



SMITHSONIAN
HANDBOOKS



COMPLETE FLAGS OF THE WORLD



REVISED & UPDATED
5TH EDITION

WORLD MAP

(see back endpaper for Europe and Caribbean detail)





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COMPLETE FLAGS OF THE WORLD





LONDON, NEW YORK, MELBOURNE
MUNICH, AND DELHI

This book was produced in association with The Flag Institute, UK.

We would like to dedicate this book to the late Dr. William G. Crampton,
Director of the Flag Institute, without whom it would not have been possible.

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Introduction

Flags are part of everyday life. They are used by countries, provinces, cities, international bodies, organizations, and companies.

EARLY FLAGS

The earliest known flags were used in China, to indicate different parts of the army. In Europe flags began with the Roman vexillum, a square flag used by Roman cavalry, from which the term “vexillology”—the study of flags—originated. In the Middle Ages, heraldry became important as a means of identifying kings and lords. The distinctive coats of arms which developed were used as flags, and some still exist today.

FLAGS FOR IDENTIFICATION

The most significant development of flags was for use at sea. Ships flew flags for identification at a distance, and many of the rules of flag-use developed at sea. Some well-known flags were designed specifically for naval use, including the Dutch and Spanish flags (*see pages 121 & 136*) and the International code flags (*see page 238*), which were used by ships to communicate with each other.

POLITICAL FLAGS

With the growth of independent nation states, flags have become

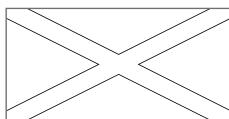
more important in politics. Many newly-independent states choose flags based on those of the political parties which secured independence. Revolutionary movements usually have their own flags, and private and professional organizations are increasingly adopting flags.

This book deals with national, international and subnational flags, and national coats of arms, and is arranged continent by continent. Among national flags are the state ensign and flag, for government use only on sea and land; the civil ensign and flag, for private and commercial use; and the naval ensign, flown by warships. Subnational flags may be of states (USA), provinces (Canada), cantons (Switzerland), overseas territories, or other such areas.

KEY FLAGS IN WORLD HISTORY

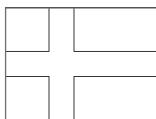
Throughout history certain flags have become the inspiration of others, starting with the Stars and Stripes in 1777 (*see pages 11–12*) ; which has inspired more flags than any other. The same degree of influence has been exercised by the French Tricolore from 1794, (*see page 131*), the Dutch Tricolor (*see page 121*) and its major derivative the Russian Tricolor (*see page 168*) which gave rise to most of the flags of eastern Europe.

Types of flags

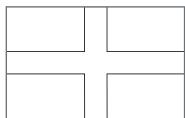


SALTIRE

A diagonal cross stretching from corner to corner of the flag.

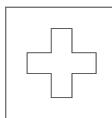


SCANDINAVIAN CROSS



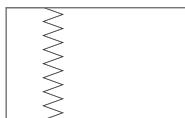
CROSS

A cross is vertical, centrally placed, and extends across the whole flag.



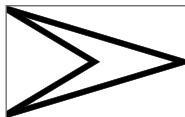
COUPED CROSS OR SALTIRE

A cross or saltire which ends short of the edges of the flag is couped.



SERRATION

A narrow strip of color separating two broader stripes or larger areas.



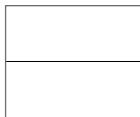
FIMBRIATED

A narrow strip of color separating two broader stripes or larger areas.



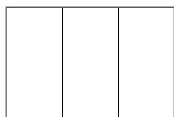
QUARTERED

A flag divided into four equal sections of differing design.



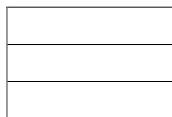
BICOLOR

A flag of two stripes of different colors, either horizontal or vertical.



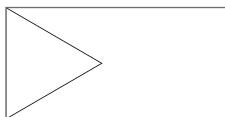
TRICOLOR

A flag of three stripes of three colors, either horizontal or vertical.



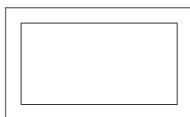
TRIBAR

A flag of three stripes of two colors, horizontal or vertical.



TRIANGLE

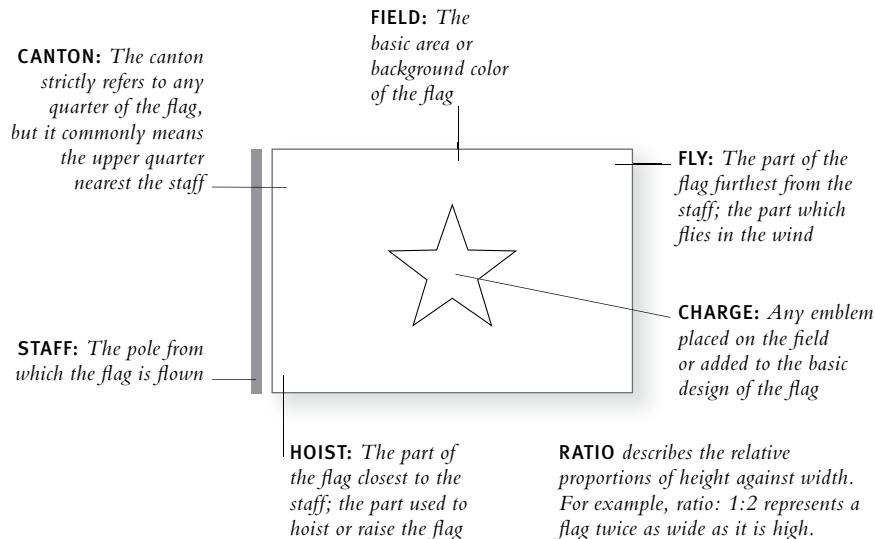
A flag divided by a triangle of a different color, usually at the hoist.



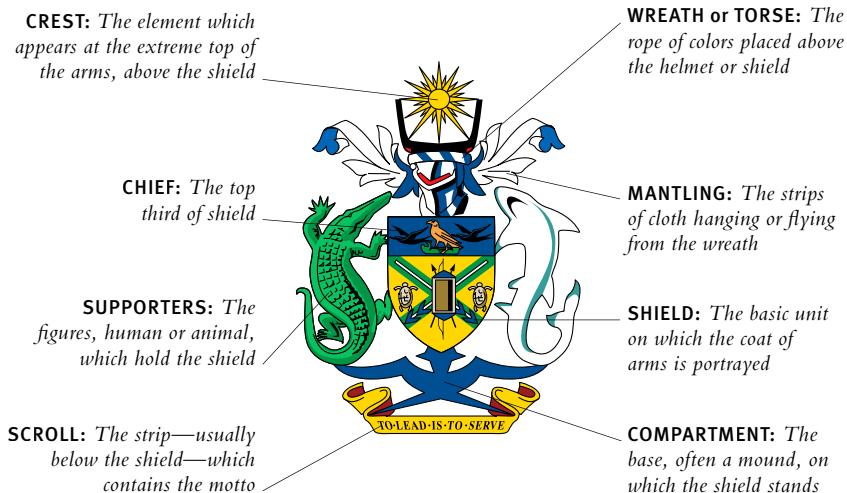
BORDERED

A flag where the central color is surrounded by a different color.

Parts of the flag

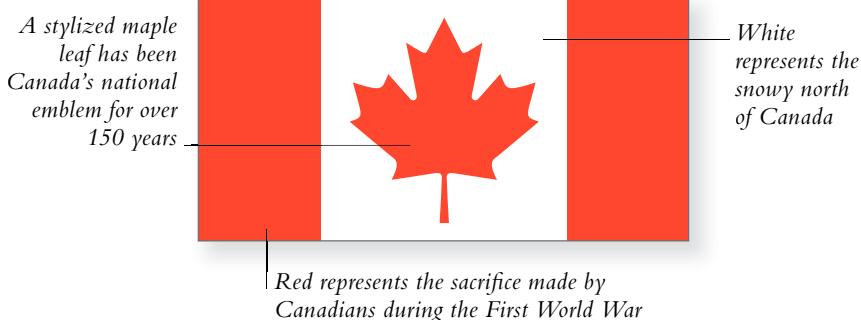


Heraldic terms



Canada

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: February 15, 1965 Usage: National and Civil



North America



Canada became a nation in 1867 when four colonies united. Later, six other provinces and two territories joined the Confederation.

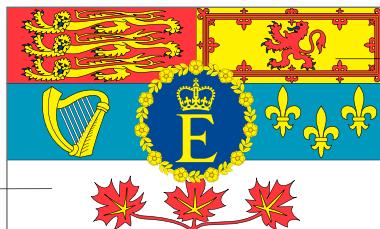
The Royal Standard shows the Arms of Canada, with the personal emblem of Queen Elizabeth II. The quarters show the arms of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France, the historical origin for the majority of European settlers to Canada. The lowest stripe shows the red maple leaf which is Canada's national emblem.

THE NEW MAPLE LEAF FLAG

Pearson's Pennant did not meet with universal approval, and consensus was only reached on the idea of the maple leaf and on the use of the national colors. The result was the "Maple Leaf Flag" which was adopted by Parliament in 1965. The Union Flag is often flown to show Canada's links with the United Kingdom.

CANADIAN ROYAL STANDARD

The maple leaves represent Canada's national emblem



Provincial flags

The date when each province joined the Confederation is shown below the province name.



ALBERTA

1905

The shield dates from 1907 and was placed on a blue field to make a flag in 1967. The shield depicts a scene from the vast wheat lands of the west under a St. George's Cross.



BRITISH COLUMBIA

1871

This flag, adopted in 1960, is an armorial banner of the arms, granted in 1906. The sun placed over heraldic waters, represents the province's position on the west coast.



MANITOBA

1870

The flag is intended to recall and to preserve the old Canadian Red Ensign, with Manitoba's shield, depicting a bison on a rock, in the fly. It was adopted in 1966.



NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

1949

The colors of the flag represent all aspects of the province, such as snow, ice, and the sea. The design is intended to recall the Union Jack, the previous flag.



NEW BRUNSWICK

1867

Another armorial banner, authorized in 1965. The galley ship stands for shipbuilding, once an important industry, and the lion represents New Brunswick's ties to Britain.



NOVA SCOTIA

1867

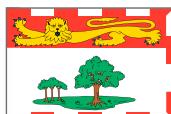
Theoretically the oldest flag of a British Dominion. "Nova Scotia" means New Scotland. Its flag is a St. Andrew's Cross in reversed colors, with the Scottish Royal Arms.



ONTARIO

1867

The flag was adopted in 1965 and also attempts to recall and preserve the Canadian Red Ensign. The shield is from the arms of 1868 and was the first design to use a maple leaf.



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

1873

The flag is a banner of the arms granted in 1905. It depicts an island, with a great British oak and its "descendants," under the protection of a British lion.

Canada: Provincial and official flags



QUEBEC
1867

Adopted in 1948, this flag is a modern version of the *Fleurdelisé*, an old French-Canadian flag. The *fleur-de-lis* flower is symbolic of France.



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
1870

The flag was a competition winner in 1969. It contains the shield from the arms adopted in 1956. The lakes are represented by blue, snow by white.



YUKON TERRITORY
1898

Accepted in 1967, the flag uses the 1956 coat of arms. Forests, snows and waters are symbolized by the colors.



LABRADOR

The spruce sprigs on this regional flag denote the three races of the larger Newfoundland & Labrador Province.



GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF CANADA
1981

This flag, dating from 1981, does not use the British Royal Crest; it has its own crest of a lion with a maple leaf.



SASKATCHEWAN
1905

Adopted in 1969, the flag combines the provincial shield (representing forests and grain) with the floral emblem, the western red lily.



NUNAVUT
1999

The figure on this flag symbolizes the stone monuments used to mark sacred places. The North Star represents the leadership of the community's elders.



CAPE BRETON ISLAND
1994

This competition-winning flag was adopted in 1994 by Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. The bird is a bald eagle.

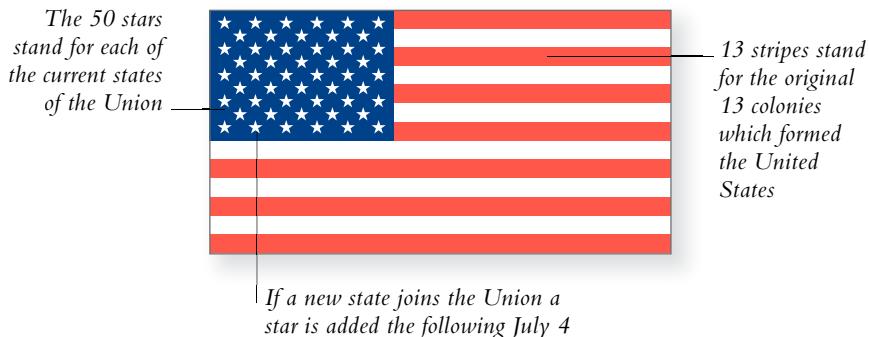


THE UNION FLAG
OF 1606-1801

When the USA became independent, some people refused to give up their British nationality. Known as United Empire Loyalists, they moved to Canada. To honor them, the Union Flag in the pattern of that time is often flown.

United States of America

Ratio: 10:19 Adopted: 1960 Usage: National and Civil



North America



The United States was formed when 13 colonies rose against the British in 1775. They declared their independence from Britain on July 4, 1776.

The first flag used by the Americans was an adaptation of the British Red Ensign, known as the “Grand Union Flag,” (see page 12). From this developed the distinctive “Stars and Stripes,” as it known today, which still has the 13 stripes for each of the original colonies to join the Union, and a star for each state which is now part of the USA. The latest star was added on July 4, 1960, after Hawaii became a state in 1959.

A TRULY NATIONAL FLAG

The flag of 1777 (see page 12), marked a break with old colonial ties. It became the first of a new kind of flag, one which was truly a national flag in the modern sense. Its basic

design and color combination was soon copied by other new nations.

The Stars and Stripes is an all-purpose flag, but the USA is rich in flags of many other kinds.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The Presidential standard, in use today, contains the President's version of the national arms, and a ring of 50 stars. The coat of arms depicts a spread eagle holding a shield in the style of the Stars and Stripes, 13 arrows, and 13 olive leaves, indicating the country is prepared for either war or peace. The motto “*E Pluribus Unum*,” meaning “Out of many, one,” reflects the federal nature of the United States.

USA: Historical flags

The flags of the War of Independence and of the Civil War still have an influence on the American flags of today.



THE GRAND UNION FLAG

The first American flag was adapted from the British Red Ensign of the time. It was known as the “Grand Union Flag,” i.e. of the Union of 13 colonies. These were represented by the 13 stripes of red and white. The flag was introduced in December 1775 for use on land and at sea.



THE FIRST STARS AND STRIPES

On June 14, 1777, the Union Jack was removed from the flag in favor of a blue canton with 13 stars, representing a new constellation, which now also represented the United States. This was the first use of stars in this way, and set a precedent for many later flags.



THE FLAG OF 1795

When two new states joined the Union in 1795, two new stars and two new stripes were added to the flag, making 15 stripes and 15 stars. This set a precedent for adding new stripes and stars when each new state joined the Union. The flag soon became known as the “Star Spangled Banner.”



THE FLAG OF 1818

Five new states were formed after 1795, but a new flag was not designed until 1817 when Congress decreed that in future only new stars would be added and it would revert to 13 stripes, in order to preserve the appearance of the flag. The new stars were added on July 4, 1818, and this system has been followed ever since.



THE STARS AND BARS

When Southern states seceded from the Union in 1860–61, a new flag for the Confederacy was hoisted on March 3, 1861. Known as the “Stars and Bars”, it originally had 7 stars, but these increased to 13 in the course of 1861, as more states joined the Confederacy.



THE BATTLE FLAG OR “FLAG OF THE SOUTH”

The Battle Flag with its distinctive saltire on a red field (Southern Cross) was introduced in September 1861, specifically for use in battle. On land it was square with a white border, but the rectangular naval version, without a border, is now accepted as “The Flag of the South.”

USA: State flags

The date when each state joined the Union is shown below the state name.



ALABAMA

1819

This flag, which was adopted in 1895, shows a red saltire on a white field. It is intended to recall the Southern Cross or Battle Flag of the Confederate States.



ALASKA

1959

The flag was designed by a Native American schoolboy in 1926, when Alaska was still a territory. It depicts the Plow and the northern Pole star. Gold also represents Alaska's mineral reserves.



ARIZONA

1912

The red and yellow rays recall the period of Spanish rule and the copper star stands for mineral riches. The flag was designed locally and adopted in 1927.



ARKANSAS

1836

The flag recalls the Southern Cross. The lower stars represent former colonial powers and the upper star stands for the Confederacy. The flag was adopted in 1913.



CALIFORNIA

1850

The flag is based on that of the California Republic declared at Sonora in 1846; it did not become the state flag until 1911. It depicts a grizzly bear and a star for freedom.



COLORADO

1876

The C-shaped emblem contains the colors of Spain, which once laid claim to this area. The gold ball also represents the state's mineral riches. The flag was adopted in 1911.



CONNECTICUT

1788

The arms date back to the seal of 1784, and the blue field to the Civil War period, when the flag was a Union color. This design was adopted in 1897.



DELAWARE

1787

The arms date back to 1777 and the flag, adopted in 1913, includes the date Delaware joined the Union. The colors recall the uniforms worn during the War of Independence.

USA: State flags

The date when each state joined the Union is shown below the state name.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1791

The flag of the Federal District of Columbia is based on a banner of the arms of the Washington family, which originated in England and dates back to 1592. It was adopted in 1938 by a Congress Commission.



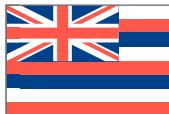
FLORIDA
1845

This is another flag which recalls the Southern Cross used by the Confederacy during the Civil War. The original flag, adopted in 1868, had only the seal, the red saltire was added in 1900.



GEORGIA
1788

The new state flag for Georgia was introduced in 2003, following objections to the inclusion of the Confederate flag on the previous two designs. The three bars evoke pre-1956 versions of the flag.



HAWAII
1959

The state flag, originally representing the independent kingdom, was adopted in 1845. The Union Jack recalls a flag given to the King by an army officer in 1793. The stripes stand for the main islands.



IDAHO
1890

The flag was originally a military color and bears the state seal in the center; beneath it is a scroll with the state's name. The flag in this form was adopted in 1927, with new specifications in 1957.



ILLINOIS
1818

Created in 1915, the central emblem of the Illinois flag, depicts elements from the state seal, including a bald eagle and a shield of the Stars and Stripes. The name was added beneath this in 1970.



INDIANA
1816

The flag was the winning entry in a design competition held in 1916, and was officially adopted in 1917. The stars in two arcs are for the original states and the subsequent ones.



IOWA
1846

The red, white and blue colors stand for French Louisiana, of which Iowa was once a part. In the center is the seal of 1847. The flag was adopted in this form in 1921.

**KANSAS**

1861

The flag of Kansas follows a very common seal and name pattern. The original flag of 1925 had the seal, recalling settlement and agriculture, and a sunflower—the state flower. The name was added in 1963.

**KENTUCKY**

1792

Another flag derived from the militia colors. The flag was adopted in 1918 and regularized in 1962. Like many state flags it contains the seal, the state name and a wreath of goldenrod, the state flower.

**LOUISIANA**

1812

The pelican, representing self-sacrifice and the state's role as a protector, has long been the badge of Louisiana, but the flag was only adopted in 1912 and slightly modified in 2004. The Acadians or "Cajuns" also have their own flag.

**MAINE**

1820

The flag dates from 1909 when the arms, adopted in 1820, were placed on a blue field. The star and motto recall Maine's northerly location. It was the northernmost state of the union, until Michigan joined in 1837.

**MARYLAND**

1788

This is the only flag which is a true heraldic banner, reproducing the arms of the Baltimore family, once the "proprietors" of the state. Each side of the family is represented by two quarters. It was adopted in 1904.

**MASSACHUSETTS**

1788

The flag was originally adopted in 1908 and revised in 1971, replacing a pine tree with the coat of arms adopted in 1780. The arms, depicting a Native American holding a bow, now appears on both sides of the flag.

**MICHIGAN**

1837

The arms was adopted in 1832, and placed on a blue field to make the state flag in 1911. The mottoes mean "I will defend," and "If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look about you."

**MINNESOTA**

1858

The motto on this flag "The North Star," was retained from when the state was the northernmost in the Union. The flag was originally adopted in 1893 and revised in 1957.

USA: State flags

The date when each state joined the Union is shown below the state name.



MISSISSIPPI

1817

The flag of Mississippi was adopted in 1894. It combines both the Confederacy's Southern Cross with the stripes of its first flag, the Stars and Bars, although on the flag of Mississippi the upper stripe is blue.



MISSOURI

1821

The colors of the flag recall when the region was under French control. The 24 stars stand for Missouri being the 24th state to join the Union. Within the seal itself are another 24 stars. The flag was adopted in 1913.



MONTANA

1889

The flag is derived from the former state militia colors, while the motto "Gold and Silver" is in Spanish, recalling Spain's claim to the area. The flag was adopted in 1905 and had the name added in 1981.



NEBRASKA

1867

The flag of Nebraska was adopted in 1925 and uses the seal which was adopted in 1867. This depicts an allegorical landscape, symbolic of the state's agricultural and industrial development.



NEVADA

1864

The flag emerged from a design competition and was adopted in 1929. It was revised in 1991 and the state name was placed underneath boughs of the sagebrush and the star, which represents the state.



NEW HAMPSHIRE

1788

The design was adopted in 1909, making use of the seal, which dates back to 1775. It depicts a ship, the *Raleigh*, being built on the docks of the town of Portsmouth during the War of Independence.



NEW JERSEY

1787

The buff field recalls the uniforms worn during the War of Independence. The flag with the arms was adopted in 1896 and made generally available in 1938.



NEW MEXICO

1912

This most distinctive flag was adopted in 1925 and uses the sun symbol of the *Zia Pueblo* Indians, while the colors represent the Spanish colonial era.



NEW YORK

1788

The flag dates originally from flags used in the War of Independence, but in this form only from 1901. Prior to that the flag had a buff field. The two figures symbolize liberty and justice. The coat of arms dates from 1777.



NORTH DAKOTA

1889

The flag was originally used by the state militia, the North Dakota Infantry, and was adopted in 1911, almost without alteration, explaining its squarish shape. In the center is a version of the national arms.



OKLAHOMA

1907

The basic design emerged from a design competition and was adopted in 1925. The name was added in 1941. The Native American emblems, all symbols of peace, recall the previous name, "Indian Territory."



PENNSYLVANIA

1787

The coat of arms of the state was adopted in 1777 and regularized in 1875. It was placed on a blue field to make the flag in 1907. The shield is supported by two horses.



NORTH CAROLINA

1789

The original flag was adopted in 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War, and was in the same colors as the Stars and Bars. The present design dates from 1885. It contains the initials of the state in the blue stripe.



OHIO

1803

The pennant-shaped flag of Ohio is derived from a cavalry guidon of the Civil War period. The 17 stars recall that Ohio was the 17th state to join the union and the circle or "O" refers to the state's initial.



OREGON

1859

This is now the only state flag with a different design on its reverse. The obverse shows the seal within 33 stars, the state's name and its date of admission. The reverse shows a beaver. It was adopted in 1925.



RHODE ISLAND

1790

The anchor, symbolic of hope, has long been the emblem of Rhode Island. The flag, based on a War of Independence flag, was adopted in 1877 and modified in 1897.

USA: State flags

The date when each state joined the Union is shown below the state name.



SOUTH CAROLINA

1788

The flag was adopted in 1861 at the very start of the Civil War, but contains emblems used during the War of Independence and also used in the state arms. The central palmetto is the state tree.



SOUTH DAKOTA

1889

The flag of South Dakota was adopted in 1963 on the basis of previous models and had the former motto “The Sunshine State” around the seal. This was changed to “The Mount Rushmore State” in 1992.



TENNESSEE

1796

The three stars are for the three geographical divisions of the state, whilst its general appearance recalls the Battle Flag or Southern Cross. The flag was adopted in 1905.



TEXAS

1845

The flag copies the colors of the Stars and Stripes, but with only one star, which dates back to one on the plain blue flag of the Republic of Texas. It was adopted in 1839 and retained after Texas joined the Union.



UTAH

1896

The beehive in the flag recalls the emblem of the Mormon state of Deseret, located in Utah and the date recalls their settlement of the region. The present flag dates from 1911, and uses the seal adopted in 1896.



VERMONT

1791

The arms, including the Lone Pine emblem, date back to when Vermont was independent from 1777–91. The present flag, based on the former militia flag, was adopted in 1923. The state name appears on a scroll.



VIRGINIA

1788

The state arms was adopted in 1776. The seal, showing Liberty Triumphant over Tyranny, was placed on the flag in 1861 at the start of the Civil War. The design has been used ever since.



