

Soft Power in World Politics: A Category of Analysis or Practice?

1. Course Details

Type	Seminar, WiSe 2019/20
VAK Number	08-26-5-M11-2
Modules	POL-M11: Internationale Politik (International Politics) IES-M6a: Theorien der Politik (BPO 2018) (Theories of Politics) General Studies Erasmus
Location	FVG M0160
Sessions	Mon 10:00 - 12:00 (Oct 14 – Jan 27)
Contact	Ivan Bakalov Mary-Somerville-Straße 9, 28359 Bremen UNICOM 1, Haus 7, Room: 7.3100 T: +49 421 218 66411 E: ibakalov@bigsss.uni-bremen.de
Office hours	Tue 16:00 – 18:00 (by appointment)

2. Course Description

The concept of soft power occupies a special position between academia and political practice. It has entered the parlance of political leaders around the world and is often used as a metaphor to describe a certain set of foreign policy measures. In academia it has been embraced by many as a term that intuitively captures a category of practice, although many more have dismissed the concept as fuzzy and ambiguous. Actually, uses of the concept as a category of analysis to help explain the dynamics of power relations in world politics have been few and far between. The aim of this seminar is to engage

students with questions of power in international relations and to explore the utility of the distinction between soft and hard power in the analysis of world politics. In-class discussions will challenge students to engage critically with different conceptions of soft power and to assess its added value both as an analytical tool and a political term. The course is designed for students who have already covered the basic curriculum in the discipline of international relations and are keen to deepen their analytical skills.

3. Learning Outcomes

Course participants will learn:

- About the development of the concept of soft power;
- About various critiques of soft power;
- About the different applications of soft power;
- How to compare different concepts of power;
- How to apply the concept of soft power in their own work;
- How to continuously work with a written text in order to improve it.

4. Course Assignments

To collect **3 credit points (CP)** students have to: (1) read the assigned texts for each session: core readings are mandatory; (2) participate actively in the course activities: students should bring the respective core reading to each session; (3) submit a position paper on: (a) a topic covered in Part II: Defining Soft Power (Sessions 4-6); or (b) on a topic covered in Part III: Debating Soft Power (Sessions 7-10); and (4) submit: (a) an essay extending and deepening the position paper; or (b) a second position paper on a different topic. The position paper and the essay each account for 50% of the grade. If two position papers are submitted, both account for 50%.

To collect **6 CP** students have to submit a research paper, in which they apply the concept of soft power to a topic of their choice, in addition to fulfilling tasks 1-3 outlined above. Course participants may choose to build on their position paper in the research paper, but this is not mandatory. The position paper accounts for 30% of the grade and the research paper – for 70%.

The credit points can apply to: (a) POL-M11: Internationale Politik (International Politics); (b) IES-M6a: Theorien der Politik (BPO 2018) (Theories of Politics), (c) “General Studies”, or (d) Erasmus. The same course requirements apply for all tracks (a-d).

Position paper (Schiftliche Textbesprechung)

The first option for a position paper (PP) topic (based on Part II: Defining Soft Power) encourages participants to engage in a discussion about the development of the concept of soft power as represented in the work of Nye. What are the key changes in the conceptualization? What makes these changes necessary? What are their implications for the study of soft power? For soft-power practice? What problems remain unresolved? These are some of the questions that can guide the argument in this paper. In any case, a position paper on this topic should focus on the work of Nye alone and is expected to include references to at least the core readings covered in sessions 4-6.

The other option for a PP topic (based on Part III: Debating Soft Power) invites participants to join the on-going debate about the concept of soft power. Course participants should address an unresolved conceptual issue discussed in class (sessions 7-9) and summarise how it is discussed in the literature. What is the conceptual issue? Why is it a problem? What can be done about it? Alternatively, the essay can draw a comparison between the concept of soft power and one of the competing concepts discussed in class (session 10). What is the difference between the concepts? What are the merits and shortcomings of each one? In either case, this paper should include references to publications of both Nye and his critics.

Requirements:

- Discuss topic with the instructor before beginning to write the PP.
- Length: 4-5 pages. Consult the Institute of Political Science's "[Study Guide](#)" (German version: "[Kompendium](#)") on layout and formatting (there are further useful hints in there as well). The word count includes the bibliography, but excludes cover page, the table of contents, and annexes where applicable.
- The position paper should be written in English.
- Include a cover page. Use the template available [here](#) ("Deckblatt für Hausarbeiten Bachelor").
- Submit via email (ibakalov@bigsss.uni-bremen.de) before our session on **13.01.2020**.

