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Switzerland seen from abroad in 2019

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*The calls for action of the women's strike were heard by the New York Times.
Photo featured in the June 14, 2019 issue.*

KEY POINTS IN BRIEF

- Switzerland's image abroad was once again positive, multifaceted, and stable in 2019.
- In 2019, the women's strike, the climate, the gains made by the Green parties in Switzerland's federal elections, and the digital currency Libra were topics of particular focus in the foreign press and on social media.
- The perception of Switzerland in the media was also strongly influenced by annually recurring topics such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Swiss athletes, the country's status as a financial centre, and direct democracy.
- News items that were highly entertaining or capable of eliciting strong emotions attracted the most viral distribution on social media. Some examples focused on how Switzerland deals with animal rights.
- Along with the manner in which Switzerland is governed, its quality in terms of business location and standard of living continues to earn the country an excellent reputation among people abroad. Switzerland's own citizens, exports, and innovations represent further strong points with regard to its image.

Introduction

The following report from Presence Switzerland illustrates how Switzerland was perceived abroad in 2019. The first section of the report focuses on **reporting on Switzerland in the foreign press and on social media** outside of the country: which topics and events played the greatest role in how Switzerland is perceived abroad? Which Switzerland-related news items that were published in foreign media or on online platforms received the most viral distribution on social media in 2019?

The second section of the report analyses the **public perception of Switzerland** in 20 countries. Based on the results of the 2019 Nation Brands Index (NBI), it reveals where Switzerland's strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of its image abroad and how it fares in international comparison.

A summary and an assessment of the most important findings of the report are provided in the conclusion. This recapitulates the topics and events that have been particularly important in shaping Switzerland's image abroad in the past year and discusses the impact they have had on how Switzerland is perceived.

Switzerland through the eyes of the foreign press and social media

The women's strike, the climate, the electoral gains made by the Green parties, and the planned Geneva-based digital currency Libra were topics of particular focus in the media

In 2019, the coverage Switzerland received in the foreign press¹ and on social media was multifaceted and largely associated with positive aspects. This following section highlights the most important events that shaped perceptions of the country; they are presented by subject area. As in years past, the **World Economic Forum (WEF) (1)** in Davos (see fig. 1) garnered the most media coverage. Donald Trump's short-notice decision not to attend and the appearance of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg were followed with particular interest in the foreign media and on Twitter. Although Switzerland itself was not the focus of the reporting, the fact that Davos was frequently mentioned as the site of the event reinforced the country's image as an important setting for sharing views on an international scale.

Following this annual prelude (which traditionally receives significant media coverage), Switzerland's external image was frequently shaped by its status as a **financial centre**. Two tendencies were apparent in this regard: on the one hand, the foreign press frequently provided positive coverage of the general conditions that favour digital innovations in the area of finance in Switzerland. On the other hand, there were also reports on the handling of past financial and tax-related scandals that continued to give new life to negative stereotypes. In February, the **fine levied against UBS in France (2)** in the amount of EUR 3.7 billion reflected poorly on Switzerland's reputation as a financial centre. Foreign media around the world reported on the extraordinary size of the fine – some of them on their front pages. They described it as the highest monetary penalty the French authorities had ever imposed for tax evasion and money laundering. Meanwhile, other controversial financial and tax-related affairs involving the undeclared Swiss bank accounts of people from South America, Spain, and France gave rise to negative reports. Another event that was followed with great interest abroad was the scandal involving **Credit Suisse and its surveillance of two former employees (16)**. Over a period of several weeks, foreign business media reported on the Swiss financial centre as the scene of a sensational bankers' feud. Criticism was levelled at Credit Suisse and its top management in the media and the bank's credibility was called into question.

At the same time, Switzerland also received a great deal of positive attention as a financial centre thanks to regular reporting on the automatic exchange of information in tax matters and the country's efforts to combat international tax evasion. This topic was particularly prominent in India, which exchanged financial data with Switzerland for the first time in 2019. The media often reported on Switzerland in connection with fintech, as well. This coverage centred on Facebook's planned **cryptocurrency, Libra, which is to be based in Geneva (13)**; and on the world's first licences for blockchain financial service providers, which were granted by the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA). In this context, most of the year's newspaper articles and social media posts portrayed Switzerland as an innovative pioneer on regulatory issues. Because of Switzerland's neutrality, openness to blockchain technology, legal stability and international organisations, the choice of Geneva as a potential location for the administration of the new cryptocurrency often received positive commentary.