WASHINGTON

1889

Washington is known as “The Evergreen State” and this is reflected by its flag. It is the only state with a green flag. The seal dates from 1889 and was placed on the flag in 1923.

USA: State and overseas territory flags

The date when each state joined the Union is shown below the state name.



WEST VIRGINIA

1863

The coat of arms dates from 1863 when West Virginia seceded from Virginia. The current version of the flag was adopted in 1929 and has the arms within a wreath of rhododendron, the state flower.



WISCONSIN

1848

The flag is derived from the militia colors of the Union in 1863. It depicts the state seal, supported by a miner and a sailor. The shield also recalls mining and sailing. The name and the date were added in 1980.



WYOMING

1890

The flag emerged from a design competition and was adopted in 1917. The flag has been revised several times—at one time the buffalo containing the arms faced the fly. The colors recall the national flag.



AMERICAN SAMOA

A self-governing US dependency, American Samoa's flag shows its links with the guardian state, in the colors and the American bald eagle. Here the eagle carries Samoan emblems.



GUAM

The flag was designed locally and adopted in 1917. In the center of the flag, in the US colors, is the seal of the territory, which depicts an idealized landscape. The flag can only be flown with the US flag.



**NORTHERN
MARIANA ISLANDS**

The original flag was adopted in 1972, but has undergone several modifications, including the addition of the flower-wreath. It also depicts a grey latte stone representing the islands' Chamorro culture.



PUERTO RICO

The resemblance of this flag to that of Cuba is no coincidence, since the two were designed at the same time, by the same activists. This version was adopted in 1952.



**VIRGIN ISLANDS
(US)**

The flag dates from 1921 and uses part of the US seal, with the initials of the islands. The three arrows in one claw stand for the main islands; in the other claw is an olive branch.

Mexico

Ratio: 4:7 Adopted: November 2, 1821 Usage: National and Civil

The basic design is derived from the French *Tricolore*



Red, white, and green are the colors of the national liberation army in Mexico

The coat of arms incorporates the badge of Mexico City

North America



Mexico was conquered by Spain in the 16th century, but broke away in 1821 to form a Central American state. It became a republic in 1822.

France was the inspiration of those who detached Mexico from Spain in 1821 and they devised a new tricolor based on the flag of the liberation army. At that time the Italian tricolor was not in use.

The coat of arms on the center stripe distinguishes the flag from that of Italy.

THE AZTEC INHERITANCE

The central emblem is the Aztec pictogram for Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City), the center of their empire. It recalls the legend which inspired the Aztecs to settle on what was originally a lake-island.

The form of the coat of arms was most recently revised in 1968.

ARMS OF MEXICO

The lake with an island, represents Tenochtitlán

Ribbon in the national colors



Aztec legend held that they should found their city on the spot where they saw an eagle on a cactus, eating a snake

Guatemala

Ratio: 5:8 **Adopted:** August 17, 1871 **Usage:** National and State

Blue and white are the colors of the original flag of the United Provinces of Central America



The coat of arms was adopted in 1968

North America



Guatemala declared independence at the same time as Mexico and, in 1823, became part of a union with the other Central American states.

In Guatemala the flag of the United Provinces of Central America, horizontal stripes of blue, white, blue was used until 1851, when a pro-Spanish government added the red and yellow of Spain to the flag. On August 17, 1871, the original colors were restored as vertical stripes, and with Guatemala's own coat of arms.

THE QUETZAL BIRD

The new coat of arms shows the quetzal, Guatemala's most famous bird, standing on a scroll giving the date of the Declaration of Independence. The present form of the arms was adopted in 1968. When used at sea for civil purposes, the flag does not contain the arms.

ARMS OF GUATEMALA

The date of the Declaration of Independence

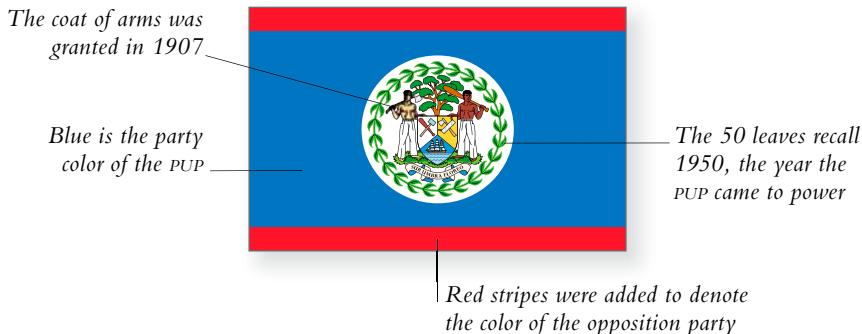
Rifles and swords represent defence of freedom



The quetzal bird with its distinctive tail-feathers is a symbol of liberty

Belize

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** September 21, 1981 **Usage:** National and Civil



North America



Belize was originally known as British Honduras, a colony formed in 1862 from settlements on the coast of Guatemala.

British Honduras obtained a coat of arms on January 28, 1907, which formed the basis of the badge used on British ensigns. The coat of arms recalls the logging industry which first led to British settlement there.

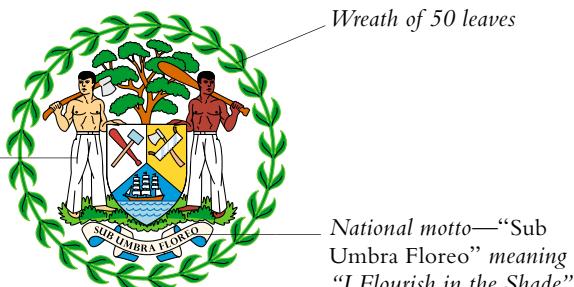
From 1968 onward an unofficial national flag was in use. It was blue with a modified version of the arms

—minus the Union Jack—on a white disc in the center. The colors were those of the People's United Party (PUP). Around the arms was a wreath of 50 leaves, recalling 1950, when the PUP came to prominence.

On independence in 1981, the flag was retained but red was added to stand for the opposition party.

ARMS OF BELIZE

The figures, tools, and the mahogany tree represent the logging industry



El Salvador

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** May 17, 1912 **Usage:** National and State

The flag is modeled on the flag of the United Provinces of Central America



The title of the state while it was part of the United Provinces of Central America surrounds the emblem

The emblem is surrounded by five flags, recalling the original five United Provinces of Central America

North America



El Salvador's flag recalls the colors of the United Provinces of Central America, used following independence from Spain in 1823.

The flag of Central America was used as the national flag until 1865, when a flag based on the Stars and Stripes was adopted, with blue and white stripes and a red canton containing nine stars.

In 1912 the original design was re-adopted, with the arms of El Salvador in the center.

TRIANGLES AND VOLCANOES

The coat of arms is similar to those of the United Provinces of Central America. The emblem is based on the Masonic triangle for equality, and depicts the five original provinces with five volcanoes. Around the triangle are five national flags and a wreath, tied in the national colors.

ARMS OF EL SALVADOR

A triangle representing equality

The motto of Central America—“Dios, Unión, Libertad” meaning “God, Union, Liberty”



The Cap of Liberty

Five volcanoes representing the original united provinces

Honduras

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 16, 1866 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors and pattern are the same as the flag of the United Provinces of Central America



Five stars recall the five original members of the United Provinces of Central America

North America



Honduras was one of the Spanish colonies which formed the United Provinces of Central America in 1823. It became independent in 1838.

In 1823 Honduras joined the United Provinces of Central America and adopted their flag. In 1866 it was amended; five blue stars were placed in the center to represent the five original Central American provinces. The state flag has the arms of Honduras in the center in place of the stars.

The arms was created in 1838 and revised in 1935. The central feature is a pyramid in Maya style rising from the sea. Around this is a band with the name of the state and the date of the Declaration of Independence. Beneath it is a landscape strewn with allegorical items representing mineral and timber industries.

ARMS OF HONDURAS

A Maya pyramid



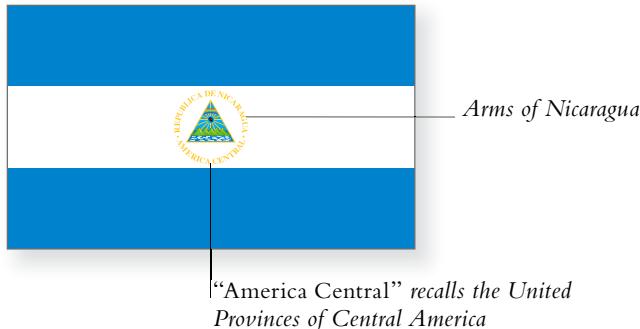
The cornucopias are symbolic of prosperity and agricultural wealth

The landscape depicts mines, mining tools, forests, and logging tools

Nicaragua

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** September 4, 1908 **Usage:** National and Civil

Apart from the text around the arms, the flag is identical to that of the United Provinces of Central America



North America



Nicaragua declared independence from Spain in 1821. It was a member of the United Provinces of Central America from 1823 to 1838.

The flag and the arms of Nicaragua in use today are the most similar to those used by the United Provinces of Central America. The triangle, volcanoes, rising sun, Cap of Liberty, and rainbow all appeared on the original emblem. The coat of arms used today contains the name of the state, *República de Nicaragua*, whereas

in 1823 the title was *Provincias Unidas del Centro de America*.

In 1908 the decision to revert to the emblems used by the United Provinces of Central America was taken and reflected Nicaragua's aspirations for the rebirth of the political entity formed by the five nations.

ARMS OF NICARAGUA

The rays of the sun and the rainbow are symbolic of the bright future



The Cap of Liberty represents national freedom

The five volcanoes represent the original five member states

Costa Rica

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** September 29, 1848 **Usage:** National and State

Blue and white were the colors of the original flag of the United Provinces of Central America



Red, white, and blue recall the colors of the French *Tricolore*

North America



Costa Rica was a signatory to the Declaration of Independence from Spain in 1821, joining the United Provinces of Central America (1823–1838).

The Central American flag remained in use in Costa Rica until 1848 when, in response to events in France, it was decided to incorporate the French colors into the national flag. This was done by adding a central red stripe. The coat of arms was also revised and placed in the center of the flag. In 1906, it was placed in a white disc on

the red stripe, and later on an oval, set toward the hoist.

The coat of arms depicts the isthmus between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The stars stand for the seven provinces and the Central American union is recalled by “*America Central*” on the upper scroll.

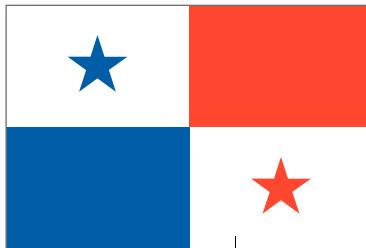
ARMS OF COSTA RICA



Panama

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 3, 1903 **Usage:** National and Civil

Although inspired by the Stars and Stripes, the stars and quarters are said to represent the two main political parties



Blue was the color of the Conservatives and red that of the Liberals

White symbolizes peace in the country

North America



Panama, originally a province of Colombia, was detached in 1903 to secure the building of the Panama Canal within a US-controlled zone.

The first flag, proposed in 1903, consisted of seven horizontal stripes of red and yellow, with a blue canton containing two golden suns, joined by a narrow line to depict the oceans to be united by the Panama Canal.

However this was not accepted by the Panamanian leader, Manuel A. Guerrero, whose family designed a

new flag. Although clearly modeled on the US flag, the stars and quarters are said to stand for the rival political parties, and the white for the peace in which they operate.

The coat of arms reflects Panama's transition from civil war to peace, and the increased prosperity this promised the people.

ARMS OF PANAMA

The shield depicts tools, weapons, a cornucopia, and a winged wheel, which together symbolize a move from war, to peace and prosperity



The national motto—“Pro Mundi Beneficio” meaning “For the Benefit of the World”

The northern and southern hemispheres joined by the Panama Canal

Jamaica

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** August 6, 1962 **Usage:** National and Civil

Black, green, and yellow are also pan-African colors

Black reflects hardships



Green represents the land

Yellow recalls the sun shining

"Hardships there are but the land is green and the sun shineth" is the local explanation of the flag

North America



Jamaica was a British colony from 1655 until 1962. From 1958 onward it was part of the West Indies Federation, which was dissolved in 1962.

The present design emerged from those sent in by the public in a national competition. It was originally designed with horizontal stripes, but this was too similar to the then Tanganyikan flag, and so the saltire was substituted.

The coat of arms, based on those granted to Jamaica on February 3, 1663, is among the oldest granted to

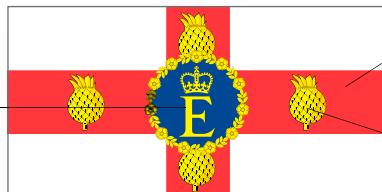
a British colony. It was used on the former British flags of Jamaica.

THE QUEEN'S STANDARD

The flag for HM Queen Elizabeth II, was introduced after independence. It contains a banner of the arms, with the Queen's Cypher in the center. The field depicts the red Cross of St. George charged with pineapples.

BANNER OF THE QUEEN OF JAMAICA

The Royal Cypher is enclosed within a chaplet of roses



St. George's Cross

The four pineapples and cross are taken from the Arms of Jamaica

Cuba

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** May 20, 1902 **Usage:** National and Civil

“La Estrella Solitaria”—
the Lone Star



The triangle comes from the Masonic symbol for equality

The design is based on the US Stars and Stripes

North America



Cuba, the only communist state in the Americas, was a Spanish colony until 1898, when it was ceded to the USA. It gained independence in 1902.

The flag was designed in 1848 for the liberation movement, which sought to detach Cuba from Spain and make it into a state of the USA. The Lone Star represented another star which would be added to “the splendid North American constellation.”

The triangle is derived from the Masonic symbol for equality, while the five stripes stand for the five

provinces of the time. The flag was briefly hoisted in 1850 at Cardenas, but was not officially adopted until 1902, when independence was granted by the USA.

Another flag from the 19th century is that of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, used by the independence movement of 1868–78. It is now used as the Jack of the Cuban navy.

FLAG OF CÉSPEDES

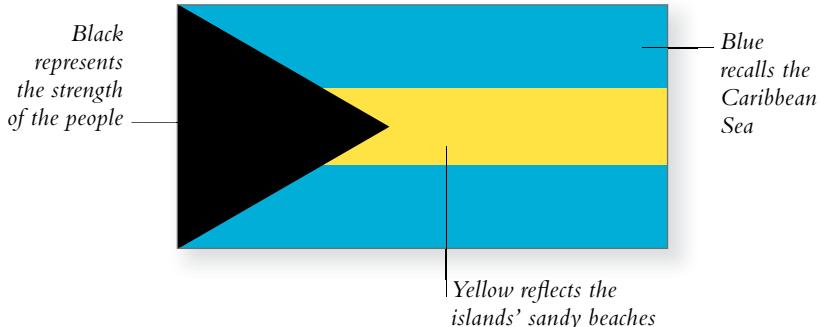
The flag is like that of Chile with the blue and red reversed



This flag was also modeled on the Stars and Stripes, using the same colors: blue, red, and white and a star in the canton

Bahamas

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** July 10, 1973 **Usage:** National



North America



Originally a pirate base, the **Bahamas** became a formal British colony in 1783. It did not achieve independence until July 10, 1973.

The colors of the flag are intended to represent the aquamarine seas around the islands and their golden sands. The flag is based on designs by the Bahamian people. Many of those submitted also included the idea of sunrise, which has been incorporated into the coat of arms.

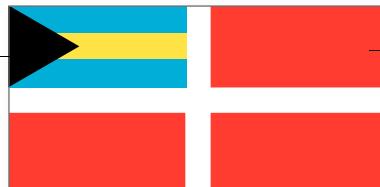
The Bahamas Civil Ensign (flown by merchant ships) is often

seen, since many ships are registered in the Bahamas. The flag is based on the British Red Ensign—red with a Bahamian national flag in the canton—but is distinguished by the white cross, like the Cross of St. George, across the red field.

The Bahamas has many other flags including one for the specific use of the Prime Minister.

BAHAMAS CIVIL ENSIGN

The national flag is placed in the canton



The civil ensign is distinguished from government and naval ensigns by its red field

Haiti

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** May 18, 1803 **Usage:** National and Civil

For official and state purposes the flag is charged with the national arms on a central white rectangle



Blue and red are taken from the French *Tricolore*

North America



Haiti became a French colony in 1697, but in 1803 a rebellion broke out. Independence was granted on January 1, 1804.

The blue and red of the flag were retained after a French *Tricolore* was torn up by the rebel Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1803. The two parts were stitched together horizontally to make a new flag.

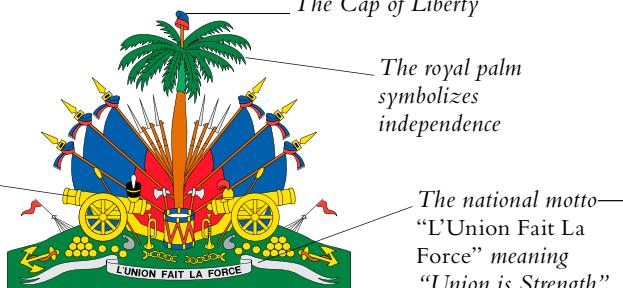
However a rival flag of vertical black and red panels was also used at various times, most recently in the

period from 1964–86, during the regime of the Duvalier family.

Since 1843 the flag for official and state use has had the arms on a white panel in the center. The coat of arms depicts a trophy of weapons ready to defend freedom, and a royal palm topped with a Cap of Liberty for the country's independence.

ARMS OF HAITI

Weapons reflect the people's willingness to defend their liberty



The Cap of Liberty

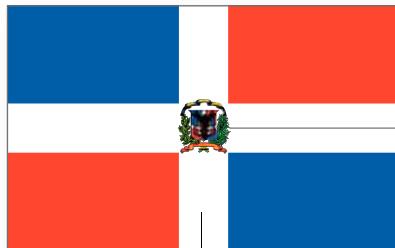
The royal palm symbolizes independence

*The national motto—
“L'Union Fait La Force” meaning
“Union is Strength”*

Dominican Republic

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 6, 1844 **Usage:** National and State

Blue and red are taken from the flag of Haiti, which once controlled the Dominican Republic



The coat of arms only appears on the flag for national and state use

The cross of the Trinitarian independence movement

North America



A Spanish colony, briefly occupied by Haiti (1820–44), the Trinitarian movement was formed to free the country. **Dominican Republic** was liberated in 1844.

The flag was designed by the leader of the Trinitarians. He altered the layout of the blue and red of the Haitian flag, placing a large white cross over it to symbolize faith.

A DISTINCTIVE NATIONAL FLAG

To create distinct flags for state and civil use, the coat of arms, adopted

in 1844, was placed on the state flag. The civil flag, on both land and sea, does not carry the arms.

The arms depicts a Bible open at the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. This is placed on a trophy of national flags, on a shield of the same design. The Trinitarian motto is above this and the name of the state below.

ARMS OF HAITI

Gospel of St. John, a Trinitarian emblem

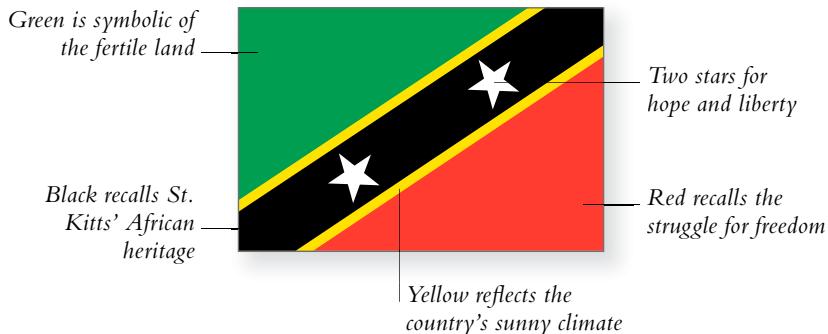
The lower scroll contains the state title



The password of the Trinitarian movement—“Dios, Patria, Libertad” (“God, Country, Freedom”)

St. Kitts & Nevis

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: September 19, 1983 Usage: National and Civil



North America



A British colony in the Leeward Islands since 1873, the islands of **St. Kitts and Nevis** gained independence together in 1983.

The flag was the winning entry in a local competition which attracted 258 entries, and was the work of a student, Edrice Lewis. It was she who gave what is now the official interpretation of the flag—that its colors stand for the fertile land, year-round sunshine, the struggle for freedom, and the African heritage. The two stars stand for hope and

liberty, not for the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis.

THE FLAG OF NEVIS

The island of Nevis has a flag of its own, which is bright yellow, with a stylized image of Nevis Peak. The national flag is in the canton.

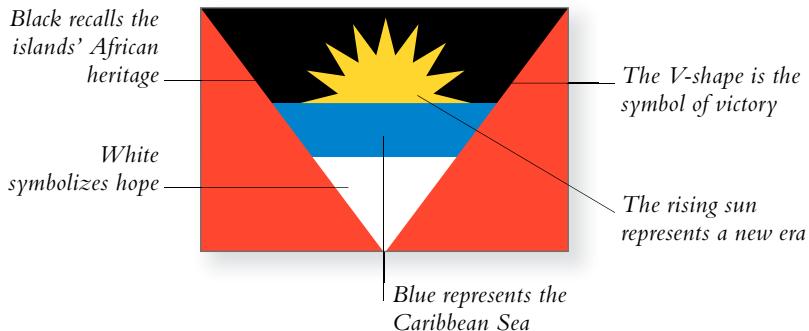
St. Kitts also has an ensign for the Coast Guard.

THE FLAG OF NEVIS



Antigua & Barbuda

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: February 27, 1967 Usage: National and Civil



North America



From 1632 until formal independence was granted in 1981, **Antigua** and its neighbor **Barbuda** were British colonies.

The flag dates from the achievement of self-government in 1967 and was the winning design in a competition which over 600 local people entered.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FLAG

The designer, Reginald Samuel, interpreted it as representing the sun rising against the background of the peoples' African heritage in a new era. The overall V-shape stands for victory. It is on a red background which symbolizes the dynamism of the population. Blue is for the sea and white is for hope.

THE NEW NATIONAL FLAG

The flag was retained unchanged when Antigua became independent.

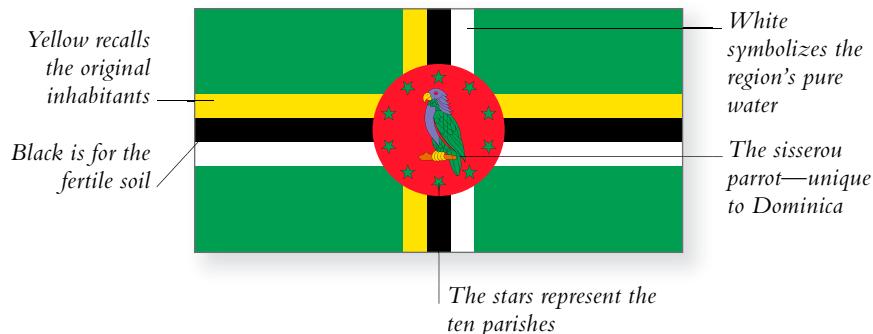
Barbuda, does not have a separate flag, although there is one for Redonda, an uninhabited island whose “throne” is claimed by several rival “monarchs.”

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms was granted in 1977 and depicts a shield with a sugar mill, once the primary industry, on a background of white and blue waves. Above this is a sun on a black background. The shield stands on a sea island. The crest is a pineapple from the arms of the former colony of the Leeward Islands, of which Antigua was once a part. Beneath is a scroll with the national motto—“Each endeavouring, all achieving.”

Dominica

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: November 3, 1978 Usage: National and Civil



North America



First colonized by the French, **Dominica** came under British control in 1759. It became a British Associated State in 1967 and independent in 1978.

The flag adopted in 1978 features the national bird emblem, the sisserou parrot, which also appears on the coat of arms granted July 21, 1961. This parrot is unique to Dominica. It is an endangered species; only a few pairs remain.

The green field represents the lush vegetation of the island. The cross represents the Trinity and the

Christian faith and its three colors recall the native Indians, the fertile soil, and the pure water. The ten stars stand for the ten parishes and the red disc for social justice.

The flag of the President has a dark green field with the coat of arms in the center, crowned with a British lion. It depicts palm trees, an indigenous frog and the sea.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The national motto is in Creole—“Aprés Bondie C'est La Ter” meaning “After the good Lord (we love) the soil”



The supporters are two sisserou parrots

St. Lucia

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: March 1, 1967 Usage: National and Civil

*The blue field
represents
the sea*



*This symbol
represents twin
peaks of the
Pitons, famous
volcanic
mountains*

North America



St. Lucia, first settled in 1605, was fought over by the French and the British, finally being ceded to Britain in 1814. It became independent in 1979.

