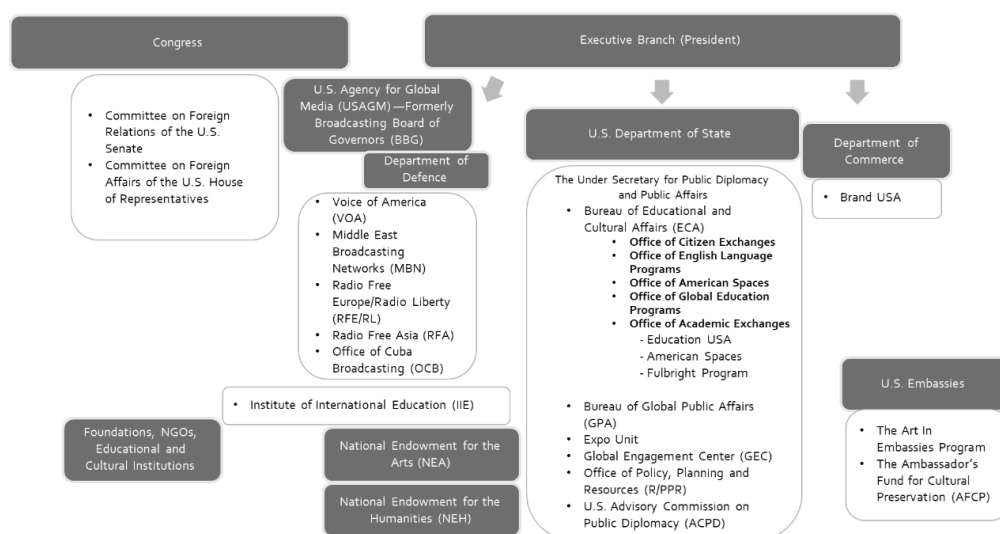
Table 4: Key ECP Statistics for the US

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	over 160
Total number of institutions abroad	about 1,400
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	about 5,000
ECP freelance & local contract staff	about 2,600
Government financial support (\$ million)	1449.6 ^{(2018) 2}
Financial scale of all ECP activities	-
Comparative ECP ranking	major

However, there are additional actors which warrant mentioning. For example, the Department of Commerce invests in the "Brand USA" initiative, which also integrates American culture into its national marketing strategy. The Department of Defence is also involved in public diplomacy, for example in supporting foreign media. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is a state foundation that supports American non-profit organizations that plan art and cultural projects abroad. The sister foundation National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) supports international projects of humanities scholars as well as programs of museums, archives, libraries and universities (Fisher, 2014, pp. 11-13). The American ambassadors also have the opportunity, through the "Art in Embassies" and "The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation" programs, to exhibit art in embassies and to support works of art or buildings of particular cultural value in their host countries (Harris, 2016). Figure 1 shows the key players in American ECP.

Figure 1: Institutional map of American ECP

United States



² Refers to the sum of "Educational and Cultural Exchanges (ECE)" and "USAGM" budget items in FY2018. The overall Public Diplomacy spending for that year amounted to \$2.19 billion, ACPD (2019).

3. Fields of ECP

The lack of a central direction creates a complex organizational landscape for US ECP. This fragmentation of external cultural policy is often criticised by some experts who fear that an overarching strategy is largely lacking (Fisher, 2014, p. 3). Due to the large number of actors, only a small fraction of the organisations involved in US ECP can be discussed in this report.

3.1. Culture and the arts

Table 5: Key statistics on culture and the arts

<i>American Spaces</i>	2019	2015
Number of countries present	141 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ ECA programs: over 160	-
Number of institutes	645 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	710
Number of FTE staff	46 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ ECA: 510	56
Budget (\$ million)	American Spaces: 13.7 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾	American Spaces: 15.2
Number of cultural agreements	ECA: 701 ³	ECA: 590
Government financial support (\$ million)	Office of American Spaces: 17.22 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁻¹⁸⁾ Cultural Programs Division: 13.63 U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP): 6.25 IVLP: 100.68	Office of American Spaces: 18.84 Cultural Programs Division: 10.20 U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP): 5.75 IVLP: 89.67

After the reform of American foreign cultural and educational policy at the beginning of the 21st century, the State Department assumed primary responsibility for the American government's information, cultural and educational programs. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is considering overhauling the US' cultural diplomacy, in an explicit effort to counter Russian and Chinese efforts (Gramer, 2018).