¹ The media analysis was based on Presence Switzerland's continuous monitoring of all coverage of Switzerland by the most important leading media outlets of 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States), as well as by EU media and the leading media in the Arab world. It examines both print and online editions, along with press reviews provided by Swiss representations abroad. Social media: all social media posts related to Switzerland were analysed. Languages covered: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. The posts mainly originated from people abroad. Since many users have deactivated the geolocalisation function on social media, however, it was not possible to fully exclude posts made by Swiss citizens from the analysis.



Foreign media reported the opportunities presented by Libra but also highlighted its risks. The focus here was on reservations expressed in EU countries and the United States in particular about the danger that Libra could be used for money laundering and financing of terrorism and on calls to ensure that national sovereignty be guaranteed.

The **Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland** was once again the subject of foreign press coverage in 2019. In connection with the handling of the affairs surrounding FIFA, **Attorney General Michael Lauber (5)** became the focus of media reports on several occasions starting in late April due to mistakes that may have been made during his office's handling of the investigation into corruption in world football. His re-election also attracted attention from a number of foreign outlets. While the reporting on Mr Lauber was largely objective, there were isolated cases in which it opened the door for critical commentary on the Swiss authorities' role in clearing up the FIFA scandal. Over the course of the year, the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland was also covered in several instances in the context of the corruption affairs surrounding the Brazilian corporations Petrobras and Odebrecht. Switzerland's cooperation in getting to the bottom of these cases was often given positive emphasis.

While the subject was not reported on as extensively as within the country, 2019 was another year in which **Switzerland's policies regarding Europe** drew regular attention from the foreign media. These outlets took an especially strong interest in the EU's decision **not to extend Switzerland's stock exchange equivalence (10)** in late June, which followed the

Federal Council's decision to postpone indefinitely its signing of the proposed institutional agreement with the EU. Foreign media across the world reported on the decision handed down in Brussels and interpreted it as an attempt by the EU to exert pressure. The European press was largely supportive of the EU's position, underscoring the drawn-out negotiation process and the numerous compromises it had made. A number of opinion pieces published in the German and Austrian press in particular criticised what they perceived as Swiss hesitancy. On the other hand, much of the British media tended to side with Switzerland against the backdrop of Brexit. The relationship between Switzerland and the EU were also discussed on social media, particularly in the United Kingdom as part of the Brexit debate.

Another topic widely covered in the foreign press was **Switzerland's approach to firearms**. First of all, the **referendum on reforming the country's firearm law (7)** on 19 May garnered a relatively high level of interest in the global press. With many other countries engaged in similar debates, most opinions on the results of the referendum ranged from neutral to positive. Meanwhile, the media often made reference to Switzerland's deeply rooted firearms culture. The Swiss approach to firearms was frequently cited as **an example for the United States to follow (7)**. A tweet containing national statistics on deaths caused by firearms – with Switzerland ranking near the bottom of the list despite its large proportion of gun owners – found a particularly large audience (109 000 likes and 44 400 retweets). The tweet was posted by a US citizen affiliated with the Democratic Party.

right-hand page: This infographic presents in chronological order the most important events related to Switzerland that were covered in the foreign press and social media. The numbered events have been selected and explained further in the report based on their volume and significance. The size of each circle serves as an estimate of how much the respective topic was covered (the larger the circle, the more extensive the coverage).

Image of Switzerland by event



Figure 1: key events that shaped the perception of Switzerland in conventional and social media

The story involving a local employee of the Swiss embassy in Sri Lanka (19), who at the end of



November was abducted, threatened and subsequently detained by the Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly making false statements, received a great deal of attention in the foreign media for several weeks. The ensuing dispute between Switzerland and Sri Lanka was widely covered by the media. The Sri Lankan media portrayed a mainly negative image of Switzerland, in part by vehemently questioning Switzerland's version of events. Coverage of the acquittal at the beginning of December of twelve supporters of the Tamil Tigers by the Swiss Federal Supreme Court caused added outrage in Sri Lanka. Outside Sri Lanka, the abduction case involving the embassy employee also attracted some attention, but the reporting here was factual and less extensive.