The flag was adopted when St. Lucia became a British Associated State in 1967. It was designed by a local artist, Dunstan St. Omer. The blue field represents the sea, from which arise the twin peaks of the Pitons said to be “rising sheer out of the sea and looking skyward—a symbol of hope.” The yellow triangle stands for sunshine and the black arrowhead

on white, for the twin cultures of the island. On independence, the flag was retained, but the height of the yellow triangle was increased.

A new form of the arms was also adopted, symbolizing the national motto: “The Land, the People, the Light.” Apart from the Governor-General’s flag and that of the capital, Castries, no other flags are known.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S STANDARD

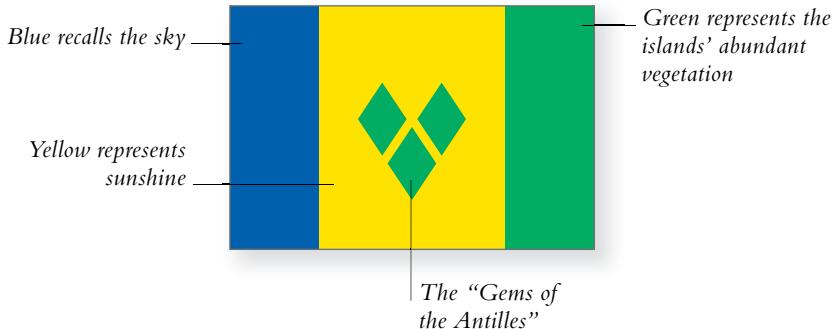
*The state’s title is
placed on the scroll*



*The British Royal
Crest of a crowned
lion standing on a
St. Edward’s Crown*

St. Vincent & the Grenadines

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 12, 1985 **Usage:** National and Civil



North America



St. Vincent was occupied by the British in 1762. It achieved independence in 1979, together with the **Grenadines**, a chain of adjacent islands.

The basic design and colors of the flag date from the flag hoisted on the day of independence in 1979. It had the arms of the islands placed on a stylized breadfruit leaf in the center. Its blue, yellow, and green stripes were derived from the common colors of the flags assigned to the Associated States by the College of Arms. The breadfruit recalled the British introduction of the breadfruit tree into the Caribbean from the South Seas.

Although this first flag was designed by a local islander, the design did not please all the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and, in 1985, moves were made to secure a new design.

A NEW NATIONAL FLAG

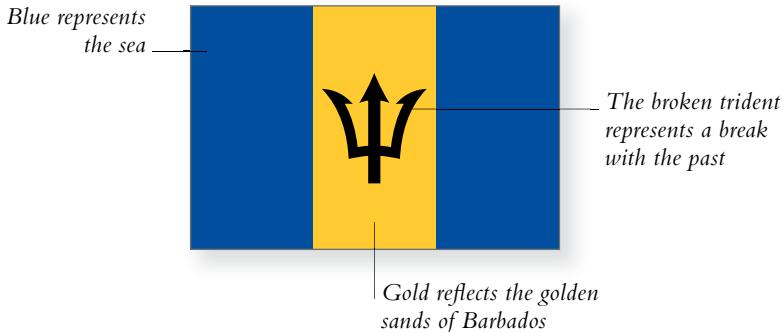
After a local competition failed to produce a satisfactory design, the problem was submitted to a Swiss graphic artist who suggested what is now the current design. In this, the "V" formed by the diamonds stands for St. Vincent, and the diamonds represent its local sobriquet the "Gems of the Antilles."

ARMS OF ST. VINCENT

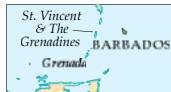
The coat of arms was first introduced in 1912. It depicts two women, one standing holding an olive branch, the other kneeling to represent peace and justice, which is the national motto—“*Pax, Justitia*.” This appears on a scroll at the base.

Barbados

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: November 30, 1966 Usage: National and Civil



North America



Barbados was first settled by the British in 1627. It became a colony and achieved self-government in 1961 and independence in 1966.

The current flag was adopted at the time of independence. It was the winning design in a national competition, won by Grantley Prescod, a local art teacher.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FLAG

Prescod interpreted the stripes as representing the blue seas and the golden sands which surround the island. The trident is adapted from the previous flag-badge which depicted Britannia holding a trident (symbolic of her rule over the seas). Here the trident is without a shaft, indicating a break with the colonial past. It is also the emblem of the sea god, Neptune, and reflects the importance of the sea to Barbados.

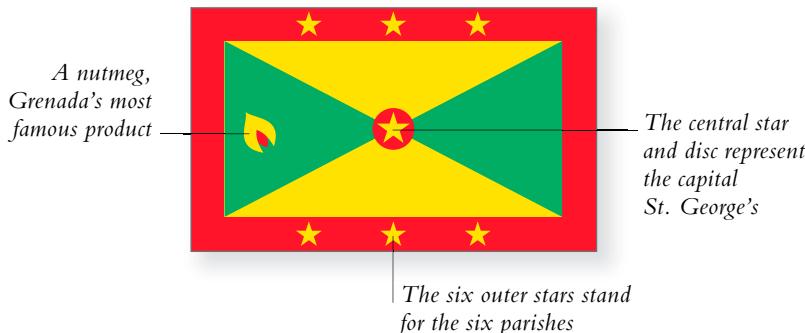
ARMS OF BARBADOS

The coat of arms was granted by HM Queen Elizabeth II in 1966, on a visit to the island. The shield depicts a bearded fig tree, after which the island takes its name, between two “Pride of Barbados” flowers. The crest is an arm holding two sugarcanes in the form of a St. Andrew’s Cross. This commemorates independence, which was achieved on St. Andrew’s Day, November 30, in 1966.

Barbados also has a Governor’s standard. It is the same as that of the Governor of St. Lucia, which features the Royal Crest of England with British lion (see page 36), except that it bears the title “Barbados” on the scroll beneath the Royal Crest.

Grenada

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** February 7, 1974 **Usage:** National and Civil



North America



First settled by France, **Grenada** was invaded by Britain in 1762. It became an Associated State in 1967 and fully independent in 1974.

The flag used prior to independence in 1967 also featured a nutmeg, since Grenada is a major world supplier of this commodity, and is known as the “Spice Island.”

Other features of the flag derive from the coat of arms granted on December 6, 1973, including the red, yellow, and green colors.

SYMBOLISM OF THE FLAG

The yellow star on a red disc stands for the Borough of St. George's, Grenada's capital, and the other six stars for the remaining six parishes.

In the official interpretation the red stands for courage and vitality, the yellow for wisdom and warmth, and the green for vegetation and

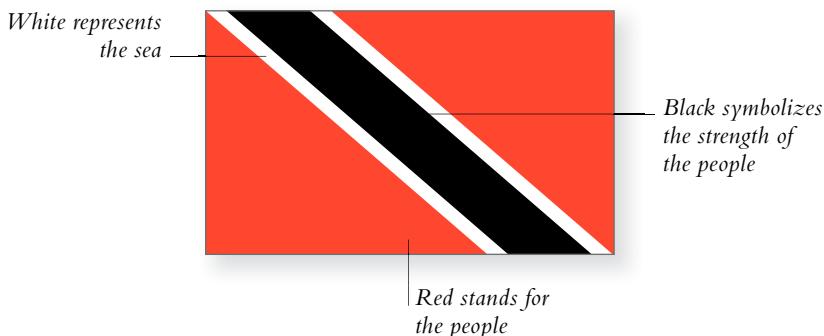
agriculture. When the flag is used at sea its proportions are altered from 3:5 to a longer form (1:2).

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms depicts the Santa Maria, Columbus' ship, a lion representing national liberty, and a lily emblem symbolizing the Virgin Mary. The shield is supported by two characteristic local creatures, an armadillo and a ramier pigeon. Beneath the shield is a representation of the Grand Etang lake, and, on a scroll at the base, what must be one of the world's longest national mottos: “Ever conscious of God we aspire, build and advance as one people.”

Trinidad & Tobago

Ratio: 3:5 Adopted: August 31, 1962 Usage: National and Civil



North America



Trinidad and Tobago were separate British colonies, which united in 1889. They became independent in 1962 and a republic in 1976.

The flag adopted at independence was chosen from among designs sent in by the public. The same colors are used in the arms.

A flag for HM Queen Elizabeth II was adopted after independence, but it became obsolete following the formation of the republic.

The President has a flag of blue with the arms in the center. The coat

of arms depicts the three ships of Columbus who landed here in 1498. Above the ships are two golden hummingbirds. The supporters of the coat of arms are also local birds and the whole shield stands on a scene depicting waves breaking against the rocky coasts of the islands.

Trinidad also has flags for the Prime Minister and other ministers.

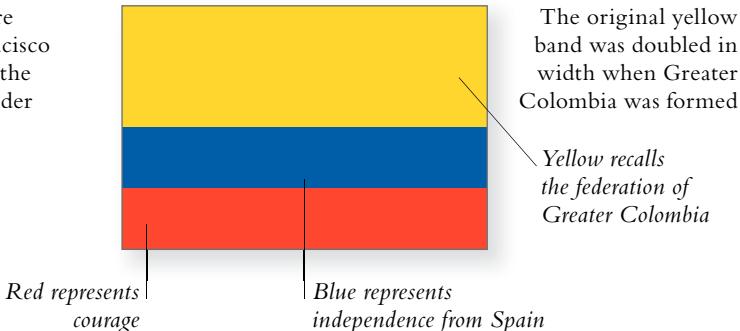
THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG



Colombia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 17, 1819 **Usage:** National

The colors are those of Francisco de Miranda, the liberation leader



South America



Following years of Spanish rule, **Colombia** became part of independent Greater Colombia in 1819, and then a separate republic in 1830.

The flag of Greater Colombia, adopted in 1819, was retained by Colombia after independence in 1830. For a while the stripes were arranged vertically, but the original version was restored in 1861.

There are two variant flags. The civil ensign has a red-bordered, blue oval bearing a white star in the center,

used to distinguish it from the flag of Ecuador. The state flag and naval ensign have the arms in the center.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms dates from 1834. It includes a pomegranate, the symbol of Granada in Spain, after which the area was once named.

ARMS OF COLOMBIA

National motto—
“Libertad y Orden”
meaning “Liberty
and Order”

The Cap of Liberty

A map of the
Isthmus of Panama



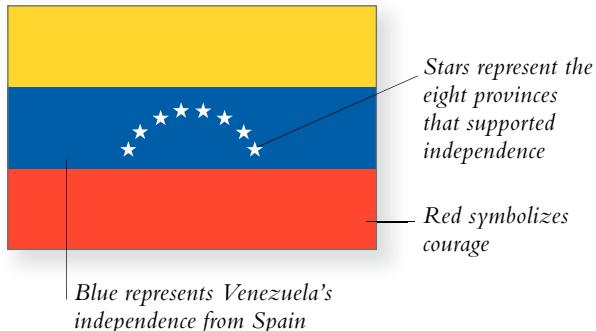
The crest is a condor frequently used in South American heraldry

A pomegranate recalls New Granada, Colombia's former name when a Spanish colony

Venezuela

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: March 10, 2006 Usage: National and Civil

The flag is most similar to that of liberation leader Francisco de Miranda



South America



Venezuela was once part of the Spanish province of New Granada. It then joined Greater Colombia from 1819 until independence in 1830.

The Venezuelan flag was the invention of Francisco de Miranda, who initiated the freedom of New Granada in 1806. At that time it had no stars; they were added in 1836 to symbolize the provinces that had supported the Declaration of Independence in 1811. The original plain tricolor was altered in 1819, to make the yellow

double width, for use as the flag of Greater Colombia.

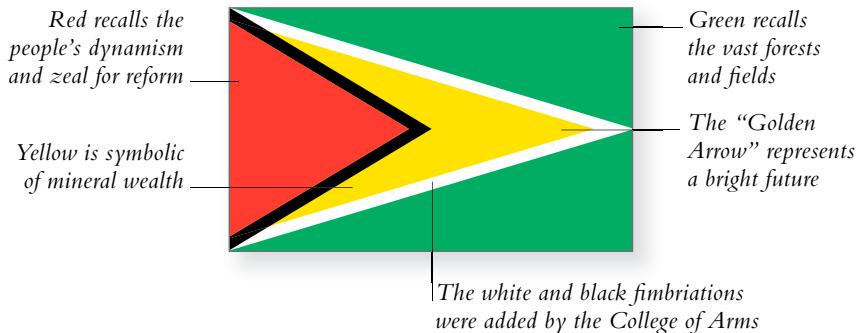
After independence in 1836, the flag reverted to stripes of equal width and the stars were added. The coat of arms dates from the 19th century but has altered frequently, especially the inscription. The present form dates from 2006.

ARMS OF VENEZUELA



Guyana

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** May 20, 1966 **Usage:** National and Civil



South America



Guyana was acquired by the UK in 1814. It became independent in 1966 and a republic within the Commonwealth in 1970.

The flag is known as the "Golden Arrow" because of the arrow-head that flies across the green field. The original design had a red field, but this was altered by the College of Arms in 1966, which also added the black and white fimbriations.

The green and yellow stand for natural resources and the red for the

"zeal and dynamism [of the inhabitants] in building the nation."

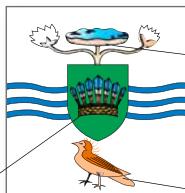
THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

Adopted in 1970, it is a banner of the arms granted in 1966. It depicts a green shield in the center charged with an Native American crown in gold, a Victoria lily and a native pheasant.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The President's flag was adopted in 1970, it is a square banner of the arms

Crown of a cacique, or Native American chief



A Victoria Regia water lily, growing from stylized heraldic water

A native canje pheasant

Suriname

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: November 25, 1975 Usage: National and Civil

Green and red were the colors of the political parties at the time of independence



The white fimbriations represent justice and freedom

The star is an emblem of unity and hope

South America



Suriname was part of the Dutch kingdom until 1975. Since independence, there have been a series of coups and changes of constitution.

The flag was chosen in 1975 by a parliamentary commission, on the basis of designs sent in by the public. The object was to choose a flag which harmonized the colors of the main political groups (green and red) into a design suggestive of unity and progress. The star is thus the emblem of unity and hope for the future, and the white fimbriations,

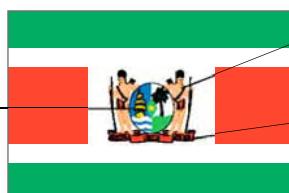
separating the red and green, stand for justice and freedom.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

This has a white panel in place of the star and contains the state arms. The coat of arms dates back to the 17th century and the time of Dutch rule, but was revised in 1959 and again in 1975.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

On the shield, a ship reflects commerce, a diamond, mining, and a tree, agriculture



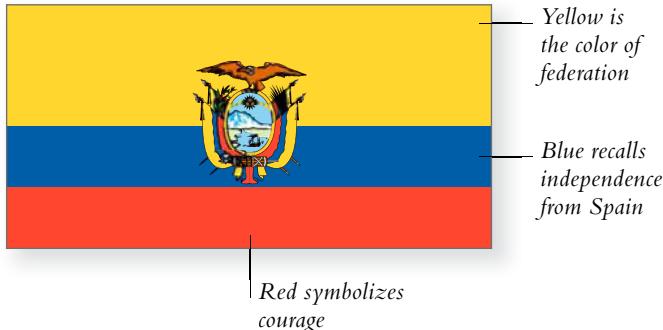
The supporters are Native Americans

The national motto—“Justitia, Pietas, Fides” meaning “Justice, Peace, Faith”

Ecuador

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** September 26, 1860 **Usage:** National

Yellow, blue and red are the colors of Francisco de Miranda



South America



Ecuador, formerly a Spanish colony, joined the state of Greater Colombia in 1822. It seceded from the federation in 1830 to form a republic.

The 1819 flag of Greater Colombia was restored in Ecuador in 1860 and since then the flags of Ecuador and Colombia have been very similar. The national arms were added to the center of the basic civil flag in 1900, creating a distinct flag for national and state purposes. The civil flag on land and sea does not contain the

arms, making it almost identical to the flag of Colombia, except for its proportions. When used abroad, the flag always contains the arms.

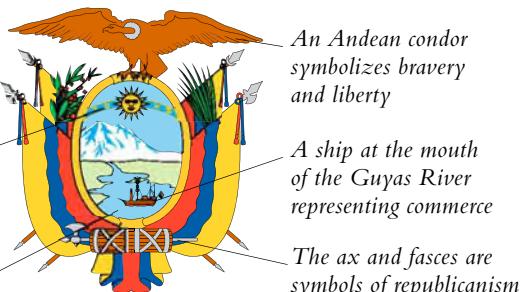
ARMS OF ECUADOR

The coat of arms dates from 1845 and depicts Mount Chimborazo and the mouth of the Guyas River.

ARMS OF ECUADOR

Four signs of the Zodiac represent the months from March to May

An allegorical scene depicts Mount Chimborazo, South America's highest peak



Peru

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: February 25, 1825 Usage: National and Civil

Red and white are the colors chosen by San Martín, "El Liberator" (the Liberator)



The colors also recall those of the Incas, who ruled much of Peru until European colonization

South America



Peru was freed from Spanish rule in 1819 by an army led by José de San Martín. Since 1824 it has been an independent unitary republic.

The colors chosen by San Martín for the Peruvian Legion were red and white, said to be the colors of the Inca Empire, and the rising sun, also dating back to the Incas. The flag assumed its present form, dropping the sun in 1825, at the behest of Simón Bolívar, another famous liberator. As is usual in former

Spanish colonies, the official flag, used by the government and the armed forces, has the coat of arms in the center.

The coat of arms dates from 1825 and depicts a cornucopia, a chichona tree, and a llama, surrounded by state flags. The flags do not appear on the arms placed on the official flag.

ARMS OF PERU

On the coat of arms, the wreaths are substituted for national flags

A cornucopia symbolizing prosperity



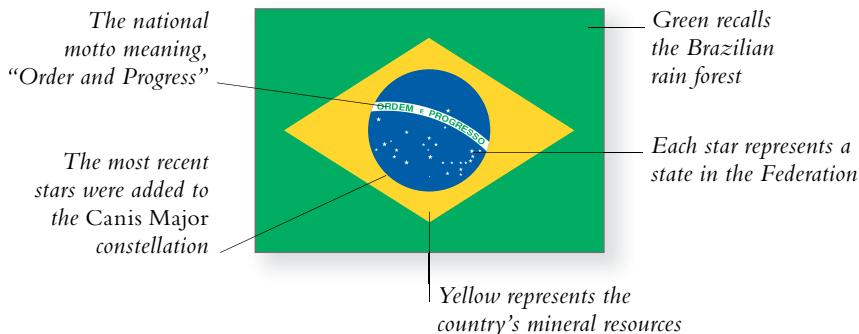
A llama

A chichona tree

This is how the coat of arms appears in the center of the official flag and ensign

Brazil

Ratio: 7:10 **Adopted:** November 15, 1889 **Usage:** National and Civil



South America



Brazil belonged to Portugal until 1822 when it became an independent kingdom, and later an empire. It formed a federal republic in 1889.

The green field and yellow lozenge were part of the flag adopted in 1822 when independence was first achieved and the empire was declared. In 1889, the imperial arms were replaced by a view of the night sky as it appeared over Rio de Janeiro when the republic was formed. Each of the stars in the constellation represents a state of the Federation, including the Federal District. These have been altered from time to time, most recently in 1992 when the number of stars increased to 27.

THE CONSTELLATIONS

The constellations on the flag are represented in a realistic manner,

with stars of varying sizes, although the size of star does not reflect the importance of the state. In 1992, new stars were added to the constellation of *Canis Major* in the lower left section of the sky. The country's national motto, “*Ordem e Progresso*” meaning, “Order and Progress” appears on a band across the center of the night sky.

THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

In Brasília, the capital city since 1960, stands one of the world's tallest flagpoles, on which flies an enormous national flag.

Brazil also has flags for the President, the Ministry of Marine, and a naval Jack.

Brazil: State flags

Many of the flags recall historical events, or the formation of the federal republic. The date of accession is given below the state name.



THE FEDERAL DISTRICT
1960

The flag of the Federal District dates from 1969. The green rectangle contains four arrows representing the balance of centralization and devolution in Brazil.



ACRE
1962

Adopted by the republic declared in 1899, when Acre was still part of Bolivia, the flag was retained by the state and the star was added to recall its joining the Federation.



ALAGOAS
1889

Based on the flag of 1894, this new version was instituted in 1963. In the center is the arms, also originally dating back to 1894. It recalls various aspects of the state's industry.



AMAPÁ
1989

The flag was adopted in 1984 for the territory and retained for the state. It uses all the national colors, together with an outline of the fortress of Macapá, the state capital.



AMAZONAS
1889

The flag dates from the local uprising of 1897. The stars stand for the 25 municipalities, with the large one for Manaus, the state capital. The flag was regularized in 1982.



BAHIA
1889

The flag dates back to the uprisings of 1789 and 1798, which are recalled by the white triangle. The flag in this form was first adopted in 1889, when Bahia joined the Federation.



CEARÁ
1889

The flag was instituted in 1922 and is very similar to the national flag. The arms depicts an allegorical landscape surrounded by stars. It dates from 1897 and was revised in 1967.



ESPÍRITO SANTO
1889

The flag was created in 1947. The Portuguese motto meaning—"Work and Trust"—is that of the Jesuits, and the pink and blue represent the local evening sky.



GOIÁS
1889

The flag is based on those promoted for the republic in 1889. This version has five stars for the Southern Cross similar to those in the national arms.



MATO GROSSO
1889

The flag is based on the national flag, but with local interpretations of the color arrangement and one star for the state. It was adopted in 1890.



MINAS GERAIS
1889

The flag contains a Masonic triangle of the *Inconfidência Mineira* (miners revolt) of 1789, standing for equality.



PARAÍBA
1889

The flag recalls Vargas' revolution in 1930. *Nego* ("I deny it") refers to the assassination of the state president.



PERNAMBUCO
1889

This is the flag of the Pernambuco revolution of 1817, which later became the flag of the state when the events of 1817 were celebrated.



MARANHÃO
1889

The flag, adopted in 1889, features the star, which represents the state on the national flag, while the stripes stand for its ethnic mix.



MATO GROSSO DO SUL
1977

The design emerged from a competition held in 1978, after the new state was formed. The flag was instituted in 1979.



PARÁ
1889

Based on a republican flag, it dates from 1898. The star is taken from the one for Pará on the national flag.



PARANÁ
1889

The flag contains an emblem like the national flag, bearing the Southern Cross and name of the state.



PIAUÍ
1889

Based on the colors of the national flag, in this instance it only has one star representing the state of Piauí. It was adopted in 1922.

Brazil: State flags



RIO DE JANEIRO
1975

The state was reconstituted in 1975 to include the state of Guanabara. The new state took over the emblems of the former state of Rio de Janeiro.



RIO GRANDE DO SUL
1889

The flag dates from the revolution of 1836, which created the Republic of Rio Grande do Sul. It was re-adopted in 1889, the arms were added in 1891.



RORAIMA
1989

The flag, adopted when the territory became a federal state, uses the national colors and star, with a red line representing the Equator.



SÃO PAULO
1889

The flag was created in 1888 at the start of the republican revolution, and revived in 1932, with 13 stripes.



TOCANTINS
1989

After achieving statehood, a flag and arms were adopted, using blue and white from the national colors.



RIO GRANDE DO NORTE
1889

Dating from 1957, the flag uses the arms granted in 1909, thus making it one of the newest flags of the original states.



RONDÔNIA
1981

Rondônia's flag uses the four national colors and a single star symbol. It was adopted in 1981 after a design competition.



SANTA CATARINA
1889

The red and white flag precedes the republic. It was most recently regularized in 1953, when the arms were placed in the center.



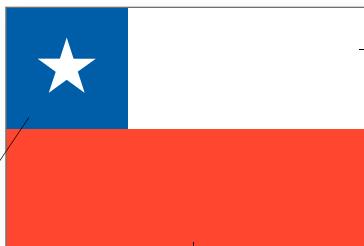
SERGIPE
1889

The flag was created in the late 19th century and adopted in 1920. In 1951 the stars were repositioned.

Chile

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 18, 1817 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag is modeled on the US Stars and Stripes



White symbolizes the snow of the Andes

Blue represents the clear Andean skies

Red is for the blood shed for freedom

South America



Chile was freed from Spanish rule in 1818, largely through the efforts of José de San Martín, leader of the Army of the Andes.

Adopted in 1817, after San Martín's victory at Chacabuco, the national flag of Chile was preceded by at least two other versions during the early years of separatism. The current flag was based on the Stars and Stripes.