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) has over eighty cultural and educational programs designed to promote mutual understanding between Americans and people worldwide. The number of programs has increased significantly in recent years. New programs have been created to respond to global challenges without ending or replacing old programs (ACPD 2016a, p. 35). The programs are managed by the ECA offices and implemented in cooperation with American and local partners in over 160 countries. The ECA has over 400 locations, 500 employees and an annual budget of \$2.19 billion in 2018, although much of this is invested within the United States (ACPD, 2019).

³ Over 90 percent of ECA's appropriation is spent in the U.S. or invested in U.S. organizations, (ACPD, 2019).

Under the ECA, the Office of Citizen Exchanges manages exchange programs for American and international participants and awards grants to non-profit organizations that organize intercultural programs in the United States or abroad. The office has four focal points: (1) cultural exchanges, (2) exchanges of political and civil society experts, (3) sports diplomacy and (4) youth exchanges.

The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) is the communications department of American Public Diplomacy. Under the motto "Connecting People with Policy", it informs people abroad about the policies – particularly the foreign policy – of the United States. It has an annual budget of \$57.58 million and 260 employees (Allgov, n.d.). One focus of the department is "Digital Diplomacy" and thus the dissemination of information via the internet. In addition to this digital presence, the IIP is also responsible for the administration of the information and cultural spaces called "American Spaces".

American Spaces brings together a variety of organizations that inform people around the world about the U.S. and its policies, organize language and cultural programs, and provide advice on exchange programs and study visits to the United States. Although many institutions can look back on a long tradition, the overarching concept of American Spaces was not developed until 2008. In 2018, there were 645 American spaces, a slight decline from previous years (ACPD, 2019). Their location indicates some US regional ECP priorities: Europe (178), Africa (128), South and Central Asia (100), East Asia and Pacific (80+) (ibid.). In 2018, it invested more than 17 million US dollars in their maintenance and expansion (ibid.). More than half of this funding goes to sixty selected American Spaces, which have been set as a priority annually since 2014 by the regional offices of the State Department (ACPD, 2016a, p. 140).

3.2. Language

Table 6: Key figures on language promotion

	2019	2015
Number of countries Intensive English Programs (IEP)	over 180	-
Number of students		
In-class	IEP: 75,379 English Access Microscholarship Program: 15,000 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	IEP: 133,335 English Access Microscholarship Program: 13,942
Online English E-Teacher Program	2,650 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ ⁴	1,383
Number of candidates for English language qualifications	n/a	n/a

⁴ The program also offers massive open online courses (MOOCs) to an unlimited number of foreign English-language teachers. In FY 2018, more than 50,000 participants have enrolled in these MOOCs. ACPD (2019).

	2019	2015
Number of language teachers and trainees (English Language Specialists program)	370	250
Budget (\$ million) English Language Programs (ELP)	46	42.1

As discussed previously, language plays a relatively minor role in US ECP, largely due to the advantages the English language possesses. However, there are some notable programs. Under the ECA, Office of English Language Programs develops the language programs of the American government. The office works closely with the U.S. embassies and their Regional Language Officers, who manage the programs locally. English language programs have a total budget of \$46 million in 2019, up from \$42.1 in 2015 (ACPD, 2019). Supporting English teachers abroad and offering language courses is primarily seen as an opportunity to prepare people for exchange programs and study visits to the US (ibid., p. 137). For example, the English Access Microscholarship Program allows underprivileged youth from more than 80 countries to participate in two-year language courses.