As every year, Switzerland's good offices were regularly discussed in connection with current events. In 2019, the conflict between the USA and Iran was a particular focus of media attention, with prominent references to the protective power mandates. An **exchange of prisoners between the USA and Iran (20)** mediated by Switzerland

The **women's strike (9)** that took place in Switzerland on 14 June attracted a great deal of attention abroad in both the traditional and social media. The reports expressed their view on shortcomings in gender equality in the country, explained the demands of those on strike, and enabled Swiss women to have their voices heard regarding the concerns that had motivated them to participate. The tone was mainly critical of Switzerland's policy on gender equality and implicitly supportive of the women. The international media was impressed by the strength and presence of the Swiss women's movement. The women's strike achieved a high degree of visibility on Twitter, as well: several thousand tweets and retweets on the topic were posted on the day of the strike and the day after. The newspaper articles and social media posts portrayed Switzerland as a country lagging behind in terms of gender equality. The results achieved by women in the National Council and Council of States elections in the autumn offered readers something of a corrective to that negative image (see the section on the federal elections on page 7).



Reflecting the topic's global relevance, **Switzerland's efforts with regard to climate change** attracted coverage in the media on a regular basis. The foreign press and social media took a particular interest in the symbolic **funeral procession that was held for the melted Pizol Glacier in the canton of St Gallen (15)**. At the same time, numerous Swiss studies on climate change were also the subject of various reports. This coverage put the spotlight on Switzerland as a country that is setting standards in climate change research. Various demonstrations held by climate



activists also drew media attention, as did the ways in which Swiss policymakers are addressing climate change. The media reported on the 2050 climate target approved by the Federal Council, for example, and on the climate-related measures proposed by the Environmental Commission of the Council of States. These articles fostered the image of a civil society that is actively engaged in the climate issue and politicians who are taking up the challenges posed by climate change.

The topics of women and the climate were also featured prominently in connection with the international coverage of the **federal elections** (18) held on 20 October. These reports centred on the electoral gains made by the Green Party and the Green Liberal Party, as well as on the successes achieved by women across party lines. In light of the climate demonstrations and the women's strike, many members of the media interpreted the results primarily as a consequence of Switzerland's strong civil society. They attributed particular importance to the climate issue, citing the fact that melting glaciers make the country especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Many foreign media outlets also took the federal elections as an opportunity to once again highlight the special characteristics of Switzerland's political system



In October, the **Nobel Prize in Physics** (17) was awarded to two Swiss astrophysicists, Michel Mayor and Didier Queloz, along with the Canadian-American researcher James Peebles. This recognition resonated favourably across conventional and social media around the world. The reports on the year's highest distinction in the field of physics had a positive effect on Switzerland's image as a centre of research.

The past year was another in which various Swiss **athletes** shined thanks to their achievements, which drew considerable positive attention in both traditional and social media. Particularly prominent among the topics covered abroad was **Roger Federer's 100th tournament win** (3) on the ATP Tour in March. Alone Federer's tweet to mark the event generated 152 000 likes and 22 300 retweets. In June, the **Swiss national football team's UEFA Nations League match** (8) against Portugal to determine which would move on to the final – and another against England for third place – met with a very large response, especially on Twitter.



The circumstances surrounding the South African track-and-field athlete and Olympic gold medal winner **Caster Semenya** (12) also attracted much media attention abroad. The case first drew international attention in May, when the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne rejected Semenya's legal challenge against the 'testosterone rule' issued by the International Federation of Athletics Associations. The case then took on a Swiss dimension when Semenya appealed to the Federal Supreme Court in June. The court provisionally suspended the rule for the South African athlete, but reversed its provisional ruling at the end of July. The foreign media largely reported the facts of the case without taking sides, however the Federal Supreme Court's ruling made little sense to some.