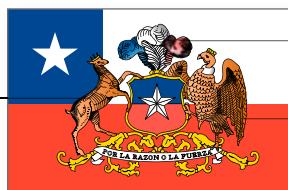
The white star was reserved for use only on the official flag until 1864, when the starred flag was made official for all purposes.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The flag of the President is the same as the national flag, with the national arms in the center. The coat of arms dates from 1834. It is supported by an huemal deer and a condor. The crest is formed from the feathers of the rhea bird. The motto—"Por La Razon o La Fuerza" means "By reason or by force."

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

An huemal deer, of the high Andes



A crest of feathers from the rhea bird

The condor is a common symbol on South American arms

Bolivia

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: November 30, 1851 Usage: National and Civil

The order of the stripes was changed to red, yellow, green in 1851. Red and green were retained from the flag of 1825



Red recalls valor

Yellow reflects Bolivia's mineral reserves

Green symbolizes fertility

South America



Bolivia, originally known as Upper Peru, was named after Simón Bolívar who supervised its secession from Spain in 1825.

The flag of 1825 had three stripes of green-red-green, with five gold stars within laurel wreaths. These stood for the original five departments.

A NEW TRICOLOR

In 1826, the flag was altered to three equal stripes of yellow, green and red with the arms in the center. It was

last altered in 1851, when the order of the stripes was changed to red, yellow, green.

The official flag still has the arms in the center. It was regulated in 1888 and depicts Mount Potosí, an alpaca, a wheatsheaf, and a breadfruit tree. The oval ring contains nine stars for the nine departments.

ARMS OF BOLIVIA

The flags and weapons represent the people's willingness to defend the state

The allegorical scene on the shield represents Bolivia's agricultural and industrial wealth



As on many South American arms, the crest is a condor

The nine stars represent Bolivia's nine departments

Paraguay

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** November 25, 1842 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors were influenced by the French *Tricolore*, which had become a symbol of liberation



On the reverse, the flag is charged with the Treasury Seal

The Star of May is used as a symbol of freedom on many South American flags

South America



Paraguay declared its independence from Spain in 1811 and has remained an independent republic ever since.

The colors of the flag and the Star of May emblem date from the Declaration of Independence. A number of variant designs existed prior to the current design, which was regularized in 1842. The current flag has a separate emblem on each side, a practice dating from the time of José de Francia, in

power from 1814–40. During his regime one side of the flag carried the arms of Spain and the other the arms of Asunción.

The current emblems, adopted in 1821, but not officially sanctioned until 1842, are the national arms on the front (obverse) and the Treasury Seal on the back (reverse).

STATE ARMS ON THE OBVERSE

The Star of May recalls the date of independence



Name of the state

TREASURY SEAL ON THE REVERSE

The motto, "Paz y Justicia" ("Peace and Justice")



The Cap of Liberty guarded by a lion

Uruguay

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 11, 1830 **Usage:** National and Civil

*The Sun of May
has been a national
emblem since the
19th century*



*The nine stripes represent
the nine departments*

Blue and white
are also the
national colors
of Argentina,
from which this
flag derives

South America



Historically a Spanish colony, **Uruguay** was annexed to Brazil and then to Argentina before becoming fully independent in 1830.

The colors, blue and white, and the Sun of May on the current flag come from the Argentinian flag.

THE FLAG OF ARTIGAS

The colors were brought to Uruguay by José Artigas, who led the movement for separation. His flag was blue and white striped, with a red diagonal. Variations of this flag

remained in use after Uruguay was annexed to Brazil in 1821.

When full independence was assumed, the present form of the flag was instituted. The nine stripes represent the nine departments. The Sun of May has been used as the national emblem since 1815 and now appears as the crest on the coat of arms.

FLAG OF ARTIGAS

This flag was used as a Jack for naval vessels until the late 1990s. The colors derive from those of Argentina's flag



*Red represents the
“Banda Oriental”
(the “East Bank”)
of Uruguay*

Argentina

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 12, 1812 **Usage:** National and Civil

Blue and white were formed into a flag by Manuel Belgrano, the leader of the revolution



The sun was added in 1818 to create a flag for state use

Light blue and white are from the cockades used by revolutionaries in 1812

South America



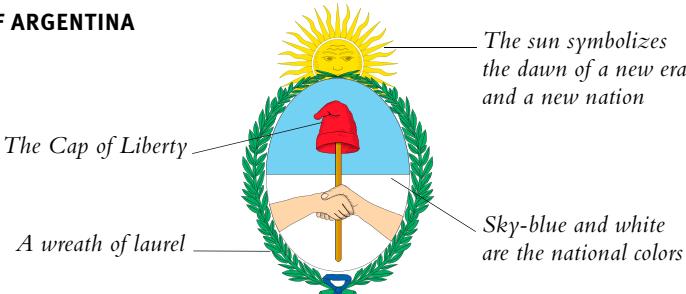
Argentina achieved its independence from Spain in 1816. Liberation demonstrations began in Buenos Aires on May 25, 1810.

At his encampment at Rosario in 1812, the revolutionary commander, Manuel Belgrano needed a flag. He devised one, using the sky-blue and white colors of the cockades worn by supporters of independence. This flag was used in battle and, although initially rejected by the provisional government, it later became the national flag.

THE SUN FLAG

In 1818, the sun emblem was added to the national flag forming the state flag flown on government buildings and military bases. It is also the Argentine naval ensign. The sun is based on coins issued in Buenos Aires in 1813. The tradition of the “Sun of May,” breaking through white clouds in a blue sky has no historical basis.

ARMS OF ARGENTINA



The sun symbolizes the dawn of a new era and a new nation

The Cap of Liberty

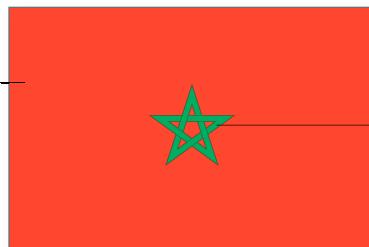
A wreath of laurel

Sky-blue and white are the national colors

Morocco

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 17, 1915 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red represents the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad



The Seal of Solomon was added in 1915

Africa



Morocco has been independent since 1956, becoming a kingdom in 1957. The state has occupied Western Sahara since 1975.

Red has considerable historic significance in Morocco, proclaiming the descent of the royal family from the Prophet Muhammad via Fatima, the wife of Ali, the fourth Caliph. Red is also the color that was used by the Sherifs of Mecca and the Imams of Yemen.

THE SEAL OF SOLOMON

From the 17th century, when Morocco was ruled by the Hassani Dynasty, the flags of the country were plain red. In 1915, during the reign of Mulay Yusuf, the green "Seal of Solomon" was added to the national flag. The Seal is an interlaced pentangle, used as a symbol in occult law for centuries.

THE COLONIAL ERA

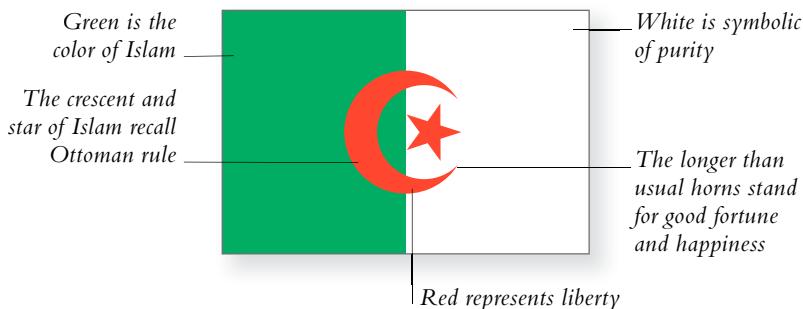
While Morocco was under French and Spanish control, the red flag with the seal in the center remained in use but only inland, its use at sea was prohibited. When independence was restored in 1956 it once again became the national flag.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

After independence in 1958, Morocco adopted a national coat of arms. This depicts the sun rising over the Atlas Mountains. The arms also includes the Seal of Solomon from the national flag. On the scroll is an inscription from the Qur'an (Koran), which reads "If you assist God, he will assist you."

Algeria

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: July 3, 1962 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Algeria was occupied by the French from 1830. Independence was achieved in 1962 after a long struggle led by the National Liberation Front.

The flag of Algeria was adopted by the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération National*) in 1954, on the basis of an older design, created in 1928, by the nationalist leader Messali Hadj. From 1958–62 it was the flag of the Provisional Government in exile, but it was retained when independence was achieved in 1962 and has remained unchanged ever since.

SYMBOLISM IN THE FLAG

The green in the hoist is the traditional color of Islam and the white represents purity. The horns of the crescent are longer than usual and represent increase or good fortune and happiness, whilst the

whole emblem recalls the period of Ottoman rule during the 16th century and its color, red, is symbolic of liberty.

THE NAVAL ENSIGN

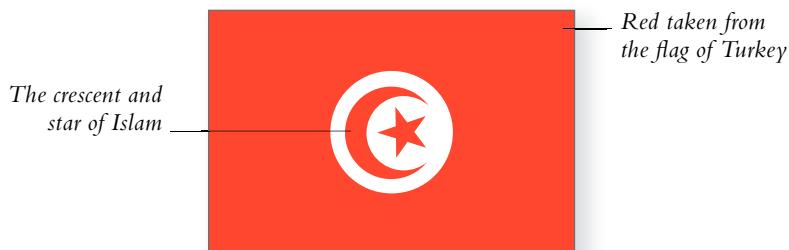
The naval ensign has two crossed anchors in the canton. This device is used on the naval ensigns of several Arab countries, following the example of Egypt.

THE EMBLEM OF ALGERIA

The state coat of arms is based on the well-known local emblem of the “Hand of Fatima.” It also contains the crescent and star of Islam, alongside symbols reflecting both agriculture and industry.

Tunisia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** 1835 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



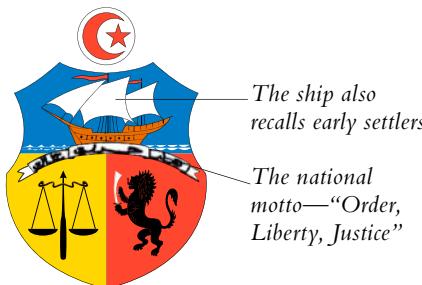
Part of the Turkish Empire until 1881, **Tunisia** then became a French Protectorate. In 1957, it became a republic when the “Bey” was deposed.

The flag is based on that of the Turkish Empire and was adopted by the “Bey,” the hereditary ruler of Tunisia, in 1835, primarily as a military flag. During the French administration (1881-1957) it became a sea flag, with the French *Tricolore* in the canton; this was removed when independence was achieved in 1956.

The coat of arms of Tunisia has been altered since the abolition of the monarchy, most recently in 1963, and unusually has the motto on a scroll actually on the shield. The motto reads—in Arabic—“Order, Liberty, Justice.” The ship, lion, and balance were retained from the previous arms.

ARMS OF TUNISIA

The ship, lion, and balance symbolize the national motto



Libya

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** 1977 **Usage:** National and Civil



Green is the national color of Libya and also reflects the people's devotion to Islam

It is the only national flag of a single plain color

Africa



Libya achieved independence in 1951, but in 1969 the King was deposed and Libya formed a republic led by Colonel Gadaffi.

The flag of the independent kingdom was red, black, and green with a crescent and star in the center, but after the revolution of 1969, the flag became three simple stripes of red, white, and black.

In 1971, Libya joined the Federation of Arab Republics with Egypt and Syria which used a similar flag with

a hawk emblem in the center and the name of the country beneath it.

When Libya quit the Federation in 1977, the new plain green flag was adopted. The national emblem remains similar to the one used while Libya was part of the Federation, which shows the Hawk of Quraish.

ARMS OF LIBYA

The Hawk of Quraish is the emblem of the tribe of Muhammad



The title of the state—“The Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Republic”

Egypt

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 4, 1984 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, white, and black are Pan-Arab colors



Eagle of Saladin

Africa



Egypt was a kingdom until 1953. From 1958–1961 it joined the United Arab Republic and from 1972–1977 the Federation of Arab Republics.

As a kingdom, the flag was green with a white crescent and three stars.

THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

When the United Arab Republic (UAR) was formed in 1958, they adapted the flag of the Liberation Rally which led the independence revolt of 1952–53. The UAR flag was red, white and black, with two green

stars in the center of the white stripe. In 1972, when the Federation was formed, the stars were replaced with the Hawk of the Quraish (see page 59), in gold, above the state name.

In 1984, Egypt reverted to the gold eagle used by the Liberation Rally. These colors and the eagle emblem have been widely copied in other Arab countries.

FLAG OF THE LIBERATION RALLY 1952–58

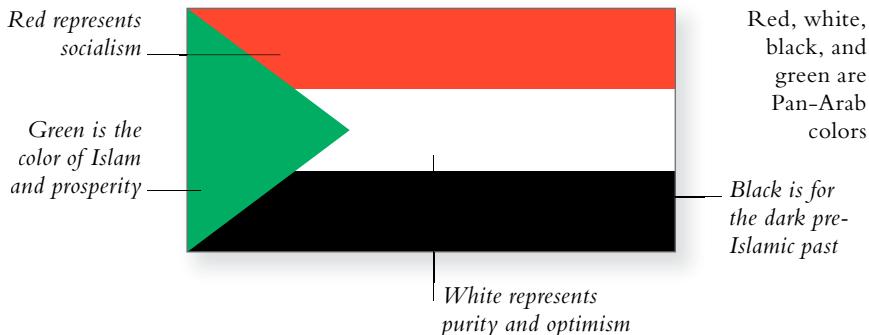
The gold eagle is said to be the Eagle of Saladin



The crescent and stars were retained from the old national flag

Sudan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** May 20, 1970 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



Ruled jointly by Egypt and Britain from 1877, **Sudan** became independent in 1956. Since then it has had a series of different regimes.

The flag used at independence was a horizontal tricolor of blue, yellow and green, but following the formation of the Democratic Republic in 1968, a new flag was chosen by competition.

A PAN-ARAB FLAG

This is like other Arab flags. The green as a triangle at the hoist.

White represents purity and optimism; red is for socialism, green for prosperity, and black for the dark, pre-Islamic past.

In 1969 a new arms was adopted, with a secretary bird bearing a shield from the time of the Mahdi, (who briefly ruled Sudan in the 19th century). Two scrolls are placed above and below the secretary bird.

ARMS OF SUDAN

The title of the state—
“Al-Jamhuriya as-Sudaniya”
("Republic of Sudan")



The national motto—
“Al-nasr lina”
("Victory is ours")

A secretary bird
bears the shield

Eritrea

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** May 24, 1993 **Usage:** National and Civil

*An olive branch
is encircled by a
wreath representing
Eritrean autonomy*



Green, blue,
and red are the
colors of the
Eritrean People's
Liberation Front

Africa



Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia in 1952 and fully integrated in 1962. From 1972, a long war of secession led to independence in 1993.

The flag of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which campaigned for independence, is green and blue with a red triangle bearing a gold star. The flag adopted on independence retained the colors and pattern, but replaced the star with the emblem used previously for autonomous Eritrea. This is an olive branch surrounded by a wreath of

olive leaves. Originally this emblem was green on a blue flag, but it is now yellow.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The President's flag contains the national arms, which depicts a camel in a desert, with the name of the state underneath in English, Tigrinya, and Arabic.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The arms of Eritrea

*The arms is
surrounded by a
wreath of leaves*

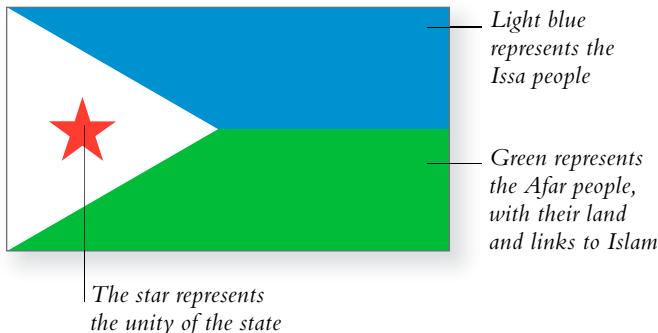


*The colors of the
national flag are used*

Djibouti

Ratio: 21:38 **Adopted:** June 27, 1977 **Usage:** National and Civil

White, green, and light blue are the colors of the LPAI



Africa



Once known as French Somaliland, and from 1967 as the Territory of the Afars and Issas, **Djibouti** gained independence in 1977.

The national flag adopted in 1977 was an adaptation of the flag of the *Ligue Populaire Africaine pour l'Indépendance* (LPAI) which led Djibouti to independence. The LPAI flag had a red triangle with a white star. For the national flag, adopted at independence, the star was placed in an upright, rather than a slanted

position, and the proportions of the flag were lengthened. The colors stand for the Issas and the Afars, the two peoples of Djibouti at independence, and the red star for the unity of the diverse state.

The coat of arms is centered around a Somali shield and spear, bordered by two hunting knives.

ARMS OF DJIBOUTI

A Somali shield and weapons; two hunting knives and a spear



The red star is a traditional symbol of unity

The coat of arms contains a local shield

Ethiopia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 6, 1996 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors date back to the 19th century

Red is symbolic of strength



Green recalls the land and hope for the future

Yellow is the color of peace and love

The emblem represents diversity and unity

Africa



Ethiopia was recognized as an empire in the 19th century. It was occupied by Italy from 1936–41. The Emperor was overthrown in 1974.

The three traditional colors: green, yellow, and red date back to the Emperor Menelik (1889–1913) and were first used in a flag in 1895.

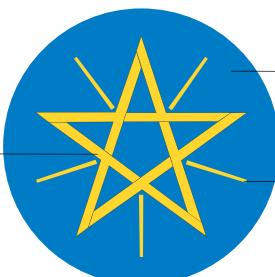
The current flag and emblem were adopted after the defeat of the Marxist Mengistu regime, in power from 1974–1991. The emblem is intended to represent both the diversity and unity of the country.

ETHIOPIA AND THE RASTAFARI

In the 1930s the Ethiopian colors became popular with black activists in Jamaica who looked to Ethiopia for political and spiritual guidance. Since then, these colors (along with black from the flag of Marcus Garvey) have become linked with the Rastafarian movement, and have spread to other African countries.

EMBLEM OF ETHIOPIA

The star represents diversity and unity



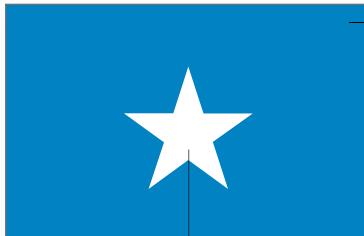
Blue represents peace

The sun's rays symbolize prosperity

Somalia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 12, 1954 **Usage:** National and Civil

The five-pointed star represents the branches of the Somali race; in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and the former British and Italian colonies



The blue is the same as that used by the United Nations

The star of unity

Africa



Modern **Somalia** is a combination of the former Italian territory and British Somaliland. Since 1991 it has been in a state of civil war.

The flag was adopted by the Italian Trusteeship Territory in 1954 on the basis of the blue and white flag of the United Nations, which was supervising the territory at the time. It was retained when Somalia became independent in 1960. The five-pointed star is said to stand for the five branches of the Somali race

including those living in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya.

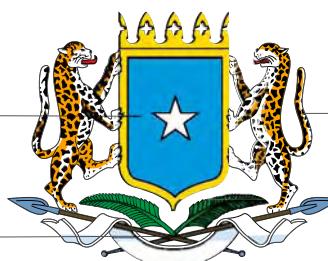
ARMS OF SOMALIA

The coat of arms was adopted in 1956. The leopards which support the shield and the white star were also found on the arms used during the Italian administration.

ARMS OF SOMALIA

The shield is based on the national flag

Below the shield are two palm branches and two spears

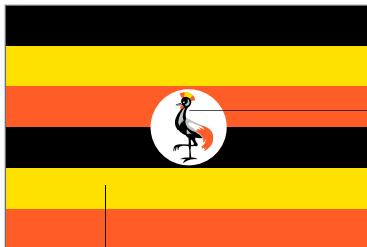


The supporters are leopards; a leopard also featured on the shield of the colonial arms

Uganda

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 9, 1962 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors of the flag represent the Ugandan people, sunlight, and brotherhood



The great crested crane is the national badge of Uganda

Black, yellow, and red are the party colors of the UPC

Africa



Since independence in 1962, **Uganda** has suffered years of upheaval. Under the current regime some stability has been restored.

The dominant party at the time of independence was the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), and the new national flag was an adaptation of its tricolor with the addition of the crane badge in the center. This dates back to before independence when the colonial badge of Uganda was the great crested crane. It also appears as one of the supporters on Uganda's

coat of arms granted on September 3, 1962. The arms depicts a local shield, in an allegorical landscape with tea and cotton plants.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The flag for the President was adopted in 1963 and consists of the arms on a red field with the national colors along the lower edge.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

A deer is one of the supporters

Coffee and cotton are Uganda's most important crops



A great crested crane supports the shield

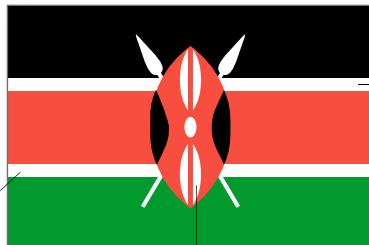
Blue and white represent the waters of the Nile and of Lake Victoria

Kenya

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: December 12, 1963 Usage: National and Civil

Black, red, and green are KANU party colors

White was added to represent the Kenya African Democratic Union



The white fimbriations were added to the KANU flag to create the national flag

The African shield is also used in the national arms

Africa



Kenya became a colony in 1920 having previously been known as British East Africa. It became independent in 1963 and a republic in 1964.

The flag adopted at independence was based on that of the Kenya Africa National Union (KANU); the dominant political party. For the national flag, white fimbriations were added, and the shield and spears replaced the party symbol.

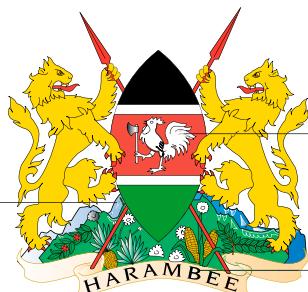
A coat of arms was adopted in 1963 which makes use of the same

shield and spears, but with a white rooster in the center, grasping an ax.

Kenya was the first African country to use a shield of traditional design in its coat of arms, a practice which has since been followed in many other new states. It was also the first to give the motto in a local language, in this case Swahili.

ARMS OF KENYA

The shield stands on a representation of Mount Kenya

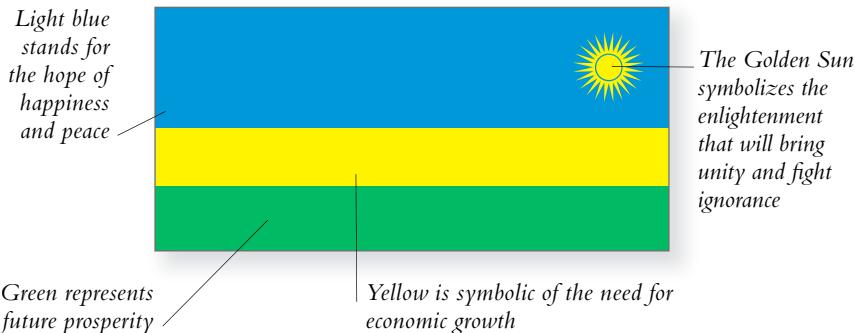


The rooster with an ax is the KANU party symbol

"Harambee" meaning "Pull Together" in Swahili

Rwanda

Ratio: 6:13 Adopted: December 31, 2001 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Rwanda, originally part of German East Africa, was taken over by Belgium after the First World War. It became independent on July 1, 1962.

In 2001 Rwanda adopted a new national flag, national arms and a national anthem, in response to the government's desire to concentrate on future possibilities rather than the troubled past. It was decided that the old national symbols reinforced the ideas of ethnic separatism and violence which eventually led to the genocide of 1994. For the new flag,

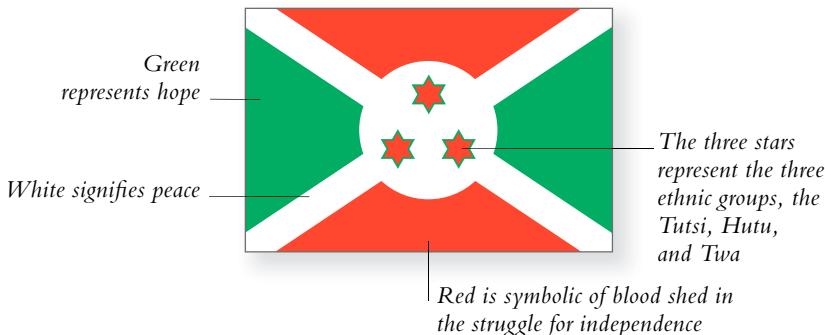
red and black, which have often been associated with blood and mourning respectively, were removed, in favor of the more optimistic blue, yellow, and green. The new national symbols of Rwanda signify national unity, respect for work, patriotism, and confidence in the future.