Also, under the ECA, the Office of International Visitors is responsible for implementing the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). This offers leading representatives from politics, civil society and business the opportunity to visit the US for three weeks, exchange views with local experts and get to know the “American way of life.” Participants are selected by local US embassies. Since its foundation in 1940, more than 225,000 people have visited the USA through the IVLP. Its annual funding in 2018 was \$100.68, up from \$89.7 million in 2015 (ACPD, 2019).

3.3. Primary and secondary education

Table 7: Key figures on primary and secondary education

<i>Youth Programs Division (YPD)</i>	2019	2015
Number of countries	54	54 ⁵
Number of students	6,210	5,813
Government financial support (\$ million)	76.06	64.58

Within the US State Department, the Youth Programs Division of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs seeks to “empower the next generation and establish long-lasting ties between the United States and other countries” (US Department of State, n.d.). It supports over 6000 students per year, is active in 54 countries, and is supported by over \$76 million per year (ACPD, 2019). There are many smaller sub-programs, including The German American Partnership Program (GAPP), the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange for High School Students, National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), and TechGirls, which aims to increase the number of women in science and technology. Many of these programs are

⁵ Refers to long-term exchanges only. Short-term exchanges are available in more than 140 countries. ACPD (2016).

small, with as few as 10 participants per year. As the names make clear, they are often tailored to specific regional, thematic, or economic concerns as part of the US' broader international strategy.

3.4. Tertiary education and science

Table 8: Key figures on tertiary education and science

	2019	2015
Number of countries (Fulbright)	155	-
Number of universities / colleges abroad	about 80 ⁶	-
Number of students		
Number of foreign students ⁷	987,313 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	907,251
Number of students at American universities abroad	about 150,000	-
Fulbright program ⁸	4,337 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾	4,028 ⁽²⁰¹⁴⁾
Budget (\$ million) (Total Fulbright Funding)	-	415 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾
Government financial support (\$ million)	Academic exchange programs: 265.4 Fulbright: 181.9	Academic exchange programs: 226 Fulbright: 185.6
Science		
Number of countries	n/a	-
Number of institutes Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES)	12 research hubs worldwide ⁹	National Science Foundation (NSF): 3 ¹⁰
Number of projects	(ECA) Office of the U.S. Speaker Program: 600 pro- grams annually worldwide	-

⁶ American universities abroad refer to higher education institutions located outside the U.S. using the name "American" and issuing degrees at the bachelor's level or higher, Kyle, A. L. (2018).

⁷ Data based on Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students | UNESCO UIS. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

⁸ Refers to the total number of Fulbright grants to foreign nationals.

⁹ The U.S. is a leader in science diplomacy, relying on many public and private initiatives and it is impossible to list them all. The OES under State Department, for example, leads U.S. diplomacy on environmental, science, technology, and health (ESTH) related issues, (ACPD, 2019).

¹⁰ All 3 overseas offices were shut down in October 2018.

	2019	2015
Government financial support (\$ million)	0.7	1.136
Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES)		
	International Science and Engineering (NSF): 48.5	-

The Office of Global Education Programs manages exchange programs for students, teachers, and scholars. In addition, the office is responsible for mentoring and assisting international students in the USA and American students abroad. Every year nearly 1 million students come to the US to study at an American university. Although US universities are highly regarded abroad, many potential applicants are dependent on advice due to the complex application and visa processes. The Office of Global Education Programs therefore supports the EducationUSA network. This consists of 435 centres that offer advice in embassies and consulates as well as American Spaces, NGOs and other partner institutions. In 2015, around 4 million young people and young adults used the services of EducationUSA. It is funded with nearly \$14 million per year (ACPD, 2019).

The Office of Academic Exchanges develops and manages several major U.S. government academic exchange programs, including the well-known Fulbright Program. The US Congress supports the Fulbright Program with over \$240 million US and more than \$140 million is provided by the partner countries, educational institutions and private companies (FFSB, 2016, p. 9). Since its foundation, more than 390,000 people from over 160 countries have participated in the program, with over 7500 participating in 2018 (FFSB, 2017; US ACPD, 2019).