In May, the participation of Swiss singer **Luca Hänni in the Eurovision Song Contest** (6) generated a large amount of enthusiasm on social media and among television viewers around the world. With 360 points, Hänni earned Switzerland fourth place, the country's best result in 26 years. The music video for the song *She Got Me* amassed over ten million views on YouTube and thousands of positive comments. The **Fête des Vignerons** (11) was another event that raised awareness of Swiss **culture** this year. Leading media outlets around the world reported in detail on this winegrowers' festival, and on the host region of Vevey.



Besides having a home-grown musician like Luca Hänni to help shape its image abroad, Switzerland also collaborated with a music group from outside the country to raise its profile among foreign audiences this year. **The Korean pop group Red Velvet (14)** was invited by Switzerland Tourism to tour the country in September and draw their fans' attention to Switzerland as a travel destination. Thanks to the group's enormous presence in Korea, where they have 8.4 million followers on Instagram, all of their travel-related posts attracted between 340 000 and 830 000 likes on the platform.



Elsewhere on social media, perceptions of Switzerland were influenced greatly by a National Council committee motion calling for a **ban on the shredding of live chicks (4)** in the country.



When the National Council accepted the motion in March, the social media response to the news was immense. The Council of States' adoption of the motion and the Federal Council's decision to amend the Animal Welfare Ordinance accordingly in October resonated to a similar extent.

Various news items convey an unusual side of Switzerland on social media

Switzerland's approach to animal rights and unusual Swiss stories go viral on Facebook

	Articles	Sources	Activité sur Facebook
1	This Movie Theater Lets You Watch Movies While Relaxing In Double Beds	Simplemost	2,2 Mio.
2	Switzerland Makes It Illegal To Own Just One Guinea Pig Because They Get Lonely	Mystical Raven	605200
3	Switzerland to rerun referendum because voters got false information	The London Economic	375300
4	Switzerland May Soon Ban All Factory Farms	Live Kindly	312900
5	En Suisse, ces échelles permettent aux chats d'appartement de sortir et de rentrer quand ils le souhaitent	Creapills	288300
6	Los Pujol llegaron a acumular 18 millones en un fondo de Suiza	El Confidencial	283900
7	Coffee not essential for life, Swiss government says	BBC	259300
8	Encuentran bocetos originales de «El Principito» en una casa de Suiza	Clarín	242300
9	En Suiza los diputados ganan menos que un profesor	Muhimu	197700
10	A Man From Switzerland Donates One Billion Dollars To Save The Earth	I heart intelligence	182500

Figure 2: The top ten news items related to Switzerland that drove the most user engagement on Facebook

Figure 2 offers an overview of the ten news items that generated the most engagement (measured in terms of likes, shares, and comments) on Facebook. The list shows that the topics that draw interest among global social media audiences are often those that exhibit a certain curiosity factor and are not typically associated with Switzerland.

At the top of the ten articles was a news item about a new multiplex cinema in Spreitenbach (AG) that is furnished with double beds instead of seats. Following its publication on the online platform *Simplemost*, the post generated the most engagement by far on Facebook (2.2 million likes, shares, and comments; first place). Second place went to an article on Switzerland's Animal Welfare Ordinance, which forbids owners of guinea pigs and other social animals from keeping them in individual enclosures (2nd place).

In addition to the way in which the country has enshrined the needs of such creatures in law, two other news items on Switzerland's approach to animal rights made the top ten: One related to the federal popular initiative "No Factory Farming in Switzerland" in September, which was widely distributed on Facebook thanks to a report by the online magazine *Live Kindly* (4th place). The second was a French article on Swiss cat ladders, which met with considerable enthusiasm on Facebook (5th place). This stemmed from the publication of a photo book titled *Swiss Cat Ladders*.

These topics show that news items that are shared most widely on social media tend to appeal to people's emotions (such as animal welfare stories) or have a what-will-they-think-of-next entertainment value (e.g. the cinema with double beds). While such reports are not extraordinarily important for the broader public, they have a large amount of news value on social media thanks to their ability to amuse, astonish, or elicit agreement or disapproval.

Reports about the Federal Supreme Court's annulment of the results of the popular referendum on the initiative to reduce the tax burden for married couples (the "marriage penalty") – a topic that is closely related to Switzerland's direct democracy – were widely shared on Facebook (3rd place). In the context of the Brexit debate, this news – which met with the most interest through the online magazine *The London Economic* – attracted a great deal of attention in the United Kingdom. Through the *BBC*, the Federal Council's plans to review the compulsory stockpiling of coffee (7th place) was another very widely shared news item.