ARMS OF RWANDA



Burundi

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: June 28, 1967 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Like Rwanda, **Burundi** was a German, then a Belgian territory. It achieved independence as a kingdom in 1962 and became a republic in 1966.

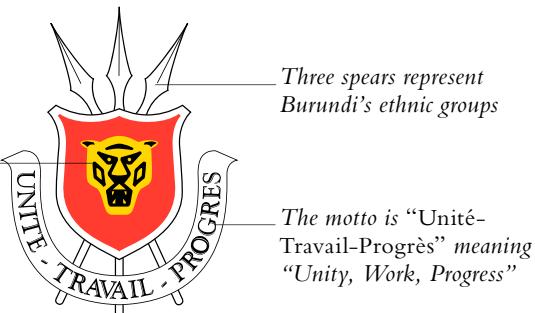
The flag adopted at independence had a drum—symbolic of the monarchy—and a sorghum plant in the central disc. When the kingdom was abolished the drum was removed, and a year later the sorghum plant was replaced by the three stars, said to symbolize the main ethnic groups.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms has also been altered. The royal drum which was above the shield was removed, a more republican motto was adopted, and the four spears were reduced to three, again to represent the ethnic groups. The golden lion's face also featured on the royal badge.

ARMS OF BURUNDI

The lion's face has remained unchanged since the original 1962 arms



Central African Republic

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: December 1, 1958 Usage: National and Civil

Red, yellow, and green are Pan-African colors

The star represents hope of a union under France



Red, white, and blue are taken from the French *Tricolore*

The vertical stripe represents unity and the blood of humanity

Africa



Previously known as Ubangi-Shari, the **Central African Republic** was formed as an autonomous state in 1958 under French protection.

The flag is unique in that it combines the Pan-African colors with those of France, the former colonial power. This was done in the hope that neighboring states would join a federation under French protection, but this never materialized; the star represents the hope of achieving this goal. The state became an empire

under the Emperor Bokassa from 1976-79, but no change was made to the national symbols.

The coat of arms is intended to symbolize both the Central African Republic and its important position in the center of Africa. The upper scroll bears the motto of the former ruling party; it means “A Man is a Man.”

ARMS OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

An elephant and a baobab tree

The national motto—“Unité, Dignité, Travail” meaning “Unity, Dignity, Work”



The central feature is a gold star on a map of Africa, symbolizing the position of the Central African Republic

The hand was the party emblem of the dominant party in 1963, when the arms was adopted

Dem. Rep. Congo

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: February 18, 2006 Usage: National and Civil

The gold fimbriations suggest hope in the future

The red diagonal represents the blood shed in civil wars.



A blue flag with a yellow star was the flag of the Congo Free State from 1877-1908

Africa



The **Democratic Republic of Congo** was originally the Congo Free State (1880). In 1908 it became the Belgian Congo and gained independence in 1960.

The flag of the Dem. Rep. of Congo is like the design used 1964-1971.

The flag of the Congo Free State was blue, with a central gold star.

Under Belgian rule this flag remained, beside the Belgian flag. At independence in 1960, six stars were added down the hoist for the then six

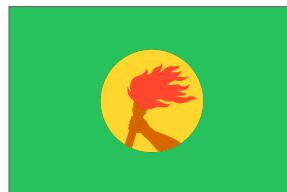
provinces. In 1964 the design changed to one like the present flag.

In 1971, the name of the country changed to Zaïre, and the flag was based on that of the ruling party. In 1997 the 1960 flag was restored, but replaced by the present design in 2006.

**FLAG OF CONGO
1960–1964 AND 1997–**

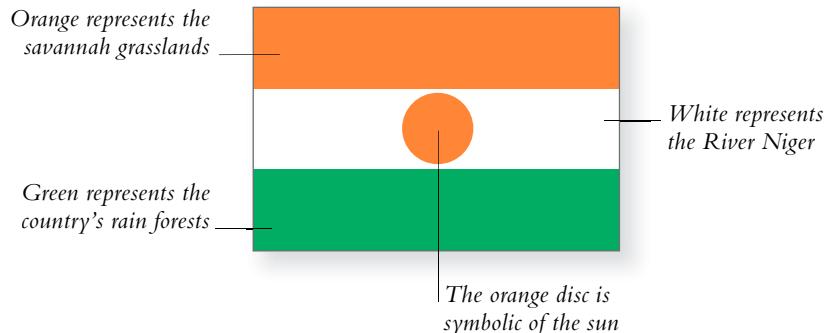


**FLAG OF ZAÏRE
1971–1997**



Niger

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 23, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



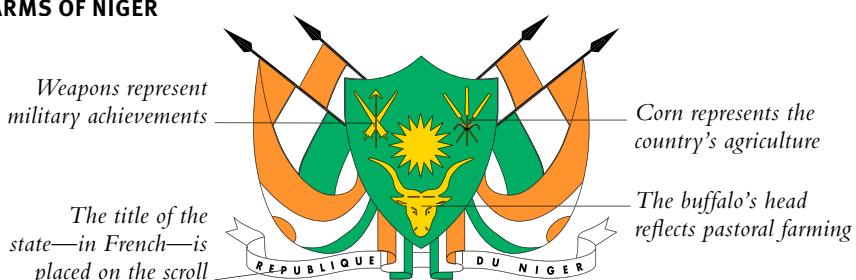
Niger was originally a province of French West Africa. In 1958 it joined the Sahel-Benin Union, achieving full independence in 1960.

The flag was designed in 1958 with that of the Ivory Coast, with which Niger was in alliance, along with Chad and Dahomey (modern Benin). This alliance came to nothing, but flags were adopted which indicated their common interest. In the case of Niger, the orange is said to stand for the savannah and the green for the

rain forest, whilst the white strip stands for the Niger River, and the orange disc for the sun. The flag was retained on independence and has remained unchanged ever since.

Four flags appear on the arms of Niger, surrounding a green shield. On the shield are weapons, the sun, a corncob, and a buffalo's head.

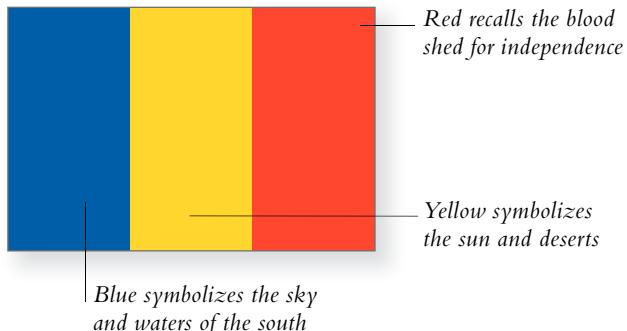
ARMS OF NIGER



Chad

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 6, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag combines two Pan-African colors—red and yellow, with two colors from the French *Tricolore*—blue and red



Africa



Chad became an autonomous republic in 1958 and for two years joined with Niger, Ivory Coast and Dahomey in the informal Sahel-Benin Union.

The flag is a combination of the Pan-African colors popularized by Ghana, and those of the French *Tricolore*, on which it is closely modeled. It was adopted for the autonomous republic and retained on independence in 1960. Despite many upheavals since independence the flag has not been changed.

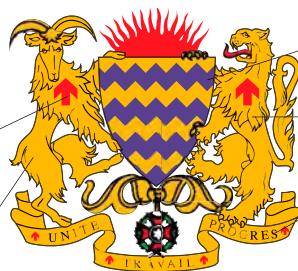
THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms dates from 1970, although Chad also has a seal (like many former French colonies), adopted in 1959. The arms is in the colors of the national flag and is supported by a lion and a wild goat. The medal below the shield is the badge of the National Order of Chad.

ARMS OF CHAD

The red symbol is for salt, the country's main mineral

A mountain goat represents the north of Chad



The wavy bars symbolize Lake Chad

The lion is symbolic of the south of the country

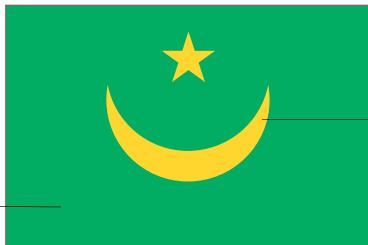
The national motto—"Unité, Travail, Progrès" ("Unity, Work, Progress")

Mauritania

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** April 1, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil

Yellow and green
are both Pan-
African colors

*Green also recalls
the country's
Islamic faith*



*The crescent and
star of Islam*

Africa



Mauritania became fully independent from France in 1960. From 1976–79 it occupied part of Western Sahara; now occupied by Morocco.

The flag was adopted in 1959 for the autonomous republic. It consists simply of a yellow crescent and star of Islam on a green field, expressive of the country's full title—"The Mauritanian Islamic Republic."

Mauritania also has a seal, like those used in many former French colonies. It is uncolored and

represents a real seal, used for certifying documents.

It bears the title of the state around the edge. In the center are the Islamic crescent and star emblems. These are decorated with a palm branch and a millet plant, both important national plants. The seal was adopted for Mauritania in 1960.

SEAL OF MAURITANIA

*The name of the
country is given in both
French and Arabic*

A palm branch



*The star and
crescent of Islam*

A millet plant

Mali

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** March 1, 1961 **Usage:** National and Civil

Green, yellow, and red are Pan-African colors



The style of the flag is modeled on the French *Tricolore*

Africa



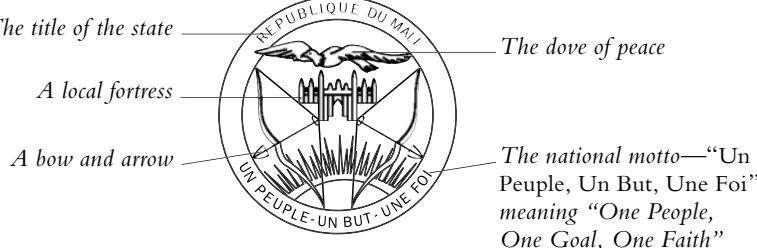
Mali achieved independence from France in confederation with Senegal on June 20, 1960, but split away later the same year to form a republic.

The flag adopted in 1959 for the Confederation was an imitation of the flag of Ghana, but following the style of the French *Tricolore*. It was charged with a black emblem known as a *kanaga*, a stylized human figure. The colors were intended to reflect a unity with other African nations. After the two countries split up in

1960, the flag was kept for use in Mali until March 1, 1961, when the black figure was dropped.

Mali also has a seal, like those of other former French colonies. It is uncolored and displays a local fortress between two bows and arrows. Above the fortress is a dove of peace and below it is a rising sun.

SEAL OF MALI



Senegal

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** September 1960 **Usage:** National and Civil

The Pan-African colors: red, yellow and green



The design is modeled on a French *Tricolore*

The star represents unity and hope

Africa



Senegal achieved independence from France in federation with Mali in June 1960. The Federation lasted until August 1960.

The original flag for the Federation with Mali was adopted on April 4, 1959. It remained in use in Mali until March 1961.

A NEW NATIONAL FLAG

After the breakup of the Federation in 1960, Senegal adopted a new national flag; changing the black

kanaga emblem on the original Federation flag to a green star. This has remained the flag ever since.

The coat of arms was designed by a French heraldist in 1965. It depicts a rampant lion and a baobab tree—emblems which had appeared on earlier badges of Senegal. The medal is the star of the National Order.

ARMS OF SENEGLA

The lion and baobab tree appeared on previous arms

A wreath of palm branches

The star of the National Order

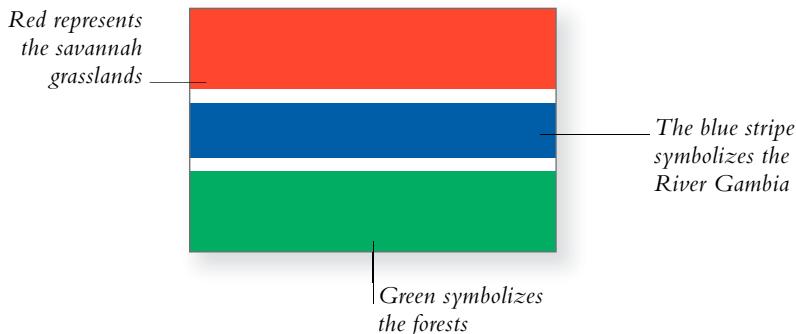


The star is the same as on the national flag

Motto is the same as Mali's—"Un Peuple, Un But, Une Foi" ("One People, One Goal, One Faith")

Gambia

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: February 18, 1965 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



The **Gambia** became self-governing in 1963 and fully independent of Britain on February 18, 1965. It became a republic on April 24, 1970.

The flag of Gambia has no political basis. The blue stripe of the flag is said to represent the River Gambia flowing between the green forest and the red savannah. It was adopted at independence in 1965.

The coat of arms was granted before independence, in 1964. It makes no reference to the previous

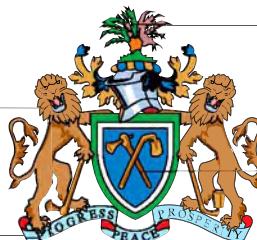
colonial badge of the Gambia and follows traditional heraldry. The two tools represent the main ethnic groups—the Mandinka and the Fulani—and the crest, above the helmet, is a local oil palm.

The federation formed with Senegal from 1981—1989 had no effect on the national symbols.

ARMS OF GAMBIA

The supporters are two lions, shown holding tools

*The national motto—
"Progress, Peace, Prosperity"*



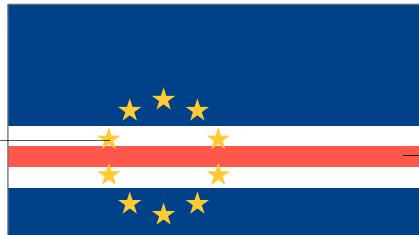
A crest of oil palm leaves

An ax and a hoe represent the Mandinka and the Fulani, the two main ethnic groups in Gambia

Cape Verde

Ratio: 10:17 **Adopted:** February 25, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil

The ten stars stand for the ten islands of Cape Verde



The red stripe between the white represents the road to progress

Blue represents the Atlantic Ocean

Africa



Cape Verde was originally an overseas province of Portugal. It obtained independence in 1975. In 1992 a multiparty constitution was adopted.

The flag adopted in 1975 was very similar to that of Guinea-Bissau, both were based on the flag of the same dominant political party.

The current flag adopted by the new government in 1992, depicts the ocean in blue, with the islands as a ring of stars on a line of red fimbriated in white, representing

the road to progress. The stars may be derived from the arms of Praia, the capital.

The national arms depicts a torch on a triangle, symbolizing unity and freedom. It also includes the ring of stars and a plumb-bob signifying rectitude and virtue, which are the “keystones” of the Constitution.

ARMS OF CAPE VERDE



*The title of the state
The stars represent the main islands of Cape Verde*

The plumb-bob is symbolic of rectitude and virtue

The torch and triangle represent unity and freedom

Guinea-Bissau

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: September 24, 1973 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Guinea-Bissau is so-called to distinguish it from the former French Guinea. Formerly a territory of Portugal, it achieved self-government in 1973.

Like the former flag of Cape Verde, the flag is based on that of the *Partido Africano para a Independencia da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), still the dominant party in Guinea-Bissau.

THE GHANAIAN INFLUENCE

The party flag was derived from that of Ghana, which first used the

pan-African combination of red, yellow, green, and black in 1957. In the Ghanaian view, the black star stands for the unity of Africa. The colors are now said to stand for the blood shed for independence, hope, and the sun, as the source of life.

The coat of arms is the PAIGC badge, a black star and a scallop shell.

ARMS OF GUINEA-BISSAU

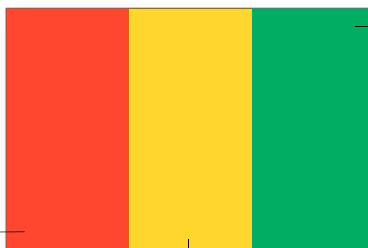


Guinea

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 10, 1958 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag is modeled on the French *Tricolore*, but in Pan-African colors

Red symbolizes the people's sacrifice



Green represents the country's vegetation

Yellow represents the sun and the riches of the earth

Africa



In 1958, **Guinea** became the first territory in former French West Africa to gain independence without first becoming an autonomous republic.

The colors of the flag were adapted from those of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine*, the dominant movement at the time of independence. Their colors were in turn derived from those of Ghana, which had first adopted them in 1957. Sekou Touré, the first President of Guinea, was a close

associate of Kwame Nkrumah, the former dictator of Ghana.

ARMS OF GUINEA

The coat of arms has been altered since the fall of Sekou Touré. The elephant's head was dropped and it now portrays a dove above an olive branch and crossed weapons.

ARMS OF GUINEA

The weapons recall periods of war

The olive branch symbolizes peace

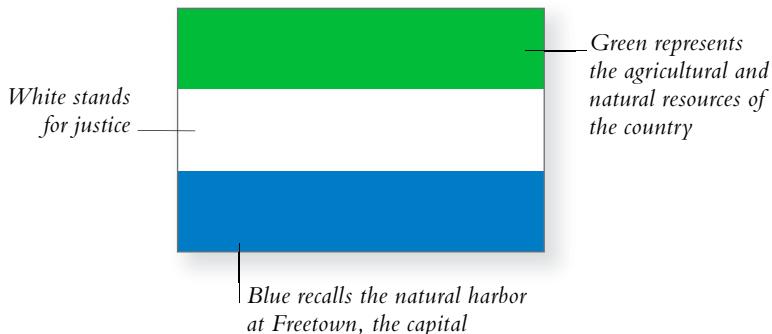


The dove is a symbol of peace

The national motto "Travail, Justice, Solidarité," meaning "Work, Justice, Solidarity"

Sierra Leone

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** April 27, 1961 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



Sierra Leone was founded as a home for freed slaves in 1787, but became a British colony in 1808. It achieved independence in 1961.

The arms and flag of Sierra Leone were devised by the College of Arms and granted in 1960.

ARMS OF SIERRA LEONE

The shield depicts a lion beneath a zigzag border, representing the Lion Mountains after which the territory was named, and three torches. At the

base are wavy bars depicting the sea. The supporters are lions, similar to those on the colonial badge.

The three main colors from the shield—green, white and blue—were used to form the flag. They represent agricultural and natural resources in green, unity and justice in white, and blue for the harbor at Freetown.

ARMS OF SIERRA LEONE

The torches symbolize education and progress

National motto—"Unity, Freedom, Justice"



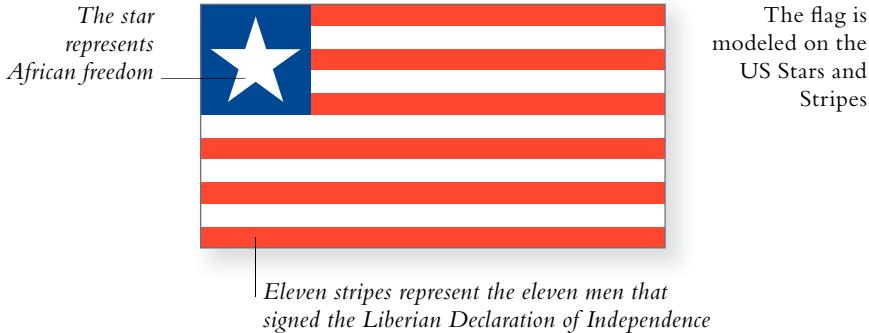
The lions holding oil-palms are taken from the old colonial badge

The border represents the Lion Mountains

The wavy bars depict the sea

Liberia

Ratio: 10:19 **Adopted:** July 26, 1847 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



Liberia was founded in 1816 by the American Colonization Society as a home for freed slaves from the USA. It became independent in 1847.

The flag of Liberia is clearly based on that of the USA, with one white star in a blue canton standing for the freedom it was intended should shine forth in the so-called “Dark Continent.” The canton itself represents Africa. The eleven stripes are said to stand, in this case, for the signatories of Liberia’s Declaration of Independence.

All the counties of Liberia have local flags, but the extent of their use is unclear.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

There is also a flag for the President, using a shield in the form of the national flag. Whether this is actually in use is in doubt, in view of the civil war in Liberia since 1990.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

Shield is derived from features of the national flag



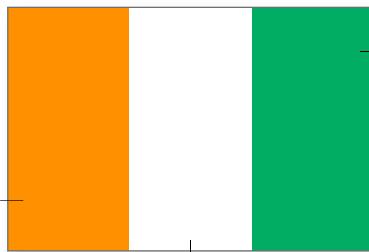
Four stars representing the Supreme Commander

Ivory Coast

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 3, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil

The design is modeled on the French *Tricolore*

Orange represents the savannah grasslands



Green recalls their coastal forests

White represents the country's rivers

Africa



Ivory Coast was originally part of French West Africa. It became independent in its own right on August 7, 1960.

After independence, Ivory Coast formed a loose alliance of West African states. The flags of these states were influenced both by the pan-African colors first used by Ghana, and also by the model of the French *Tricolore*, the flag of the former colonial power.

ALLIANCE OF WEST AFRICAN STATES

The colors chosen for Ivory Coast's flag were also used by Niger, with which Ivory Coast had an alliance (the resemblance to the colors of Ireland is coincidental). They were intended to symbolize the following: orange represents the savannah grasslands, white the rivers, and green the coastal forests. Another

interpretation is that they symbolize progress, hope, and national unity. The flag was adopted in 1959, just prior to independence.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms, which has a green shield charged with an elephant's head, is based on the emblem of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine*, the dominant political party at the time of independence. Originally the elephant's head was on a blue shield, but this was altered in 1964 to green, to match the national flag. The shield is supported by two palm trees. Behind is a rising sun. On a scroll at the base of the arms is the title of the state, "*Republique de Côte d'Ivoire*."

Burkina

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** August 4, 1984 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, yellow, and green are pan-African colors



Red recalls the 1984 revolution

The star is the guiding light of the revolution

Green represents Burkina's abundant natural resources

Africa



Burkina, originally known as Upper Volta, was once a French colony. It became self-governing in 1958 and fully independent in 1960.

The original flag of Upper Volta, adopted at independence, contained three horizontal stripes of black, white, and red. These simple colors represented the three major tributaries of the Volta River, which flow south through the country.

A NEW NATIONAL FLAG

In August 1984 there was a coup and a new flag and emblem were adopted. The new flag is in the pan-African colors, reflecting both a break with the country's colonial past and its unity with other African ex-colonies. The red is also said to symbolize the revolution and the green the abundance of natural riches. The yellow star placed over

the red and green stripes is the guiding light of the revolution.

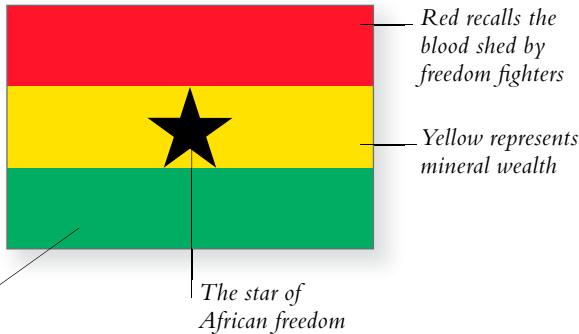
THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms, which was adopted in September 1997, shows a shield in the colors of the national flag. The arms are held by two horses, which represent the nobility of the people. Two crossed lances show the will of the people to defend their country, and an open book and two ears of millet symbolize their will to educate and feed themselves. At the top of the arms is a scroll, inscribed with the name Burkina Faso—the country of the upright people. At the base, another scroll carries the national motto: Unity, Development, Justice.

Ghana

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** March 6, 1957 **Usage:** National

Ghana was the first country to use the pan-African colors of red, yellow, green, and black



Africa



Previously the Gold Coast, **Ghana** became independent from Britain in 1957. It took its new name from that of an historic African empire.

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first leader after independence, was the first to introduce the politically symbolic pan-African colors—red, yellow, green, and black—into African flags. They were ultimately derived from the colors of Ethiopia, dating back to the 19th century and have now become associated with the Rastafarian movement in the West Indies. The flag also became

the inspiration for numerous other African flags during the period of decolonization.

Ghana followed the flag patterns established in the United Kingdom, and so has both a red ensign for use on civil vessels and a white ensign for naval vessels. This use of several flags sets it apart from other West African states, which normally have only one all-purpose flag.