In addition to drawing foreign students to the United States, many American universities have a presence abroad, either through branch campuses or American institutions overseas. The latter exists in over 55 countries, with the average institution enrolling between 1,000 and 2,000 students on a \$20 million operating budget (Kyle, 2018).

The US also encourages scientific exchange with foreign countries, although to a smaller extent than many other highly developed countries. This may be due to the natural appeal that US research institutions possess. One notable program is the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), which has 12 research centres worldwide. In 2019, it was funded with \$690,000, a decline from \$1.1 million in 2015 (ACPD 2019).

3.5. Foreign Media

Table 9: Key figures on foreign broadcasting

<i>USAGM</i>		2019	2015
TV		201	142
Radio	Audience / weekly (million)	139	102
Digital		127	32
Total ¹¹	Number of countries broadcasted to	over 100	over 100
	Number of languages	61	61
	Number of channels	5	5
	Audience / weekly (million)	350	226
	Budget (\$ million)	814	750

As with other aspects of American ECP, many of the large players are private, and are therefore beyond the scope of this report. In the field of foreign media, large private institutions like CNN International or the foreign reach of newspapers like the *New York Times* is no doubt substantial. While these are important to keep in mind when considering US foreign media, the following will focus on government run or supported outlets. As their geographic focus makes clear, US foreign broadcasters focus clearly on American strategic objectives, countering narratives in “unfree” countries (in practice, typically geopolitical rivals) and offering pro-American viewpoints in regions where the US may be unpopular.

In contrast to the previously bi-partisan Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 dissolved the BBG and its supervisory capacity, replacing it with a single executive. With the change in the law, a CEO appointed by the President can now take over his duties. Former US President Donald Trump then appointed political loyalist Michael Pack to head the agency, arousing fears that it may become “Trump TV” (Bonazzo, 2018). The USAGM broadcasts in 100 countries and 61 languages, reaching an audience of 350 million people in 2019 (USAGM, 2019). It has an annual budget of around \$800 million and over 3,700 employees (ACPD, 2019). 5 networks fall within its remit: Voice of America (VOA), Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), and Radio Free Asia (RFA). These are discussed below.

¹¹ United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM), formerly the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) (until 2018). USAGM's networks: Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN).

In 2019, VOA was the BBG's largest television and radio company with annual budget of \$250 million (ACPD, 2019). The station is headquartered in Washington D.C. and produces over 70 television shows and 200 radio programs each year. A total of more than 1,000 employees work at the head office or as correspondents and freelancers abroad (ibid.). Despite the broad range of languages on offer, the VOA's programming reflects the priorities of American foreign policy. VOA has had an "Extremism Watch Desk" since 2015, which is intended to monitor and discredit the so-called Islamic state. Its working languages include Kurdish, Persian, Russian and Turkish (ACPD, 2016a, p. 61). Other initiatives address the growing influence of Russian media in the post-Soviet states. In February 2017, VOA launched the Russian news channel Current Time in cooperation with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN) was founded in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and consists of the television stations Alhurra Television and Alhurra Iraq Television, the radio stations Radio Sawa and Afia Darfur as well as several online platforms. According to its own information, the Arabic-language programs of the MBN reached 27.5 million people every week in 22 countries in North Africa and the Near and Middle East in 2016, whose media are classified by the NGO Freedom House as not free or only partially free. It has nearly 900 employees in Washington and the Middle East with a budget of \$110 million (BBG, 2017; ACPD, 2019). The aim of the MBN is to offer objective news to the people in the region and to serve as a pro-American voice in an anti-American media landscape (BBG, 2017).

Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) were initially founded as separate organisations at the beginning of the Cold War to provide people behind the "Iron Curtain" with anti-communist news and information from the West. After the Cold War ended, broadcasts in countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were stopped, and the range of languages offered was expanded in other regions—in particular the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia (RFE/RL, n.d.). It is currently active in 22 countries with a budget of \$124 million (USAGM, 2019). More than 500 regular employees work in the broadcaster's headquarters in Washington, D.C. and Prague, as well as more than 750 freelancers in the 19 branch offices (USAGM Performance and Accountability Report 2018: 182). According to own estimates, around 24.3 million listeners per week were reached in 2019, a slight decline from previous years (RFE/RL, n.d.; USAGM, 2019).

Radio Free Asia (RFA) was founded in 1996 as a private, non-profit company with an annual grant of over \$35 million. The station also receives approximately \$6.5 million as part of the Open Technology Fund. In total, the budget amounts to \$44 and the channel's roughly 250 employees work both in Washington D.C. and in the 8 overseas offices, which includes Hong Kong, Taipei, Bangkok, Seoul and Phnom Penh (USAGM, 2019). In addition, the station works with freelancers in Dharamsala and Ankara (RFA, 2017). The radio station broadcasts in nine languages and is received in six countries: China, Vietnam, North Korea, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

The Spanish radio and television station Martí primarily targets the Cuban population. The channels of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) are intended to contribute to promoting "democracy and freedom" in Cuba. With an annual budget of almost \$30 million and 130 employees, OCB produces programs that focus on human rights and personal freedoms, but also praise entrepreneurial initiatives in Cuba (ACPD 2016a, p. 178). Despite its main location in Miami, Florida, the station has access to a large network of independent journalists in

Cuba who send information to the USA by telephone, SMS or e-mail (ibid., p. 378). It was funded with \$29 million in 2019 (ACPD, 2019).

	VOA: 3.5	⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ VOA: 4.9
	MBN: 0.5	⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ MBN: 0.64
Social media engagement / weekly (million) ¹²	RFE/RL: 2.13	⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ RFE/RL: 2.10
	RFA: 1.13	⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ RFA: 1.12
	OCB: 0.07	⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ OCB: 0.03
New Media		
	VOA: 9.4	VOA: 5.9
	MBN: 1	MBN 0.25
Audience / unique weekly visitors (million) ¹³	RFE/RL: 11	RFE/RL; 7.9
	RFA: 1.3	RFA: 0.7
	OCB: 0.14	OCB: 0.11

Although the US State Department was relatively slow to adopt social media and internet technologies, the expansion of online offerings became a priority in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. Indeed, today, many of the outlets described above have a “digital first” approach. VOA is by far the most prominent, with nearly 5 million social media followers and 10 million unique monthly visitors to its website. Still, these lagging figures do show a clear lag behind private counterparts: CNN International has over 11 million Twitter followers, as of December 2020.

4. Challenges and future outlook

Although American cultural diplomacy can look back on a long tradition, it still faces new challenges. In this context, the benefits of the “digital first” strategy are also questioned, especially because it is often used as a justification for budget cuts. Since the early 1990s, the budget for cultural diplomacy has fallen by almost 30 percent and numerous libraries, centres and offices have been closed (Grincheva, 2010, p. 172). Another problem with American public diplomacy is that in many cases it is understood as a “tool” of foreign policy and therefore loses credibility.

The long-term effect of President Donald J. Trump’s presidency is still unclear. While it is clear that the “America First” strategy has been off-putting to some, this sort of attitude may be more of a secular trend in global politics than a singular event. Overall, the political climate in the United States suggests that cultural programs will face major obstacles in the future, both in terms of funding and visa processes. The independence and credibility of the foreign media also appears to be under threat.

Despite these challenges, the US has the luxury of prestigious universities, a native language that has assumed *lingua franca* status, and a dynamic economy that will continue attract ambitious people from around the world. While there is much to be criticised in terms of specific ECP decisions from the US government, few other nations are in such an enviable position in terms of overall cultural influence.

¹² Refers to the weekly average number of engagement actions on currently measurable platforms, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (without Instagram).

¹³ Weekly Web & mobile visits, ACPD (2019).

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