The ten news items that reached the most people in 2019 also included three reports from Spanish-speaking countries. Generating the most engagement was an article in the Spanish investigative newspaper *El Confidencial*, which reported on illicit assets belonging to associates of the former head of Catalonia's regional government that were found in Swiss bank accounts (6th place). These assets had come to light during investigations in a corruption case. Through the Argentinian newspaper *Clarín*, the discovery in Winterthur in the canton of Zurich of previously unknown sketches made by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry for his children's classic *The Little Prince* also proved popular with a large number of readers (8th place). The third widely shared topic followed the publication by a Spanish news portal of an article about the relatively modest salaries of Swiss parliamentarians, which surprised many because of the stereotype that everyone in Switzerland is very well off (9th place). Rounding out the top ten was an article about Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss and his plans to donate a billion dollars to nature preservation efforts across the globe over the next ten years (10th place).

The fact that reports on subjects that are perceived as strange or curious go viral as they do can be explained by considering how social media platforms work: unlike conventional mass media, these platforms do not operate based on journalistic criteria. Instead, algorithms personalise each news feed in a manner designed to keep the user engaged with the platform for as long as possible, which serves a commercial purpose. To achieve this goal, it is not the news items with significant social relevance that are displayed, but those that have a pronounced ability to amaze and/or entertain. In line with this logic, Switzerland is often perceived through the lens of 'entertainment', 'lifestyle' or another soft-journalism category – that is, those that reveal an unusual side of the country, affect users on an emotional level, and encourage them to interact with the platform in question.

Switzerland's image among populations abroad

Governance, quality of life and business location, and citizens are cornerstones of Switzerland's positive image

The foreign press and social media are not the only factors that play an important role in how Switzerland is perceived. The country's image among foreign populations is also key. One suitable instrument for gauging Switzerland's reputation abroad and comparing it against other nations is the Nation Brands Index (NBI)². Each year, the NBI assesses the strength and attractiveness of countries' images. The perception of Switzerland and 49 other nations is surveyed among the general populations of 20 countries around the world, which are selected based on their economic and geopolitical significance. The NBI reveals where the strengths and weaknesses of Switzerland's image lie, along with how it has changed in recent years. Six dimensions of perception are evaluated in this reputation index: export products/innovation, governance, culture/sport, people, tourism, and immigration/investment. Each of these dimensions comprises several indicators (see figure 3).