GHANAIAN RED ENSIGN

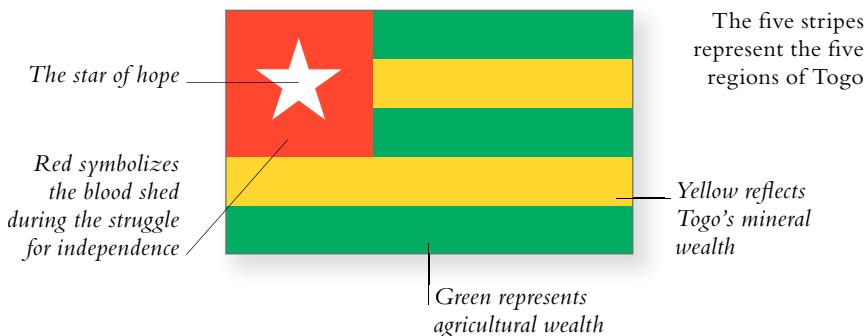
The national flag is placed in the canton



The field is in the style of the British Red Ensign

Togo

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** April 27, 1960 **Usage:** National and Civil



Africa



Togo, once a German colony, was divided between France and Britain in 1914. The French part became independent, as Togo, in 1960.

During the period of autonomy, 1956–1960, the flag was green with two yellow stars arranged diagonally with the French *Tricolore* in the canton.

On independence in 1960, the present flag was adopted. The five stripes stand for the regions of Togo, and are in green and yellow to

signify its agricultural and mineral resources. The red canton is for the blood of those who struggled for independence, while the white star is for hope, as on Liberia's flag.

The national emblem contains two lions holding bows and arrows, and a sun with the country's initials. Above the sun is the national motto.

EMBLEM OF TOGO

"RT" stands for the title of the state "République Togolaise"



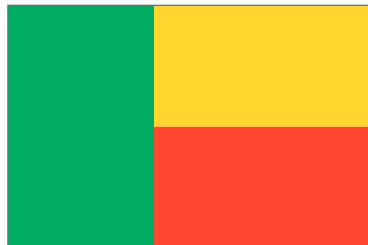
The national motto—“Union, Paix, Solidarité”, meaning “Unity, Peace, Solidarity”

Two lions are shown carrying bows and arrows to protect the homeland

Benin

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 16, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, yellow, and green are pan-African colors
The colors symbolize African unity and nationalism



Africa



Originally known as Dahomey, **Benin** became autonomous in 1958 and independent from France in 1960. Its name was changed in 1975.

The flag used today is the same as that adopted in 1959, although after the revolution of December 1975, a green flag with a red star in the canton was used. The original flag was restored in 1990, as was the original national emblem. The new name of the country was retained. Benin has both a seal and a coat of

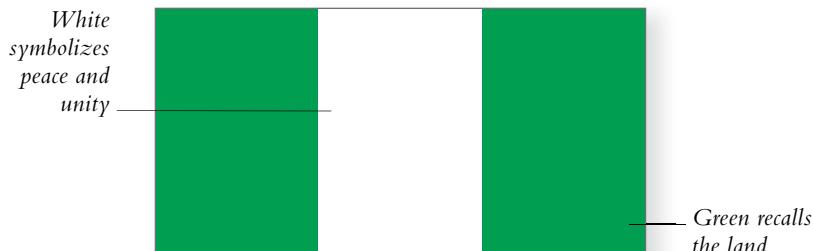
arms. The seal depicts a *pirogue* or African canoe with a bow and arrow, and two clubs. The arms consists of a quartered shield depicting a local Somba fortress, the medal of the Order of the Star of Benin, a palm tree, and a sailing ship. The motto is “*Fraternité, Justice, Travail*” meaning “Fraternity, Justice, Work.”

ARMS OF BENIN



Nigeria

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** October 1, 1960 **Usage:** National



Africa



Nigeria was formed in 1914 from several British colonies and protectorates. In 1954 it became a federation and in 1960 achieved independence.

The national flag is an adaptation of the winning entry in a competition held in 1959. The original had a red sun with streaming rays placed at the top of the white stripe. This was removed by the judges and the flag has not been altered since.

Like Ghana, Nigeria has special flags for civil and naval vessels and at

one time the states also had flags.

The coat of arms was granted in 1960, but the motto has been altered since then to include the words “Peace and Progress.” The shield represents the confluence of two rivers and the crest is a red eagle. It all stands on a green base strewn with the *Coctus spectabilis* flower.

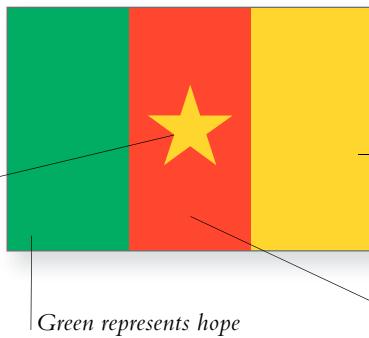
ARMS OF NIGERIA



Cameroon

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** May 20, 1975 **Usage:** National and Civil

The pattern of the flag reflects the French *Tricolore*



Red, yellow, and green are the pan-African colors

The star of unity

Yellow symbolizes prosperity

Green represents hope

The red stripe represents unity

Africa



Cameroon was originally a German colony, which was partitioned by the French and the British after World War I.

The French area became autonomous on January 1, 1959 and independent a year later. A national flag was adopted during the period of French control and was the first West African flag after that of Ghana to use the red, yellow, and green colors. The actual design is based on the French *Tricolore*. The original design of 1959 did not have a star.

A NEW UNITED FLAG

In 1961, the southern part of British Cameroon joined the former French colony forming the current state of Cameroon. To mark this, two yellow stars were placed in the upper hoist. In 1975, the two stars were replaced by a

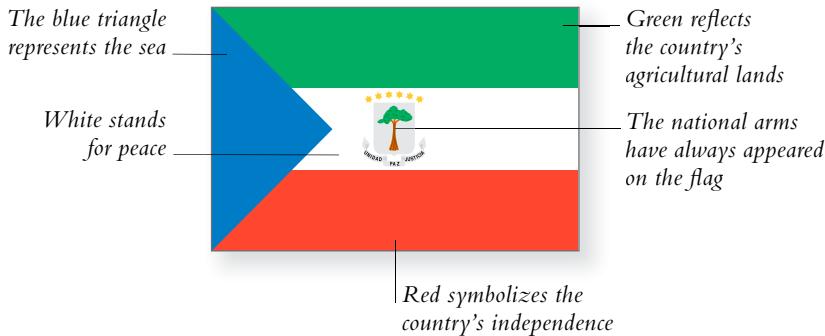
single star in the center of the flag to symbolize the new unity of the state.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms, like the flag, has been altered to reflect the changes in the constitution. The date of independence of French Cameroon has been removed, leaving just the name of the state on the scroll and there is now only one yellow star in the green on the shield. The main features of the current arms are a map of the country, a balance, and two crossed fasces or local axes. The shield is divided in the colors of the national flag; green, red, and yellow.

Equatorial Guinea

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: October 12, 1968 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Equatorial Guinea includes the former Spanish colonies of Río Muni, the island of Fernando Po (Bioko), and other islands in the Gulf of Guinea.

The flag was first shown on the day of independence, October 12, 1968, and has always contained the national emblem in the center, although from 1972, during the regime of Francisco Nguema, a different national emblem appeared on the flag. The original coat of arms was restored after he was deposed in August 1979.

ARMS OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA

The arms consists of a silver shield charged with a silk-cotton tree, which was derived from the arms of Río Muni. Above the shield is an arc of six, six-pointed stars, which represent Río Muni and the offshore islands. Beneath the shield is a scroll with the national motto.

ARMS OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA



São Tomé & Príncipe

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: November 5, 1975 Usage: National and Civil

The red triangle recalls the struggle for independence, as on the flags of Ghana and Togo



Green, red, yellow, and black are pan-African colors

The two stars stand for the two islands

Africa



São Tomé & Príncipe are a pair of islands in the Gulf of Guinea that formerly belonged to Portugal. They became independent in 1975.

The flag is based on the party flag of the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé & Príncipe (MLSTP). It was retained even after the party lost its monopoly of power in 1990.

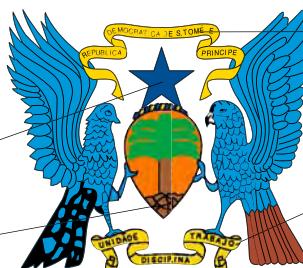
The combination of red, yellow, and green with black stars, is clearly based on the flag of Ghana, with the stars standing for the two islands.

The shield within the national arms is in the form of a cocoa pod, on which is depicted a cocoa palm, the country's main export. Above this is a star representing freedom. The supporters are two pigeons standing on a scroll with the national motto—“*Unidade, Disciplina, Trabajo*” (“Unity, Discipline, Work”).

ARMS OF SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

The crest, a blue star, stands for African freedom

The shield is in the form of a cocoa pod



The upper scroll bears the title of the state

The national motto—“*Unidade, Disciplina, Trabajo*” (“Unity, Discipline, Work”)

Gabon

Ratio: 3:4 **Adopted:** August 9, 1960 **Usage:** National and Civil

Yellow and green represent natural resources



Blue represents the sea

Africa



Gabon was once a province of French Equatorial Africa. It became independent in 1960 under the leadership of the Gabon Democratic Party.

The original flag was adopted in 1959 and was similar to the present one, but with stripes of unequal width and the French *Tricolore* in the canton. The *Tricolore* was dropped at independence. The flag's unusual proportions are laid down by law and the colors are said to stand for the sea, and for the country's natural

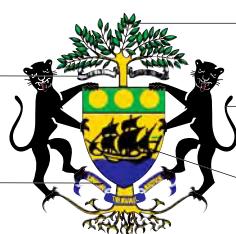
resources, especially its timber.

The coat of arms is of European style and is in the colors of the flag. The shield is supported by two black panthers and an *okoumé* tree, symbolic of the timber trade. The coat of arms is unusual in having a Latin motto—"Uniti Progrediamur," beneath the branches of the tree.

ARMS OF GABON

A Latin motto—"Uniti Progrediamur" meaning "We go forward in Unity"

A second motto means "Union, Work, Justice"



The okoumé tree is symbolic of the timber trade

Two black panthers support the shield

The ship represents Gabon moving toward a brighter future

Congo

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 20, 1959 **Usage:** National and Civil

The Pan-African colors of red, yellow, and green



The distinctive diagonal pattern sets it apart from other Pan-African flags

Africa



Congo was a French colony until independence as Congo-Brazzaville in 1960. After a coup in 1964, it became the People's Republic (1970–91).

The current flag was originally adopted for the autonomous republic, established on August 18, 1959. It is in the pan-African colors used by many other West African flags. It was retained without change when full independence was achieved in 1960.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC 1970–91

Following the Marxist revolution in 1964, no new national flag was officially adopted until the People's Republic was formed in 1970. This flag was red and contained the national emblem in the canton. The emblem depicted a wreath containing a crossed hoe and hammer, and a gold star. This represented the communist

regime which had taken power.

AN OLD FLAG FOR A NEW ERA

At the National Conference for the restoration of democracy in 1991, which restored a multiparty democracy, it was decided to re-adopt the original flag, arms and national anthem. This decision was made official on June 4, 1991.

ARMS OF CONGO

The coat of arms was originally adopted in 1963 and was designed by the European heraldist Louis Mühlmann, who also designed the arms of Gabon. It follows a traditional European heraldic style.

Angola

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 11, 1975 **Usage:** National and Civil

The design is based on flag of the MPLA

The emblems are similar to the Soviet-style hammer and sickle



The cog-wheel and machete are emblems of agriculture and of industry

Africa



Originally a Portuguese colony, **Angola** was eventually liberated by the People's Liberation Movement of Angola in 1975.

The flag of the People's Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) is like the present national flag but with a yellow star. The half cog-wheel and machete on the national flag were added, to create an emblem reminiscent of the hammer and sickle on the Soviet flag.

The national arms also features the

cog-wheel, star, and machete, but includes a hoe. These symbols are on a background which, like the emblem on the flag, is similar to the devices used in Soviet designs. The cog-wheel is balanced by a wreath of cotton, coffee, and corn, and an open book. On the scroll is "Republic of Angola," the state name.

ARMS OF ANGOLA

These are emblems of agriculture and of industry

The book is symbolic of the importance of education

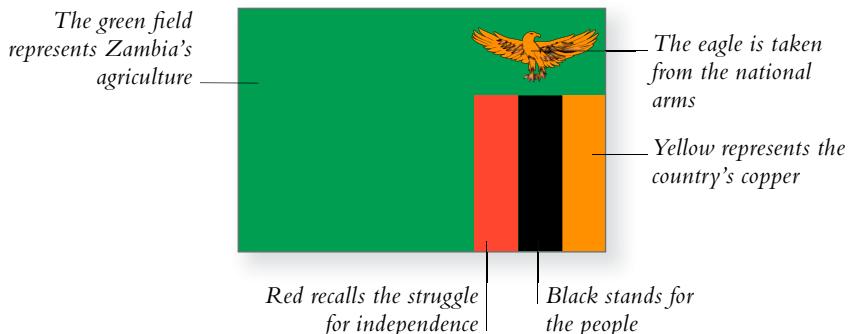


The Soviet-style emblem is still in use

The state name, in Portuguese—República de Angola—

Zambia

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: October 24, 1964 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



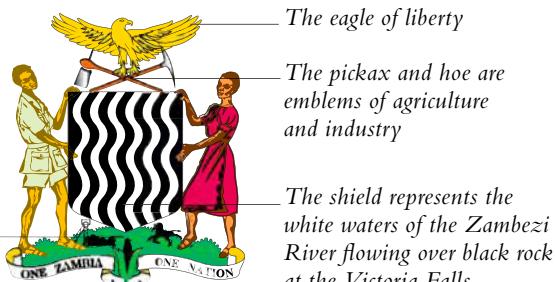
Zambia was formerly the British colony of Northern Rhodesia. It was granted full independence in 1964.

Although the United National Independence Party is no longer dominant in Zambia, the party's colors remain in the bottom left of the flag, designed by graphic artists just prior to independence. The eagle is taken from the national arms, which are based on those of the former Northern Rhodesia.

In the arms, the eagle, which once appeared in the upper part of the shield, forms the crest, above a crossed pickax and hoe. White and black bars on the shield represent the famous Victoria Falls. The supporters are an African man and woman and the motto on the base reads "One Zambia, One Nation."

ARMS OF ZAMBIA

The shield stands on an allegorical landscape



Tanzania

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** June 30, 1964 **Usage:** National and Civil

Green and black, taken from the old Tanganyikan flag, represent the land and the people



Blue, taken from the flag of Zanzibar, represents the sea

Yellow symbolizes mineral wealth

Africa



The British Trusteeship Territory of Tanganyika became independent in 1961. In 1964, it merged with the Republic of Zanzibar, to form **Tanzania**.

The original flag of independent Tanganyika was derived from that of the Tanganyika African National Union, the dominant party at the time. This was horizontal stripes of green-black-green. For the national flag, yellow fimbriations were placed between the green and the black.

Derived from the Afro-Shirazi Party, the flag of Zanzibar is green, black, and blue stripes, with a vertical

white stripe along the hoist.

A NEW UNITED FLAG

When the two countries united to form Tanzania, a new national flag was created which combined the colors of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The country's coat of arms was also altered to include the new national flag in the shield, again to reflect the new union of the two countries.

FLAG OF ZANZIBAR

The national flag was added as a canton to the revolutionary flag of 1964



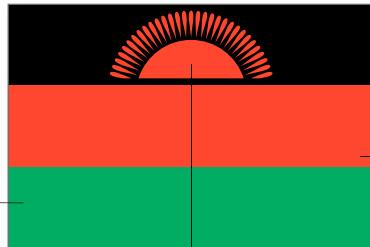
These are the colors of the Afro-Shirazi Party, who overthrew the ruling Sultan in 1964

Malawi

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 6, 1964 **Usage:** National and Civil

These are the colors of the Malawi Congress Party

Green represents the land



Black is symbolic of Malawi's African heritage

Red represents the blood shed for freedom

The rising sun symbolizes a new dawn

Africa



As Nyasaland, **Malawi** formed part of British Rhodesia and Nyasaland from 1953–63. It became fully independent in 1964.

The colors of the flag are the same as those of Malawi Congress Party (MCP) which led the country to independence in 1964. The MCP flag was derived from the flag popularized by Marcus Garvey at the time of World War I, as the flag of Africa or "Ethiopia," symbolizing an African renaissance. For Malawi's national flag the rising sun or *kwacha* was added in red.

The *kwacha* also appeared on the colonial coat of arms adopted in 1914. It was retained on the current arms granted with the flag in 1964.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The flag of the President has a bright red field. It uses the lion passant found in the center of the coat of arms, with the name "Malawi."

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG



The name of the state

The lion passant is taken from the coat of arms

Zimbabwe

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** April 18, 1980 **Usage:** National and Civil

The national bird of Zimbabwe



Green, yellow, red, and black are the colors of ZANU and pan-Africanism

Black represents the new leaders, and white, their desire for peace

Africa



Zimbabwe, the name of an ancient African city, is now applied to the whole country, which was formerly known as Rhodesia.

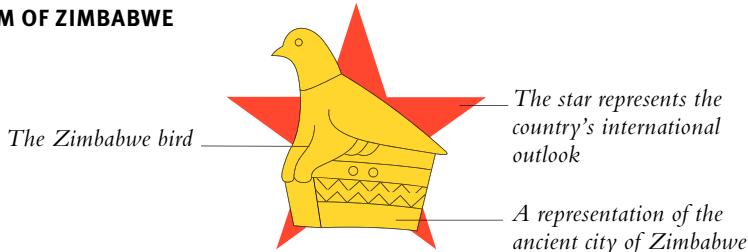
The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led the struggle for self-determination in the 1970s, and its flag was used as the basis for the new national flag. The ZANU flag is composed of concentric panels of green, yellow, red, with a central black panel; the colors of pan-Africanism. The national flag has these colors simply arranged in stripes. Toward the hoist is a white

triangle with a black edge, symbolizing new leaders and their desire for peace. Within this is the Zimbabwe bird on a red star.

THE ZIMBABWE BIRD

The bird is representative of birds found in the ruins of the ancient city of Zimbabwe and has been a local symbol since 1924. The star stands for an international outlook.

EMBLEM OF ZIMBABWE



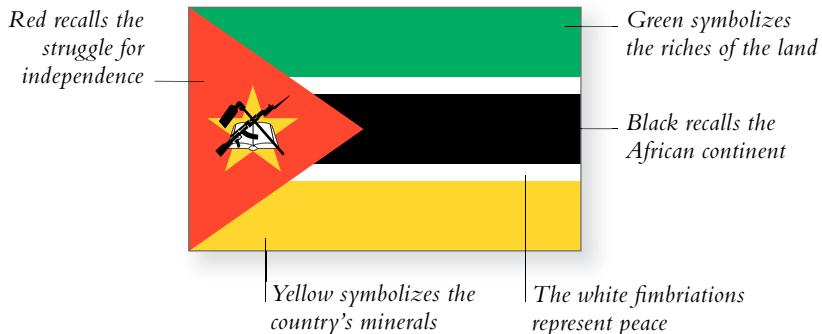
The Zimbabwe bird

The star represents the country's international outlook

A representation of the ancient city of Zimbabwe

Mozambique

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: May 1, 1983 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Mozambique was a Portuguese colony before becoming independent under the single-party rule of FRELIMO in 1975.

The original flag of the *Frente da Libertaçāo da Moçambique* (FRELIMO), the leading political party in Mozambique, also had green, black and yellow horizontal stripes separated by white fimbriations. In the hoist was a red triangle. The black, green, and yellow were derived from the flag of the African National Congress, used in South

Africa. On independence the colors were re-arranged to form the national flag, in rays emanating from the upper hoist. Over this was a white cogwheel containing the hoe, rifle, book, and star which appear on the present flag. The flag was altered in 1983; the colors were arranged in horizontal stripes, and the star of Marxism was made larger.

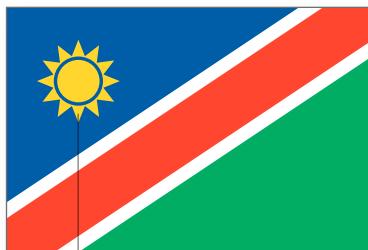
EMBLEM OF MOZAMBIQUE



Namibia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** March 21, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Blue, red, and green were the colors of SWAPO



The sun is the emblem of life and energy

Red, white, and blue were the colors of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance

Africa



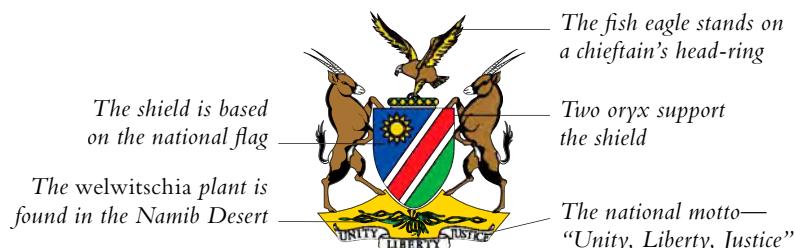
Namibia, once German South West Africa, passed into South African control after World War I, until gaining independence in 1990.

The national flag combines the colors of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), which liberated Namibia in 1990, and those of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, another Namibian political party. The sun, which is similar to that on the flag of Taiwan, is said to stand for life and energy.

ARMS OF NAMIBIA

The coat of arms, adopted with the flag, appears on the President's Flag. The shield is of the same pattern as the national flag, and is supported by a pair of oryx. On a sand-dune beneath is a *welwitschia* plant, found in the Namib Desert. The crest is a fish eagle on a chieftain's head-ring.

ARMS OF NAMIBIA



The shield is based on the national flag

The fish eagle stands on a chieftain's head-ring

The welwitschia plant is found in the Namib Desert

Two oryx support the shield

*The national motto—
"Unity, Liberty, Justice"*

Botswana

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** September 30, 1966 **Usage:** National and Civil

Black and white symbolize the harmony of the people



Blue represents both water and life

Africa



Botswana, originally known as British Bechuanaland, is now known by its Setswana name. Independence was achieved in 1966.

Unusually for Africa, the national flag of Botswana is not derived from that of the dominant political party. Neither does it use the pan-African colors.

PULA—LIFE-GIVING RAIN

Instead, it is based on the idea of life-giving rain, an essential element in the drought-prone country. This is also reflected in the Setswana word *pula*, which forms the national motto. This means not only “water” and “rain” but also the life that is derived from it.

The two horizontal blue stripes represent rain and water. The importance of water is also a feature on the flag of Lesotho. The black

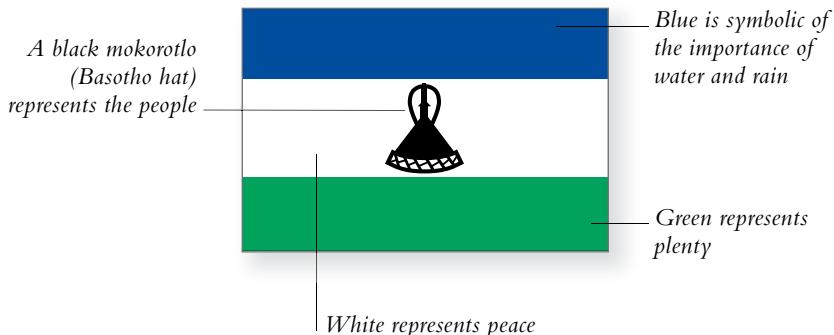
stripe fimbriated with white in the center of the flag represents the idea of the African and European populations of Botswana living together in harmony.

ARMS OF BOTSWANA

The coat of arms which appears on the President’s Flag was adopted in 1966. The African shield depicts three cog-wheels and a bull’s head separated by three wavy bars of water. The supporters are two zebra, holding an elephant tusk and a sorghum plant, the country’s staple crop. Some also interpret the zebra, with their black and white stripes, as being symbolic of racial integration.

Lesotho

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: October 4, 2006 Usage: National and Civil



Africa



Lesotho was formerly known as British Basutoland but is now known by its Sesotho name. It became independent in 1966.

The national flag was changed to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of independence. The change from a shield to a black mokorotlo, a Basotho hat, reflects a peaceful future for the country.

ROYAL ARMS OF LESOTHO

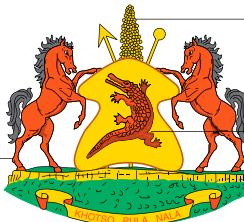
On the national flag only the outline of the shield is shown, with its tufted spine, and two weapons, but on the

Royal Standard the whole arms appear in color.

The shield, of African design, contains a crocodile, which is a symbol of King Moshoeshoe I, who founded the state in 1824. It stands on a representation of Mount Thaba Bosiu, the Mountain of Night, and is supported by two Basuto ponies. Behind the shield is a spear and a knobkerrie, a local club.