Essay

The essay is a text that builds on the argument presented in the PP. The assignment encourages course participants to continue working with their text after receiving feedback on it. This means that the

essay has to respond to the comments by either amending a certain line of argument or countering the critique with additional arguments. While course participants can freely use their text from the position paper, they can benefit from the opportunity to improve it in both form (style, grammar, formatting) and substance (argumentation). Students are expected to extend the list of references used in the PP.

Requirements:

- Discuss feedback on PP with the instructor before beginning to write the essay.
- Length: 8-10 pages. Consult the Institute of Political Science's "[Study Guide](#)" (German version: "[Kompendium](#)") on layout and formatting (there are further useful hints in there as well). The word count includes the bibliography, but excludes cover page, the table of contents, and annexes where applicable.
- The essay should be written in English.
- Include a cover page. Use the template available [here](#) ("Deckblatt für Hausarbeiten Bachelor").
- Submit via email (ibakalov@bigsss.uni-bremen.de) by: **31.03.2020**.

Research paper (Hausarbeit)

The research paper (RP) is a text in which course participants will be given the opportunity to apply the concept of soft power in their own empirical work. The task can be approached from two directions. The concept of soft power can be employed either as a category of analysis, whereby it is used as an analytical tool that allows the researcher to study a power relationship in world politics. Alternatively, the concept can be taken as a category of practice, whereby it is used to refer to a certain set of foreign policies pursued by an actor in world politics. In the first case, the RP would be about using the concept of soft power to shed light on an interesting occurrence/process/relationship, whereas in the second the concept of soft power would be used to elaborate a set of policies that can be implemented to achieve an objective. Students may choose to use their text from the PP, if they decide to build on the same topic for the RP. This decision will be reflected in the expected page length of the RP (see requirements below). Further guidance will be provided during the last session of the course, which will be partly devoted to the design of RPs, but participants are strongly encouraged to discuss their research ideas with the instructor early on. It is expected that the RP builds on a wider literature (i.e. reference list) than the one included in this syllabus.

Requirements:

- Discuss topic with the instructor well before beginning to write the research paper.
- Length: 15-20 pages (if PP is used) or 12-15 pages (if PP is not used). Consult the Institute of Political Science's "[Study Guide](#)" (German version: "[Kompendium](#)") on layout and formatting (there are further useful hints in there as well). The word count includes the bibliography, but excludes cover page, the table of contents, and annexes where applicable.
- The research paper should be written in English.
- Include a cover page. Use the template available [here](#) ("Deckblatt für Hausarbeiten Bachelor").
- Submit via email (ibakalov@bigsss.uni-bremen.de) by: **31.03.2020**.

5. Overview

Session Title	Date
Part I: Introduction	
1: Course Introduction	14.10.2019
2: Power and World Politics	21.10.2019
3: Categorisations of Power	28.10.2019
Part II: Defining Soft Power	
4: Joseph Nye I (Bound to Lead)	04.11.2019
5: Joseph Nye II (The Means to Success)	11.11.2019
6: Joseph Nye III (The Future of Power), <i>Student Feedback 1</i>	18.11.2019
Part III: Debating Soft Power	
7: The Critics I (Realists)	25.11.2019
8: The Critics II (Liberals)	02.12.2019
9: The Critics III (Constructivists)	09.12.2019
10: Alternative Concepts	16.12.2019
Part IV: Practical Applications	
<i>No Session</i>	06.01.2020
11: Category of Practice, <i>Deadline PP</i>	13.01.2020
12: Category of Analysis, <i>Student Feedback 2</i>	20.01.2020
13 + 14: Concluding Discussion + Design Session (longer session)	27.01.2020

6. Detailed Plan

Session 1: Course Introduction (14.10.2019)

The first session is meant to introduce participants to the seminar (topic, goals, and assignments). This session will provide a useful opportunity for us to exchange thoughts on our mutual expectations, as well as to map out the existing knowledge.

No readings for this session.

Session 2: Power and World Politics (21.10.2019)

Power is a key concept in the study of world politics. During this session we will discuss the roots of the concept, as well as its different uses and applications. We will talk about how our underlying assumptions about the social world shape our thinking about power.