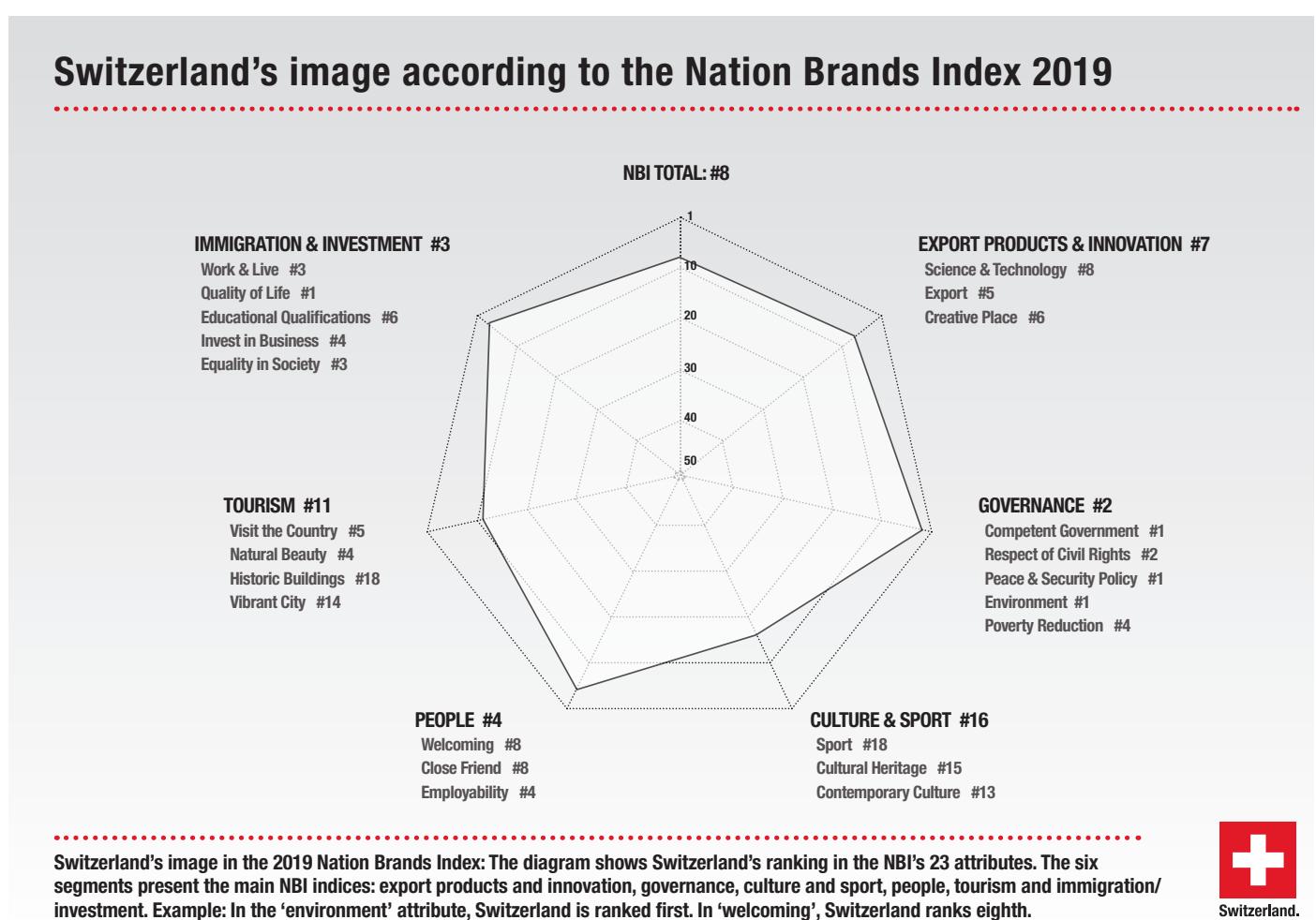


Figure 3: Switzerland's image according to the 2019 Nation Brands Index

² The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) assesses the images of 50 countries. It takes six dimensions into account: export products/innovation, governance, culture/sports, people, tourism, and immigration/investment. The NBI covers 20 countries and collects a total sample size of around 20 000 interviews. Adults over the age of 18 with internet access are surveyed. The NBI conducts surveys in 20 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

While recent years have witnessed relatively strong shifts within the top ten (the election of Donald Trump, for example, polarised the global public and caused the USA to fall five places according to the study's authors), Switzerland's image has remained stable. In NBI 2019, the country came in eighth in the 50-place ranking for the eighth straight year. This top-ten position shows that Switzerland's image abroad has been outstanding for years. Switzerland remains the best-ranked medium-sized nation, ahead of Sweden, the Netherlands, and Austria. That said, Switzerland's placement does vary in the assessment of the individual countries involved (see figure 4): Switzerland receives its best marks from Germany, China, and Russia (4th place), where the country is held in especially high regard in terms of immigration/investment and governance. While the least favourable evaluations come from Sweden (9th place), the UK (10th place), and Italy (12th place), perceptions of Switzerland in Sweden and Italy have improved overall since 2017. There have been positive changes in China, Egypt, and the USA, as well. Switzerland's reputation has improved most consistently in Russia in recent years. By contrast, Switzerland's image has grown increasingly worse in South Africa, which can be attributed primarily to declining assessments in the areas of immigration/investment and culture/sport.

As placing eighth in the overall NBI ranking indicates, Switzerland possesses a strong global brand. One cornerstone of Switzerland's positive image is **governance** – a category in which the country is viewed as excellent and second only to Canada. In international comparison, Switzerland is perceived as a country with an honest and competent government that is highly engaged with regard to citizens' rights, peace, and security, as well as in efforts to fight poverty and protect the environment. On the subject of Switzerland's involvement in environmental protection in particular, the general public's perception thus matches that of the media, which frequently covered such topics over the past year.