ARMS OF LESOTHO

Two Basuto ponies support the shield



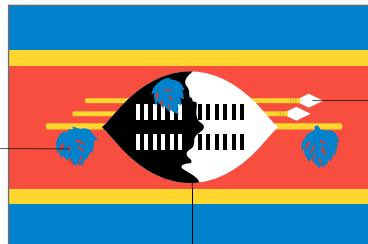
The shield stands on a representation of Thaba Bosigo

A crocodile, symbol of King Moshoeshoe I

Swaziland

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: October 30, 1967 Usage: National and Civil

Injobo tassles, made from widowbird and lourie feathers



Assegais are Swazi spears

The pattern of the shield is taken from the Emasotsha Regiment

Africa



Swaziland was a British Protectorate until 1968. It is now ruled by the Swazi royal family who founded the kingdom in the 19th century.

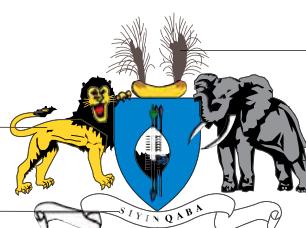
The flag is based on one given by the late King Sobhuza II to the Swazi Pioneer Corps in 1941. On it are an Emasotsha shield, laid horizontally. The shield is reinforced by a staff from which hang *injobo* tassles; bunches of feathers of the widowbird and the lourie. They also decorate the shield. Above the staff

are two *assegais*—local spears. The shield and *assegais* appear on the national arms, which is supported by a lion and an elephant, symbolic of the King and of the Queen Mother. The crest is an otter-skin head-dress decorated with widowbird feathers, and the motto is “*Siyinqaba*” meaning “We are the fortress.”

ARMS OF SWAZILAND

A lion, symbolic of the King

The national motto—
“We are the fortress”



A head-dress and widowbird feathers

An elephant, symbolic of the Queen Mother

South Africa

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** April 27, 1994 **Usage:** National and Civil

The overall design conveys convergence and unification

Yellow, black, and green are taken from the ANC flag



Red, white, and blue are taken from the colors of the Boer republics

Africa



The Union of **South Africa** was formed in 1910 and the republic in 1961. In 1994 a democratic, multi-racial constitution was adopted.

South Africa had no distinctive flag until 1928 when a national flag was adopted based on the orange, white, and blue tricolor used by the first Dutch settlers, with three smaller flags in the center for Britain, Transvaal, and the Orange Free State.

A NEW FLAG FOR A NEW ERA

When a multi-racial democracy came into prospect, attempts were made to

find a new flag and the present design, created by the Chief Herald of South Africa, was adopted. The new South African flag combines the colors of the Boer republics, with those of the African National Congress (ANC), whose flag was adopted in 1917. The Y-shape represents the convergence of old traditions with new and the progress of the united state into the future.

ARMS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Tusks are for strength and eternity

Motto is in the earliest known (though now extinct) language in South Africa; it translates as "Diverse People Unite"



The secretary bird spreads its wings to show the ascent of the nation

The weapons of war symbolize defense, but are laid down, symbolizing peace

Seychelles

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** January 8, 1996 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag now includes blue and yellow, the colors of the Democratic Party



Red, white, and green are the colors of the SPUP

Africa



The **Seychelles** became independent from France in 1976. In 1977, a *coup d'état* brought the Seychelles Peoples United Party to power.

The Seychelles has had three flags since independence. After the coup of 1977 a new national flag based on the party flag of the ruling SPUP was adopted. This used their colors of red, white, and green.

Following the adoption of the Constitution of 1993, the existence of other parties was permitted and

the latest flag allows for the colors of the Democratic Party to be included in a striking new design.

The coat of arms was adopted in 1976 and it has been only slightly altered since then. It is based on the old colonial badge and depicts the most famous inhabitant of the islands, the giant tortoise.

ARMS OF THE SEYCHELLES

Two sailfish support the arms
The giant tortoise and palm have been in use in the arms since the 19th century

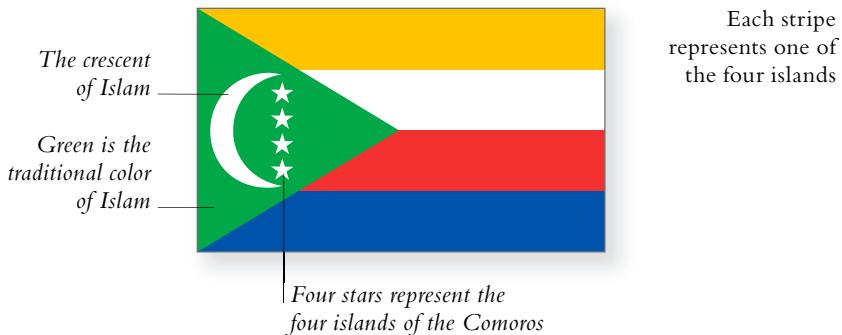


The crest is a paille-en-queue, a native bird of the Seychelles

A Latin motto—"Finis Coronat Opus," meaning "The end crowns the work," was chosen in the 19th century

Comoros

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** January 2002 **Usage:** Government and Civil



Africa



The **Comoros** became independent in 1975, although the island of Mayotte did not join the new state and remains a French dependency.

The present flag is based on one adopted at independence, which included stars for the four main islands (including Mayotte) and a crescent to symbolize Islam. The original flag was mainly red, to underline the socialist aspirations of the country. This was dropped in 1978 in favor of a green flag, with the crescent and stars in white. The Constitution of

1996 modified the flag to include the monograms of Allah and of Muhammad in the top right and bottom left corners.

Comoros adopted a new name, constitution and flag in January 2002. The four stars, the crescent moon, and the green of Islam have been moved into a triangle. Each stripe of yellow, white, red, and blue represents one of the four islands.

THE NATIONAL FLAG 1996–2002

A monogram of the Prophet Muhammad

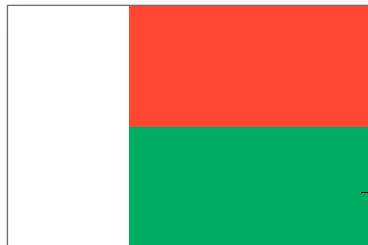


A monogram of Allah

Madagascar

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 14, 1958 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red and white were the colors of the Kingdom of Madagascar



Green represents the Hova, the former peasant class

Africa



Madagascar was annexed by France in 1895 and the monarchy abolished two years later. It achieved independence in 1960.

The flag was introduced when self-government was achieved in 1958 and was retained on independence. The red and white are said to symbolize the earlier Merina Kingdom, whose flags were all red and white, with the addition of green for the Hova, the former peasant class. The coat of arms has

changed several times since independence. That of the present republic, introduced in March 1993, shows a map of the island with a spray of leaves. Beneath these is a paddy field surmounted by the head of a zebu. The motto reads “Fatherland, Liberty, Justice.” Above the design is the country’s name.

ARMS OF MADAGASCAR

The leaves of the traveller's tree
*The national motto—
“Fatherland, Liberty,
Justice”*



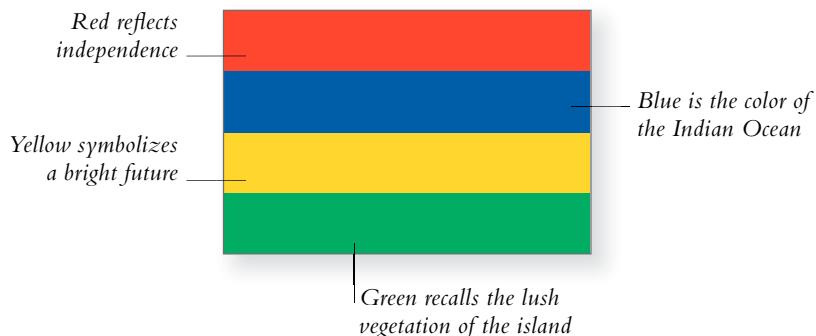
The state title is in Malagasy, the local language

An outline of Madagascar

A stylized paddy field and a zebu, a local ox

Mauritius

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: January 9, 1968 Usage: National



Africa



Mauritius was taken over by Britain from France in 1810. The colony achieved independence in 1968 and became a republic in 1992.

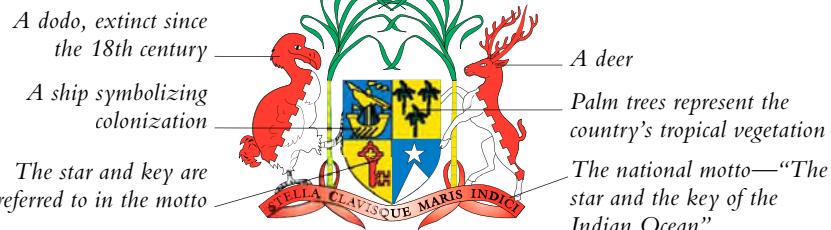
The flag was designed by the College of Arms in Britain prior to independence, and is a simple statement of the colors found in the coat of arms.

MAURITIUS'S COAT OF ARMS

The coat of arms was granted on August 25, 1906, and depicts various

attributes of the island. In the lower right quarter is a key and on the left-hand side is a white star, which are referred to in the Latin motto, "*Stella Clavisque Maris Indici*" ("The star and the key of the Indian Ocean"). The supporters are a dodo and a deer each holding a sugar cane, the island's staple crop.

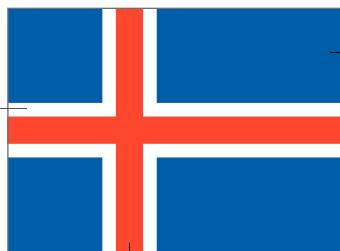
ARMS OF MAURITIUS



Iceland

Ratio: 18:25 Adopted: June 19, 1915 Usage: National and Civil

White recalls the ice and snow which covers Iceland



Deep blue represents the Atlantic Ocean

Red represents the fire produced by the island's volcanoes

Europe



Ruled by the Danes from the 14th century, **Iceland** became a realm within the kingdom of Denmark in 1918, and a republic in 1944.

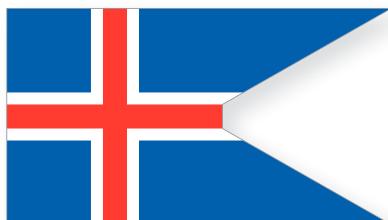
Iceland's first national flag was a white cross on a deep blue background. It was first paraded in 1897. The modern flag dates from 1915, when a red cross was inserted into the white cross of the original flag. It was adopted

in 1918 and became the national flag when Iceland gained independence from Denmark in 1944.

The naval ensign is swallow-tailed, as are the naval ensigns of all the Scandinavian countries.

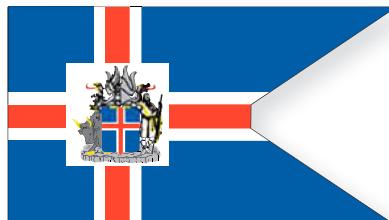
NAVAL ENSIGN

The swallow-tail form is common in Scandinavia for government flags.



THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

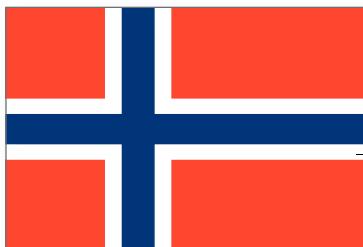
The shield is supported by a bull, an eagle, a dragon, and a giant, the mythical defenders of the island.



Norway

Ratio: 8:11 **Adopted:** July 17, 1821 **Usage:** National and Civil

The red, white, and blue colors were influenced by the French *Tricolore*—a symbol of liberty—and by the flags of the UK and USA



Off-centered white cross on a red field is taken from the Danish flag

Europe



Ruled by Denmark from 1397, **Norway** passed to Sweden in 1814. It gained independence in 1905, when its union with Sweden was dissolved.

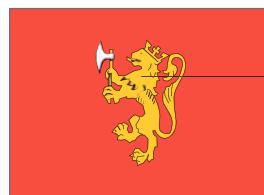
Until 1814, the Norwegian flag bore the Danish red and white cross. The current flag was born in 1821, during the period when Norway was united with Sweden. The flag combines two influences; its red and white coloring was taken from the Danish flag, and a blue cross was added overall. These three colors were chosen in honor of the French

Tricolore, a symbol of revolution and liberty. They were also the colors of the flags of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, two other countries that were not ruled by an absolute monarch.

The Royal Standard consists of a banner of the Royal Arms, dating back to the Middle Ages. It depicts a lion rampant on a red field.

THE ROYAL STANDARD

The standard dates back to the Middle Ages

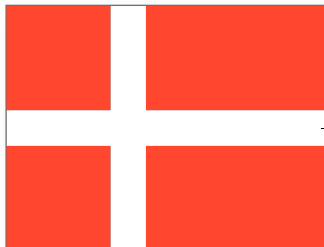


A tall, slender lion bearing the ax of St. Olav

Denmark

Ratio: 28:37 **Adopted:** 1625 **Usage:** National and Civil

According to legend, a red flag with a white cross “appeared as a sign from heaven”



The off-centered cross is the basis for other Scandinavian countries' flags

Europe



Denmark is Europe's oldest kingdom, dating back to the 10th century. The present queen rules under a constitution granted in 1953.

Besides being the oldest monarchy in Europe, Denmark also has the oldest flag, known as the *Dannebrog*, or Danish cloth. Legend says that a blood-red flag with a white cross appeared as a sign from heaven to King Valdemar II during the conquest of Estonia in 1219. In

reality, the flag may have been a gift from the Pope during the Crusades.

THE SCANDINAVIAN CROSS

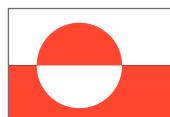
The flag was originally square, but its design was elongated and the arm of the cross in the fly was extended. It has become a model for other flags.

Overseas Territories



FAEROE ISLANDS

The Faeroe Islands are a self-governing territory of Denmark. The flag has the Norwegian colors in a new arrangement. This recalls that they were once part of Norway.



GREENLAND

Greenland's flag was designed by a local artist and adopted in 1985. In the Danish colors, white represents the ice which covers most of the island and red is for the Sun.

Sweden

Ratio: 5:8 **Adopted:** June 22, 1906 **Usage:** National and Civil

The yellow and blue colors are taken from the national arms



The distinctive Scandinavian cross is taken from the flag of Denmark

Europe



Until 1523, when King Gustav Vasa laid the foundation of **Sweden** as a separate state, the country was under the influence of Denmark.

The present flag was adopted in 1906, but it was first used in a similar form almost four centuries before. The design is based on the Scandinavian cross. The flag's blue and yellow colors are thought to come from the national coat of arms—three gold crowns in a blue field—which originated in the 14th century. A national flag day is celebrated each year on June 6.

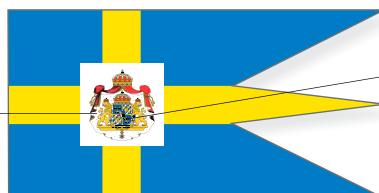
On this day in 1523 King Gustav Vasa was elected and, on the same date in 1809, Sweden adopted a new constitution.

SWEDISH ROYAL STANDARD

The coat of arms is placed in the center of the Royal Standard, which is used on special occasions by Parliament and dates from the 1440s.

THE ROYAL STANDARD

The shield is supported by two golden lions



The triple crown symbolizes the "Three Wise Men," a Swedish emblem since 1336

Finland

Ratio: 11:18 **Adopted:** May 29, 1918 **Usage:** National and Civil

The overall design is based on the Scandinavian cross



*White recalls the
snows of winter*

*Blue represents
Finland's blue skies
and its thousands
of lakes*

Europe



Finland was part of Sweden from the 12th century. From 1809 until independence in 1917, it was part of the Russian Empire.

Like Sweden's, Finland's national flag is based on the Scandinavian cross.

It was adopted after independence from Russia, when many patriotic Finns wanted a special flag for their country, but its design dates back to the 19th century. The blue coloring is said to represent the country's thousands of lakes and the sky, with white for the snow that covers

the land in winter. This color combination has also been used over the centuries in various Finnish provincial, military, and town flags.

THE ÅLAND ISLANDS

The Åland Islands are an autonomous group of Finnish islands with their own flag since 1954. The design incorporates a Scandinavian cross.

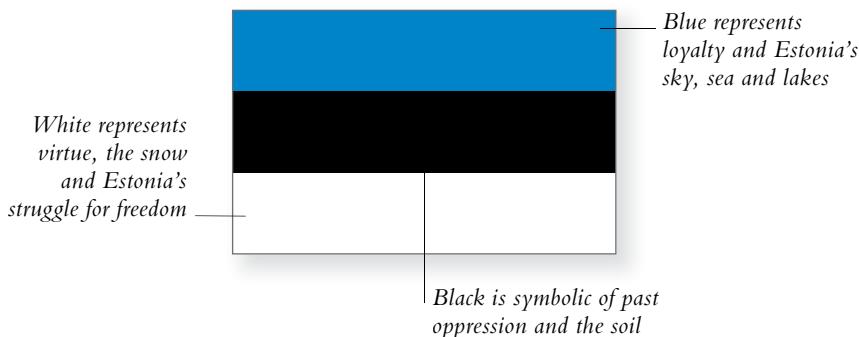
THE FLAG OF THE ÅLAND ISLANDS

Red and yellow are taken from the arms of Finland. Blue and yellow represent Sweden; the islands have a large Swedish population



Estonia

Ratio: 7:11 **Adopted:** May 8, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil



Europe



Estonia declared independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. In 1940 it was annexed by the Soviet Union, but recovered its independence in 1991.

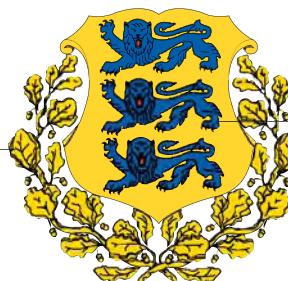
The tricolor was first adopted by students in 1881 during uprisings against occupying Russian Tsarist forces. It was re-adopted as the national flag in 1990 just prior to independence. The colors represent Estonian history, folk costumes, and landscape. Blue is the color of loyalty and also represents the sky,

sea, and lakes. Black symbolizes the past suffering of the people, the soil and the traditional black peasant's jacket. White represents virtue and the struggle for freedom. It is also the color of birch bark and snow.

The great coat of arms was originally the emblem of a 13th-century Danish king.

GREAT ARMS OF ESTONIA

The shield is surrounded by golden branches of oak



Three blue leopards are ranged on a gold shield

Latvia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 27, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil



Europe



Over the centuries, **Latvia** has been invaded by Swedes, Poles, and Russians. It became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Though officially adopted in 1922, the Latvian flag was in use as early as the 13th century, but its use was suppressed during Soviet rule.

The red color is sometimes described as symbolizing the readiness of the Latvians to give the blood from their hearts for freedom. An alternative interpretation, according

to one legend, is that a Latvian leader was wounded in battle, and the edges of the white sheet in which he was wrapped were stained by his blood.

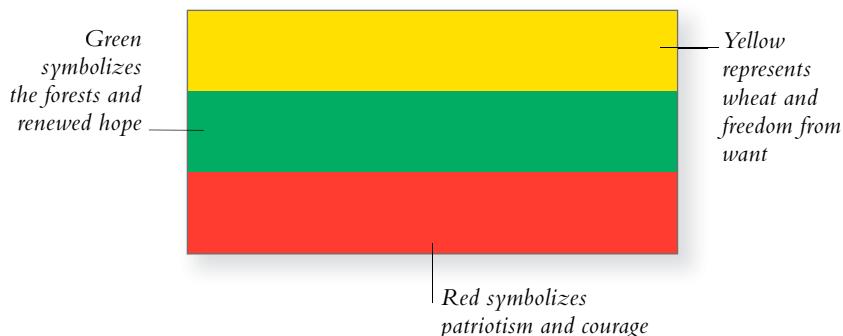
The coat of arms depicts a tripartite shield recalling the three reunited duchies of Latvia. The shield is held by a red lion and a silver griffin.

ARMS OF LATVIA



Lithuania

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** March 20, 1989 **Usage:** National and Civil



Europe



After declaring independence from Russia in 1918, **Lithuania** was again occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. It declared independence in 1991.

The national flag dates from the independent republic of 1918–1940. It was suppressed under the Soviet regime, but was re-adopted in 1990. Yellow is said to stand for ripening wheat, green for the forests, and red for love of the country, or alternatively for the blood shed in defence of the nation. Red also

refers to the color of the medieval banners of the kingdom of Lithuania. Together, the colors stand for hope, courage and freedom from want.

ARMS OF LITHUANIA

The coat of arms' red shield dates from the 14th century. It was re-adopted in 1991.

ARMS OF LITHUANIA

A white knight on his charger



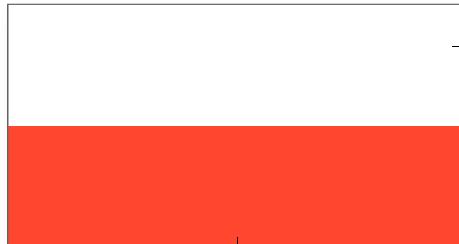
The double-barred cross commemorates the conversion of Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania to Catholicism in 1386, at the time of his marriage to Queen Hedwig of Poland

Poland

Ratio: 5:8 **Adopted:** August 1, 1919 **Usage:** National

The bicolor design was adopted after the World War I

Red and white were taken from the 13th century arms



White represents a desire for peace

In the past red was said to represent socialism

Europe



Poland is strategically placed in Europe and its borders have constantly shifted. They were last altered after World War II, in 1945.

The red and white colors of the flag have been used since the 13th century, although they did not become the official national colors until 1831. They were taken from the colors of the national arms, first recorded in 1295.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms traditionally shows a white eagle on a red field. This emblem has remained more or less unchanged throughout Poland's turbulent history. The coat of arms was used by the Kingdom of Poland until its fall in 1795, and was re-adopted by the newly-declared republic around 1918/19, when a zigzag border and crown were

added. The border and the crown were both dropped under the communist administration, but the crown was restored in 1993.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Under communist rule from 1945–1989, white was commonly said to represent the people's desire for peace, and during this period, red stood for socialism. The flag was re-confirmed as the national flag by the new government in 1992.

The plain bicolored flag is used for general purposes on land. When at sea the flag is charged with the state arms in the center. Poland also has a swallow-tailed ensign, which is also charged with the state arms.

Germany

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** May 23, 1949 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors of the German flag were taken from the uniforms of German soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars



The flag was first adopted in 1848.

The flag was officially adopted for the republic in 1919



In 1919 the German Empire became a republic. In 1949 it was divided into East and West **Germany**, and in 1990 the two halves reunited.

Until the 19th century, Germany was a collection of feudal states. In 1848 an attempt was made to unite them, and although no union was established, a flag was produced. This was a black, red, and gold horizontal tricolor. The colors were taken from the uniforms of the German soldiers in the Napoleonic Wars in the late 18th century.

THE GERMAN EMPIRE

Most of the states finally united into the German Empire in 1871, but instead of retaining the black, red and gold flag, the rival Bismarck tricolor of black, white, and red was adopted. This was a combination of the red of the Hanseatic League and

the black and white of Prussia, of which Bismarck was Chancellor.

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

After Germany's defeat in the First World War a republic was declared in 1919 and the black, red, and gold flag returned. Its revival was short-lived and in 1933, when the Nazi government came to power they restored the imperial colors and made their party flag, the *Hakenkreuz*, the national flag.

After World War II, both German states reverted to using the black, red, and gold tricolor, but East Germany added its coat of arms. Since reunification, the plain tricolor has been used.

Länder flags

On German regional flags the arms only appear on the official versions (except Lower Saxony, Saarland, and Rhineland Palatinate).



BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

The flag was adopted in 1953. Its colors derive from the arms of Duke Frederick V of Swabia, the coat of arms dates back to 1265. It was adopted as the state arms in 1954.



BERLIN

The flag was first adopted for West Berlin in 1950 and extended to the whole city in 1991. The bear, a pun on the name Berlin, dates from 1338 and the colors from 1861.



BREMEN

The flag of Bremen predates its coat of arms, which was adopted in 1891. Prior to this, Bremen was a member of the Hanseatic League, where the flag originated.



HESSEN

The flag of Hessen was adopted in 1948. The coat of arms was that of Ludwig III of Thuringia in 1182. The red and white colors of the flag are taken from the lion in the arms.



BAVARIA

Bavaria's flag was adopted in 1950, but blue and white have been Bavarian colors since 1330 and the lozenge shapes first appeared on banners in the 15th century.



BRANDENBURG

The colors of the flag are from the shield, dating from 1170, although red and white were also the colors of the medieval Hanseatic League. The flag was adopted in 1990.



HAMBURG

Used since 1325, red and white are the Hanseatic colors. The castle is for Hamburg; the three towers for the Trinity; the cross for Christ; the stars for the Father and Holy Spirit.



LOWER SAXONY

This flag uses the national flag with Lower Saxony's local arms in the center. It was adopted in 1946, but the arms dates from 1361, when it appeared on the seal of the ruler.

Germany: Länder flags



MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN

This flag, adopted in 1991, combines blue and white of Pomerania with blue, yellow, and red of Mecklenburg. The bull and the gryphon are also local emblems. Red and white recall the Hanseatic League.