Core reading:

Berenskoetter F (2007) Thinking about Power. In: Berenskoetter F and Williams MJ (eds), *Power in World Politics*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–22. (Available as an Ebook [here](#))

Additional reading:

Baldwin D (2013) Power and International Relations. In: Carlsnaes W, Risse T, and Simmons BA (eds), *Handbook of International Relations*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 273–297.

Session 3: Categorisations of Power (28.10.2019)

Nye's differentiation between soft and hard power is not the only classification of power in IR. During this session we will talk about why it makes sense to think about different types of power and what issues we need to deal with in this respect.

Core reading:

Barnett M and Duvall R (2005) Power in International Politics. *International Organization* 59(1): 39–75. ([Link](#))

Additional reading:

Baldwin D (2016) *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 3, 4 (pp. 49–122).

Session 4: Joseph Nye I: Bound to Lead (04.11.2019)

In sessions 4 through 6 we will trace the development of the soft power concept as represented in the work of its author – Joseph S. Nye, Jr. The concept has undergone considerable changes, which bear important implications for how we think about soft power and how we can use it in practice (both analytical and political). The selection of texts includes the first articulation of the concept in 1990, as well as two key revisions from 2004 and 2011, all three appearing at crucial moments in time from a U.S. perspective. We will begin with the discussion of an article that appeared right at the end of the Cold War.

Core reading:

Nye JS (1990) Soft Power. *Foreign Policy* 80: 153–171. ([Link](#))

Additional readings:

Kennedy P (1987). *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House Inc.

Nye JS (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.

Session 5: Joseph Nye II: The Means to Success (11.11.2019)

The session will be devoted to an article from 2004, based on the book from the same year, which is Nye's most cited work on soft power. It contains the most widely used definition of soft power. In the discussion we will address the political context in which these works were published (i.e. War in Iraq) and think about the role of soft power as a category of analysis and a category of practice.

Core reading:

Nye JS (2004) Soft Power and American Foreign Policy. *Political Science Quarterly* 119(2): 255–270. ([Link](#))

Additional reading:

Nye JS (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

Session 6: Joseph Nye III: The Future of Power (18.11.2019)

During this session we will discuss an article from 2011 (again based on a book), which offers a more comprehensive definition than the one from 2004 (though not as widely cited). It (the book more so than the article) provides an extensive elaboration of the term smart power for the first time. In the

discussion we will address the political context in which these works were published (i.e. challenges to U.S. hegemony) and think about the role of soft power as a category of analysis and a category of practice. We will conclude the session with a round of course evaluation, where participants will give their feedback on how the course is going.

Core reading:

Nye JS (2011) Power and Foreign Policy. *Journal of Political Power* 4(1): 9–24. ([Link](#))

Additional readings:

Nye JS (2011) *The Future of Power*. New York: Public Affairs.

Nye JS (2013) What China and Russia Don't Get about Soft Power. *Foreign Policy* [online], 29 Apr. Available from: http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/?wp_login_redirect=0.

Session 7: The Critics I: Realists (25.11.2019)

In sessions 7 through 10 we will discuss texts that challenge the concept of soft power from various theoretical standpoints. We will talk about how different schools of thought diverge in what they find problematic about soft power and discuss possibilities for systematising the problems of soft power (both in terms of analysis and practice). In session 7 we will look at a critique coming from a (neo-)realist position. We will start off the session with a discussion of the first round of feedback (collected during session 6).

Core reading:

Layne C (2010) The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power. In: Parmar I and Cox M (eds), *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 51–82. (Available as an Ebook [here](#))

Additional reading:

Ferguson N (2003) Power. *Foreign Policy* 134: 18–24.

Session 8: The Critics II: Liberals (02.12.2019)

This session will focus on an article that approaches the discussion on soft power from liberal grounds, in that it explores the links between soft power practice and liberal norms and values. In the discussion

we will think about the analytical and political implications of embedding norms and values (liberal or otherwise) in the concept of soft power.

Core reading:

Gallarotti G (2011) Soft Power: What it is, Why It's Important, and the Conditions for Its Effective Use. *Journal of Political Power* 4(1): 25–47. ([Link](#))

Additional readings:

Kearn DW (2011) The Hard Truths about Soft Power. *Journal of Political Power* 4(1): 65–85.