Alongside this positive image of Switzerland's political system, **immigration and investment** are seen as one of the country's major strengths. In this area of perception, Switzerland comes in third behind only Canada and Germany. In terms of quality of life, meanwhile, Switzerland is second to none: no other country offers a higher quality of life in the eyes of those surveyed.

The Swiss **people** also enjoy a very good reputation, as their fourth place in the NBI indicates. The employability of Swiss citizens garners particularly strong reviews. Furthermore, Switzerland rates very well thanks to its **export products and innovations** (7th place): Swiss products are especially popular abroad, and the country itself is viewed as a creative place. Switzerland's recognised status as a centre of science and research is also considered a strength. This is another finding that is reflected in the media's coverage, where the research activities of Swiss universities are regularly reported on abroad (see page 7 for a section on the Nobel Prize in Physics).

Opinions of Switzerland as a **tourist destination** are more mixed: people abroad describe Switzerland as a place with a spectacular landscape that they would like to visit – if money were no object. At the same time, those surveyed do not associate Switzerland with historic buildings or monuments, or with vibrant cities. This discrepancy was why Switzerland ranked no higher than the top end of mid-ranking countries in terms of tourism (11th place).

The area in which Switzerland performed most modestly, however, was **culture and sport** (16th place). People abroad view both Switzerland's cultural heritage and its contemporary contributions to culture as rather average. With regard to sport, perceptions diverge widely between the media and the general public (see page 7 for more on Swiss athletes). Despite its major accomplishments in tennis and football – and the fact that these achievements attract media interest abroad – Switzerland is generally unable to keep pace with leading nations like France, Germany, or the USA when it comes to sport

Ranking of Switzerland in the Nation Brands Index in international comparison

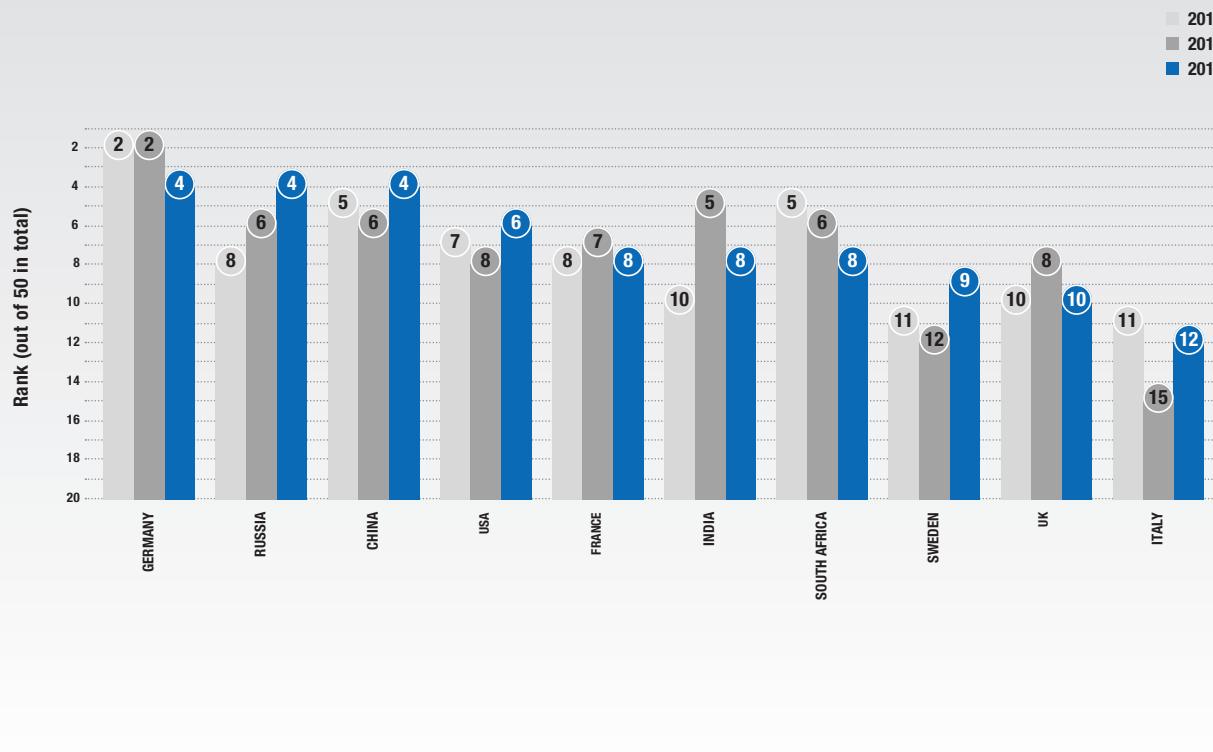


Figure 4: Switzerland's rank in the assessment of select Nation Brands Index countries over time



Conclusion: Switzerland's image abroad 2019

Foreign media reports concerning Switzerland covered a wide variety of topics in 2019, many of which were favourable to Switzerland's image. While coverage included certain controversial topics, the analysis shows that overall Switzerland's image abroad is **positive and stable**. Perceptions of Switzerland are positive not only in the media but also among the general public in other nations. The Nation Brands Index 2019 confirms Switzerland has a very good image: its governance, its quality in terms of business location and standard of living continue to earn the country an excellent reputation. Swiss export products, Swiss innovation and the Swiss people themselves add a further boost to Switzerland's image abroad.

Compared with previous years, 2019 was relatively quiet in terms of media coverage of Switzerland. A few events and topics with a Swiss connection reported on by the foreign media had a significant impact on Switzerland's image. On the occasion of the **women's strike**, the global media provided extensive coverage of Switzerland's position on equality. The reporting addressed both the shortcomings of Swiss gender equality policy and the influence of the Swiss women's movement. The women's strike had great media impact due to its strong mobilisation and the current global debates on equal rights.

Switzerland also gained much media visibility through its **approach to climate change**: owing to the global significance of the issue, various related news items were picked up worldwide. The consequences of climate change are particularly evident in Switzerland because our glaciers are melting. This generates media interest around the world. Switzerland is seen as a country that is getting to grips with the challenges of climate change and looking seriously for solutions.

Reporting on the planned **cryptocurrency Libra** and other fintech developments also showed Switzerland in an innovative light, presenting a side of the Swiss financial centre that broke with the usual stereotypes and clichés. The thematic focus of the media reports shows that in 2019 the trend of recent years continued: reporting on the Swiss financial centre is no longer dominated by controversial financial and tax-related scandals, while more positive topics such as the automatic exchange of information or the regulatory environment for new fintech developments are increasingly attracting media attention.

Switzerland's image was also strongly influenced by **annually recurring themes** such as the World Economic Forum, education and research in Switzerland, European policy and Swiss sportsmen and women. By contrast, referendums had less of an impact on Switzerland's image than in previous years: votes on urban sprawl, the revision of firearms legislation and the tax and pensions reform bill met with comparatively little interest abroad. Migration and integration issues in Switzerland also had a lower profile: while in 2018, for example, the full-face veil ban in the canton of St Gallen attracted a fair amount of media attention, there were no comparable events in 2019 that had a broad impact on Switzerland's image.

A look at the **portrayal of Switzerland on social media** shows that news with a high entertainment value or highly emotional content has the greatest viral spread. This is partly due to the fact that such widely shared social media posts challenge commonly held perceptions of Switzerland, often causing surprise and eliciting responses from users around the world. Last year, for example, this concerned posts on Switzerland's approach to animal rights and quirky pieces on things like the compulsory stockpiling of coffee or a Swiss cinema equipped with double beds instead of seats. This sometimes unusual perspective on social media adds extra layers to perceptions of Switzerland abroad.

PICS

Page 1: @ AFP / Stefan Wermuth

Page 5:

German Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel with Swiss President Ueli Maurer – © German Embassy

UBS – © KEYSTONE/Ennio Leanza

Roger Federer – © KEYSTONE/ EPA/Ali Haider

Chicks – © pixnio.com

Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland – © DFF - Office fédéral des constructions et de la logistique

Luca Hänni – © Cyril Schmid/ Luca Music GmbH

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