Keating VC and Kaczmarska K (2019) Conservative Soft Power: Liberal Soft Power Bias and the “Hidden” Attraction of Russia. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22(1): 1–27.

Session 9: The Critics III: Constructivists (09.12.2019)

It is sometimes assumed that hard power is a strictly realist understanding and that soft power is a constructivist concept. These relationships are, however, more complex. This session draws on an article that advances a nuanced critique of soft power that can serve as a springboard for a discussion about what is “realist” and what is “constructivist” about the concept.

Core reading:

Feklyunina V (2016) Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the Russian World(s). *European Journal of International Relations* 22(4): 773–796. ([Link](#))

Additional readings:

Bilgin P and Elis B (2008) Hard Power, Soft Power: Toward a More Realistic Power Analysis. *Insight Turkey* 10(2): 5–20.

Mattern JB (2005) Why Soft Power Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33(3): 583–612.

Session 10: Alternative Concepts (16.12.2019)

Some of the critics of soft power discuss its conceptual problems in an attempt to improve it as an analytical tool, but others suggest that it is better to dismiss the concept in favour of better ones (e.g. cultural statecraft, strategic narrative). Similarly, soft power as a category of practice has been substituted by terms like hybrid warfare, smart power, sharp power, and sticky power. The purpose of this session is to consider these alternatives and assess their merits and shortcomings. As there are

many alternative concepts, it will be up to the seminar participants to decide which ones to focus on (participants will have the opportunity to voice their opinion two weeks in advance, i.e. at the end of session 8).

(Possible) Readings:

Forsberg T and Smith H (2016) Russian Cultural Statecraft in the Eurasian Space. *Problems of Post-Communism* 63(3): 129–134. ([Link](#))

Johnson R (2018) Hybrid War and Its Countermeasures: A Critique of the Literature. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29(1): 141–163. ([Link](#))

Roselle L, Miskimmon A and O'Loughlin B (2014) Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power. *Media, War and Conflict* 7(1): 70–84. ([Link](#))

Session 11: Practical Applications I: Category of Practice (13.01.2020)

In the last part of the course (sessions 11 through 14) we will look at the application of soft power both as a category of practice and of analysis. In session 11 we will engage with the application of soft power as a political or policy tool. The discussion will address an example of a historical or current case where soft power was used in the practical sense. Participants will have the opportunity to select a text for discussion at the end of session 10.

(Possible) Readings:

Chatin M (2016) Brazil: Analysis of a Rising Soft Power. *Journal of Political Power* 9(3): 369-393. ([Link](#))

Nye JS (2013) Transcript of Witness Testimony to the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and UK Influence. London: House of Lords. ([Link](#))

Zanardi C (2016) China's Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: The Cases of Confucius Institutes and Chinese Naval Diplomacy. *Journal of Political Power* 9(3): 431-447. ([Link](#))

Session 12: Practical Applications II: Category of Analysis (20.01.2020)

Session 12 will focus on practical applications of soft power as an analytical tool. The discussion will build on two texts: the first adapting the concept of soft power to a qualitative research design, while the second – to a quantitative one. Each of the approaches has merits, while facing different challenges. We will conclude the session with a round of course evaluation, where participants will give their feedback on the course.

Core readings:

Daßler B, Kruck A and Zangl B (2019) Interactions Between Hard and Soft Power: The Institutional Adaptation of International Intellectual Property Protection to Global Power Shifts. *European Journal of International Relations* 25(2): 588–612. ([Link](#))

Goldsmith B and Horiuchi Y (2012) In Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for US Foreign Policy? *World Politics* 64(3): 555–585. ([Link](#))

Session 13 + 14: Practical Applications III: Concluding Discussion and Design
Session (27.01.2020)

In the final double session (i.e. longer) we will look back at the seminar and think about the conclusions we can draw from our discussions. This could be useful in the development of ideas for the essay and the research paper. The reading for this session advances the argument that soft power qualifies as a category of practice, but not as a category of analysis, thereby providing a point of departure for a debate on the general topic of the seminar. We will discuss the second round of feedback (collected during session 12).

Core reading:

Hall T (2010) An Unclear Attraction: A Critical Examination of Soft Power as an Analytical Category. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3(2): 189–211. ([Link](#))