NORTH-RHINE-WESTPHALIA

The coat of arms depicts the River Rhine of the Rhineland, the horse of Westphalia, and the rose of Lippe; the three territories which united to form the state. The colors of the flag are from the arms.



RHINELAND-PALATINATE

The flag was adopted in 1948 when the arms were placed on the national flag. The coat of arms depicts the lion of the Palatinate dating from 1229, the cross of Trier from 1273, and the wheel of Mainz from 1335.



SAARLAND

Adopted in 1957, the flag of Saarland recalls the different parts of the state. Depicted on the shield is the lion of Saarbrücken, the cross of Trier, the eagles of Lorraine and the lion of Pfalz-Zweibrücken.



SAXONY

The flag was adopted in 1991, but the coat of arms is the traditional arms of the rulers of Saxony; black and yellow bands and the green crown of rue. The white and green flag dates from the 19th century.



SAXONY-ANHALT

This flag was the same as Baden-Württemberg until 1991, when the colors were reversed. The eagle recalls Prussia, the bicolored bands and rue crown, Saxony, and the bear and wall are the arms of Anhalt.



SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

The shield depicts two lions from arms of Schleswig and a nettle-leaf from those of Holstein. The colors of the flag, adopted in 1957, are taken from the arms.



THURINGIA

Another flag whose colors are based on the state arms. It was adopted in 1991. The red and white lion was the arms of the Counts of Thuringia in the 12th century.

The Netherlands

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** February 19, 1937 **Usage:** National and Civil

Blue and white originally represented faith in God



In the mid-17th century, red, rather than orange, was made the official color

Europe



Independent from Spain in the 16th century, the **Netherlands** was a republic until the Napoleonic Wars and became a kingdom in 1814.

The first *Stadholder*, or ruler, of the Dutch Republic was William of Orange, who joined with Dutch nationalists and led the struggle for independence from Spain.

THE PRINSVLAG

Partly out of respect for him, the first flag adopted by the Dutch, was a horizontal tricolor of orange, white, and blue (see page 6). It became known as the *Prinsenvlag* and was based on the livery of William of Orange. The orange dye was particularly unstable and tended to turn red after a while, so in the mid-17th century, red was made the official color. The flag has flown since then, but was only confirmed

by Royal Decree in 1937. As the first revolutionary flag, it has had a seminal influence throughout the world, particularly on the Pan-Slavic colors of Russia.

Until about 1800, in the case of both the orange- and red-striped versions, the number of stripes and their order frequently varied.

ARMS OF THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch coat of arms depicts a golden lion on a blue shield, holding a sword and a sheaf of arrows. It is a combination of the coat of arms of the Dutch Republic and that of the House of Orange. The seven arrows represent the seven original provinces in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands: Provincial flags

Except for South Holland and North Brabant, all the Dutch provincial flags are modern creations.



DRENTHE

White and red are the colors of the Archbishops of Utrecht, former rulers of Drenthe. The black castle and stars recall the uprising of Coevorden against the archbishop.



FLEVOLAND

Blue is for the Lake IJssel from which the province was reclaimed. Green is for vegetation and yellow for the cornfields. The lily recalls Lely, the engineer of the reclamation project.



FRIESLAND

The flag is based on that of the 15th century kings of Friesland. The colors are those of the Dutch flag. The stripes and flowers represent the seven districts of Friesland.



GELDERLAND

In 1371, the dukedoms of Gelre and Gulik were united and combined their arms. The new arms was blue, yellow, and black, the colors which appear in the flag, hoisted in 1953.



GRONINGEN

The flag, adopted in 1950, combines green and white from the town of Groningen, surrounded by red, white, and blue of Ommeland, reflecting the town's position.



LIMBURG

The red lion is from the arms of Limburg. White and yellow are from local coats of arms, while the narrow blue stripe is for the Maas River which crosses the province.



NORTH BRABANT

The design, adopted in 1959, originated in Antwerp where red and white checked coats of arms were popular. It was associated with the area from the 17th century.



NORTH HOLLAND

Adopted in 1958, this flag unites the colors of Holland; yellow and red, with blue and yellow of West Friesland. Yellow, the common color, is placed at the top.

Netherlands: Provincial /Overseas Territory flags



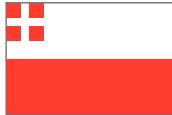
OVERIJSSEL

The yellow and red stripes recall the ancient association of the province with Holland. The wavy blue stripe running across the center is for the IJssel River, after which the province is named.



SOUTH HOLLAND

The flag is a banner of the arms of Holland and was adopted in this form in 1986, replacing the previous simple triband of yellow-red-yellow, which was also based on the colors of the arms .



UTRECHT

The Archbishop of Utrecht used a red flag with a white cross from 1528. The Archbishop's flag remains in the canton of the modern flag, adopted in 1952. The field is in the traditional colors of the province.



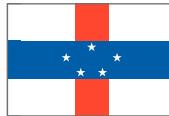
ZEELAND

The flag of Zeeland, adopted in 1949, shows its full coat of arms. The wavy blue and white stripes are for the sea and the constant struggle to control it. From the water, the Dutch lion rises in triumph.



ARUBA

The flag of Aruba was adopted in 1976 when it was still administered as part of the Netherlands Antilles. The flag was retained when Aruba became autonomous in 1986.



NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

Originally adopted in 1959, the flag incorporated the Dutch colors with six stars on the blue stripe, for the island groups. These were reduced to five in 1986 when Aruba left the Netherlands Antilles.

Belgium

Ratio: 13:15 **Adopted:** January 23, 1831 **Usage:** National and Civil

The vertical layout is derived from the French *Tricolore*



Red is adapted from the lions claws and tongue

Black is taken from the shield of the arms

Gold is the color of the lion in the arms

Europe



Following centuries of foreign domination, **Belgium** finally gained international recognition as an independent kingdom in 1830.

The Belgian colors black, yellow and red derive from the arms of Brabant, a black shield with a gold lion having red tongue and claws. The first flag in these colors, but with horizontal

stripes, appeared in 1792 in a revolt against Austrian rule. On independence in 1831, they were changed to vertical in imitation of the French *Tricolore*.

Belgian Regional flags



BRUSSELS

Adopted in 1991, the lily was widespread in the area which later became Brussels.



FLANDERS

Adopted in 1985, it is based on the arms, and the colors are taken from the national flag.



GERMAN REGION

Adopted in 1990, the lion recalls former owner, Limburg; 9 roses are for the 9 communes.

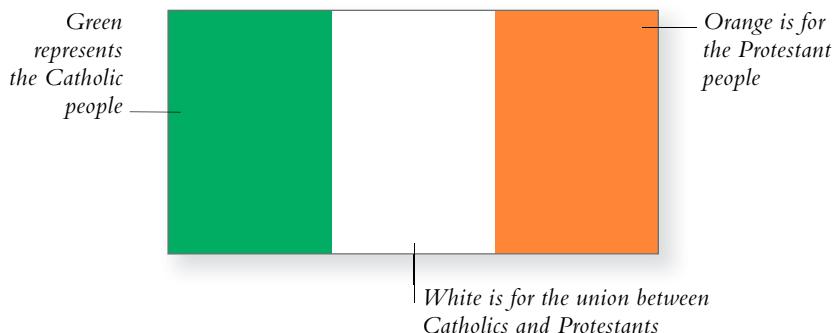


WALLONIA

The cockerel is derived from the Gallic rooster, recalling the cultural links with France.

Ireland

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** January 21, 1919 **Usage:** National and Civil



Europe



After centuries of British rule, **Ireland** was split in 1921, becoming the Free State (The Republic of Ireland) and the northern Six Counties.

The Irish flag is modeled on that of the French *Tricolore*. It was first flown by nationalists during their struggle for freedom from Britain in 1848, a year of Europe-wide revolution. However, it was not until the Easter Rising of 1916 that it came to be regarded as the national flag. It was officially confirmed in 1919 and was written into the Constitution in 1937. The green coloring on the flag

represents the Catholic majority; orange is for the Protestant minority (originally supporters of William of Orange) and white is for peace between the two faiths.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The flag of the President was introduced in 1945 and is based on the ancient “Green Flag,” a traditional symbol of Irish nationalism.

THE PRESIDENT'S STANDARD

The harp is said to be the harp of Brian Boru, an 11th century ruler

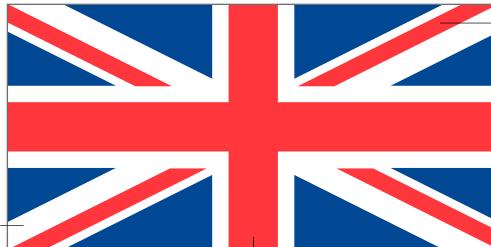


The flag is similar to the quartering for Ireland on the Royal Arms of the United Kingdom

United Kingdom

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** January 1, 1801 **Usage:** National and Civil

The white saltire on a blue field was taken from the St. Andrew's Cross



The saltire of St. Patrick has been counterchanged with the white saltire of St. Andrew

The central red cross, fimbriated with white was adapted from the St. George's Cross

Europe



The **United Kingdom** was formed in 1707, uniting England, Scotland, and Wales. In 1801 Ireland joined, but in 1921 the south broke away.

The Union Flag is probably one of the world's best known flags, partially due to its unusual design, but more importantly, because of the importance of the British Empire in World history.

THE FIRST UNION FLAG

When King James of Scotland became King of England in 1603, both countries retained their own flags. Even today, the St. George's Cross and St. Andrew's Cross remain the flags of England and Scotland respectively. In 1606 King James considered it necessary to have a flag reflecting the new union of Scotland and England and ordered that a Union Flag, more commonly

known as the Union Jack, be flown on British ships, combining the English Cross of St. George with the Scottish Cross of St. Andrew.

A NEW UNION FLAG

In 1801, when Ireland joined the Union, the so-called Cross of St. Patrick was added to form the present flag, but was counterchanged with the Cross of St. Andrew.

A ROYAL FLAG

The Union Flag was established as a maritime flag and it remains a royal flag, not officially a national flag. In 1915, King George V gave permission for British citizens to use the flag on land.

Subnational flags

Most regional flags are older than the Union Flag, except those based on the St. George's Cross, which date from the 20th century.



ENGLAND

Originally used in 1191, the flag of St. George became the flag of England after 1277. The white flag has a red upright cross throughout. At sea it is the flag of an Admiral.



SCOTLAND
(THE STANDARD)

The red lion on gold is the traditional royal flag of Scotland. The *fleur-de-lis* on the border recall the “auld alliance” with France. Its exact date of adoption is not known.



ISLE OF MAN

Again this is a traditional design. It was adopted in 1968. The *Trinacria*, three legs of Man, has been used for several centuries in varying forms, but its origin is uncertain.



JERSEY

Prior to the adoption of its current flag, Jersey used a red diagonal cross on white, which is the same as the saltire of St. Patrick. The arms were added in 1981.



WALES

Approved in 1959 as the Welsh national flag, the Red Dragon is an ancient emblem of Wales. For a time it appeared on a green hill, but the horizontal division is traditional.



SCOTLAND
(NATIONAL FLAG)

In use since 1512, the Scottish flag is the Cross of St. Andrew. As James was King of Scotland before he was King of England, this flag formed the basis of the Union Flag.



GUERNSEY

Guernsey formerly used only the Cross of St. George. In 1985 a gold cross taken from the flag of William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings was added to the flag.

UK: Royal Standards

Like other monarchies, the UK has a wide range of flags which are armorial or semi-armorial, for the leading members of its royal family. In the case of HM Queen it is necessary to distinguish between her role as Queen of the United Kingdom and her other Realms, and as Head of the Commonwealth. In addition to her British Royal Standard she has standards for other Realms.



**ROYAL STANDARD
OF THE UNITED
KINGDOM**

This form has been in use since the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 and depicts the three areas united to form the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). Strictly, flags of this kind are armorial banners rather than “standards.”



**QUEEN AS HEAD
OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

This is used when the Queen is not in a “Queen’s Realm” (i.e., a country of which she is directly the Head of State) or in one which does not have a local Royal Standard. It is a banner with Her Majesty’s initial “E”, a gold crown, and a chaplet of roses.



**PRINCE PHILIP
DUKE OF
EDINBURGH**

The banner for Prince Philip has quarters representing his descent from the royal families of both Denmark and Greece, and from the Mountbattens, and his title Duke of Edinburgh is represented by the arms of the city.



**HRH PRINCE
CHARLES PRINCE
OF WALES**

The banner is an adaptation of the Royal Standard, with a “label” for an eldest son; a white bar with three points, and the quartered arms of the Principality of Wales over all in the center. Labels are used for children and grandchildren of the Queen.



**HRH PRINCE CHARLES
FOR USE IN WALES**

For personal visits to Wales and as his own flag, the Prince uses the banner of the Principality of Wales with his crown on a green shield over all in the center. The Prince also has banners for his titles in Cornwall, Rothesay, and as Lord of the Isles.

OTHER ROYAL STANDARDS

Other members of the Queen’s family who have standards based on the Royal Standard are the Princess Royal, the Duke of York, Earl of Wessex, and the Queen’s royal cousins. There is a general banner for those members of the royal family not entitled to an individual standard.

Overseas Territories

Official flags for British Overseas Territories are generally based on the British blue or government ensign with a local badge in the fly.



ANGUILLA

The flag of Anguilla was adopted in 1990. It is a blue ensign with the badge of the island. This derives from the unofficial flag used locally on land only.



BERMUDA

Unusually, Bermuda uses a red ensign. The badge shows a lion holding a shield on which appears the 1609 wreck of a ship, which struck a reef, not a cliff as is shown.



**BRITISH
ANTARCTIC
TERRITORY**

The white field of the new flag, approved in 1998, symbolizes the snow which covers the Antarctic continent. It is used by research stations within the territory.



CAYMAN ISLANDS

Blue and white lines recall the sea and the three stars, the three main islands. The lion of England appears above and the crest is a turtle and a pineapple for the fauna and flora.



**ANGUILLA
(UNOFFICIAL)**

Adopted in 1967, when the island separated from St. Kitts and Nevis. The turquoise stripe represents the sea, and the three dolphins are for friendship, wisdom, and strength.



**BRITISH VIRGIN
ISLANDS**

The badge dates from 1909, the flag from 1956. It shows St. Ursula, the namesake of the islands, with a lamp. She was martyred with 11,000 virgins, represented by 11 lamps.



**BRITISH INDIAN
OCEAN TERRITORY**

The flag was adopted in 1990. Blue and white wavy lines represent the ocean and the palm recalls the natural vegetation of the islands. The crown shows British possession.



**FALKLAND
ISLANDS**

The badge shows a ram for the sheep industry of the islands. The ship is the *Desire*, the ship of John Davies who discovered the islands in 1592. The flag was hoisted in 1948.

United Kingdom: Overseas Territories



GIBRALTAR
(ENSIGN)

The blue ensign of Gibraltar was officially adopted in 1895. The badge is based on the arms of Gibraltar granted by Ferdinand, the King of Spain in 1502. The castle and key recall that Gibraltar is both a fortress and, because of its position on one side of a narrow strait, also the key to the Mediterranean Sea.



GIBRALTAR (CITY)

The local flag of Gibraltar City is a banner of the arms officially granted in 1926. It is based on the original arms granted by Spain in 1502. The banner was granted for use exclusively on land in 1983. Like the badge it depicts a red fortress with a gold key. The red and white field is derived from the arms.



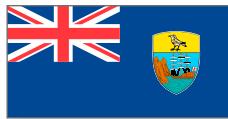
MONTSERRAT

The coat of arms dates from 1909, although its origin is unknown. It shows a woman in green holding a cross and a harp. The cross is for Christianity and the woman and harp recall Irish immigrants who settled on the island in 1632. The arms were re-adopted in 1962 when the West Indies Federation was dissolved.



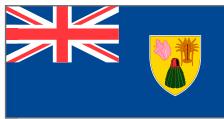
PITCAIRN ISLANDS

Adopted for the Pitcairn Islands in 1984, the badge commemorates the island's earliest settlers, the infamous crew of HMS *Bounty*, who mutinied in 1790. The badge is blue to represent the Pacific Ocean, with a green triangle symbolizing the island. The shield is charged with the Bible and the anchor of HMS *Bounty*.



ST. HELENA

The current badge was made into a coat of arms in 1984. It depicts a ship flying the Cross of St. George sailing between two cliffs. Above is a wire-bird representing the local fauna. The flag is also flown in the Ascension Islands and Tristan da Cunha, dependencies administered by St. Helena.



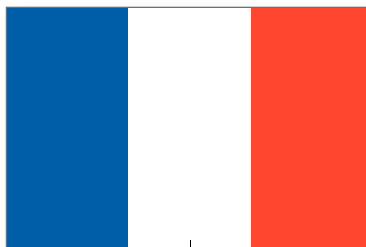
TURKS AND
CAICOS ISLANDS

The blue ensign was granted in 1968, three years after the arms. The shield from the arms shows a conch-shell and a crayfish representing fishing, the islands' main industry, and a cactus for their flora. The Turks and Caicos became a separate colony after the Bahamas achieved independence.

France

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** February 15, 1794 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, white, and blue have come to represent liberty, equality, and fraternity—the ideals of the French Revolution



Blue and red are the colors of Paris

White is the color of the House of Bourbon

Europe



France was a monarchy until the Revolution of 1789. A republic was created in 1792, following the abolition of the monarchy.

The traditional emblem of France was the *fleur-de-lis*, or lily, which first appeared on the arms in the 12th century.

A REVOLUTIONARY FLAG

The *Tricolore* was used during the Revolution and has since become a symbol of liberty around the world.

Other nations have also adopted the design. Because France has no arms, the *Tricolore* is also the national emblem.

The colors are probably derived from those of Paris, combined with those of the Bourbon Dynasty, though they are usually associated with liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Overseas Territories



ST. PIERRE &
MIQUELON

These islands lie just south of Canada's Newfoundland. The flag features the emblems of the Basques, Bretons, and Normans who settled the islands.



FRENCH POLYNESIA

Red and white are local colors. The emblem depicts a *pirougue*—a local canoe—below a rising sun. The five crew recall the five island groups.

Luxembourg

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** 1848 **Usage:** National

The colors date back to the 13th century



The blue stripe is paler than that of the Netherlands

Europe



For most of the 19th century **Luxembourg** was part of the Netherlands. It gained independence in 1890 and is Europe's last independent duchy.

Luxembourg had no flag until 1830, when patriots were urged to display the national colors. The flag was defined as a horizontal tricolor of red, white and blue in 1848, but it was not officially adopted until 1972. The tricolor flag is almost identical to that of the Netherlands, except that it is longer and its blue stripe is a lighter shade. The red, white, and blue

coloring was derived from the Grand Duke's coat of arms, which dates from the 13th century.

THE CIVIL ENSIGN

Since 1972 a banner of the Grand Duke's arms has been used as a civil ensign for use at sea. This is a blue and white-striped field with a lion rampant in the center.

LUXEMBOURG CIVIL ENSIGN

Red, white, and blue coloring gave rise to colors of national flag



A crowned two-tailed lion rampant

Monaco

Ratio: 4:5 **Adopted:** April 4, 1881 **Usage:** National and Civil

The bicolor design is common on other national flags, for example San Marino. It is often used as a background for heraldic livery



Red and white are the heraldic colors of the Grimaldi family

Europe



The Grimaldis, a Genoese family, have ruled **Monaco** since the 13th century. Until 1860, the principality was considered part of Italy.

The present bicolor design was adopted in 1881 under Prince Charles III. It is identical to the far younger Indonesian national flag except in its statutory proportions which are 4:5, compared to 2:3.

The Grimaldi coat of arms, which appears on the state flag, is the traditional one of the princely family

and consists of a shield supported by two monks bearing swords. The device alludes to the legend of 1297, in which the Grimaldis conquered Monaco after entering the city with soldiers disguised as monks. Earlier Monegasque flags incorporated the Grimaldi shield and crown on a white field.

ARMS OF GRIMALDIS

*The Grimaldi motto—
Deo Juvante
(“With God’s Help”)*



A princely crown

*The collar of the
Order of St. Charles
surrounds a shield of
red and white (or silver)*

Andorra

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 10, 1996 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors reflect Andorra's dependence upon France and Spain

Blue and red are taken from the colors of France



Red and yellow are taken from the colors of Spain

*Andorran
coat of arms*

Europe



The Principality of **Andorra** is an independent republic in the Pyrenees, between France and Spain. It is one of the world's oldest states.

The principality of Andorra has been under Franco-Spanish protection since 1278, governed by the Counts of Foix and the Bishops of Urgel. The colors of its national flag reflect both France: blue and red; and Spain: yellow and red. The Andorran coat of arms is placed in the middle of the yellow stripe.

ARMS OF ANDORRA

Like the colors of the flag, the coat of arms also depicts the areas on which Andorra has been dependent. The quartered shield represents Urgel by the crozier and mitre, Foix by the three vertical red stripes, Catalonia by the four vertical red stripes and Béarn by the two cows.

ARMS OF ANDORRA

The crozier and mitre symbolize the Bishops of Urgel

The four red stripes are taken from the arms of Catalonia



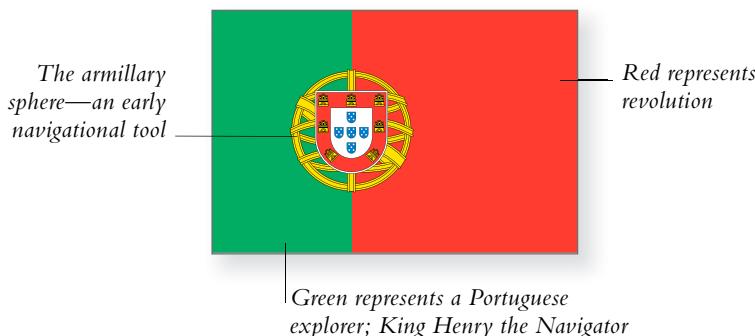
The three red stripes recall the Counts of Foix

The two cows are taken from the arms of Béarn

The motto is, "Virtus Unita Fortior"—"Strength united is stronger"

Portugal

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: June 30, 1911 Usage: National and Civil



Europe



During the 15th and 16th centuries, **Portugal** played a leading role in discovering the world beyond Europe. It formed a republic in 1910.

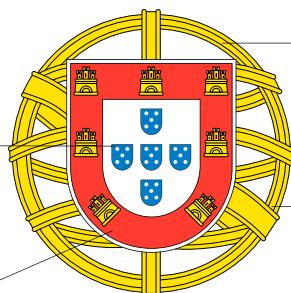
The present flag with red for revolution and green for Portuguese exploration dates from 1910. The central emblem is an armillary sphere, an early navigational instrument, on which is the former royal arms of Portugal. The white

shield was first used by King Sancho I. The five blue shields recall the victory of King Afonso Henriques over five Muslim princes. The red edge and castles are from the marriage of King Alfonso III to a Spanish princess in 1252.

EMBLEM OF PORTUGAL

Five blue shields recall the victory of King Afonso Henriques

Gold castles on red recall the marriage of King Alfonso III to a Spanish Princess



This armillary sphere and shields appear in the center of the Portuguese coat of arms

The armillary sphere recalls the importance of Portuguese exploration of the globe

Spain

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 19, 1927 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red and yellow are the colors of the arms of both Castille and Aragón



The first red and yellow flag of Spain was adopted in the 18th century for use at sea

The present layout was adopted in 1927

Europe



Spain was united in the 15th century and rapidly became an imperial power. It lost most of its colonies during the 19th century.

Early Spanish flags were mostly heraldic; some, like the flag of Castilla y León (*see page 138*) survive today.

In 1785 the King of Spain adopted red and yellow, a combination of colors then used by no other country, to distinguish Spanish ships. The present pattern was finally established in 1927.

THE SPANISH REPUBLIC

When Spain became a republic in 1931, an equal horizontal tricolor in red, yellow, and purple became the new flag. Purple was from the arms of León. At the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the original flag was restored.

The state flag has the national arms set toward the hoist.

ARMS OF SPAIN



The arms show the regions of Spain. The shield is supported by the Pillars of Hercules and has the Spanish royal crown above.

Regional flags

Although most of the flags were adopted recently, all are based on older models, or traditional arms, displaying continuity with the past.



ANDALUSIA

Adopted in 1918, but not confirmed until 1983, the colors were those used during the Napoleonic Wars. The coat of arms depicts the Pillars of Hercules and the lions of Cadiz.



ASTURIAS

Blue is the color of the Virgin Mary. The cross is the Cross of Victory, a traditional Asturian emblem. From it hang Greek letters, symbolizing Christ, the Beginning, and the End.



THE BASQUE COUNTRY
(PAÍS VASCO)

This flag was first adopted in 1931 and re-adopted in 1979. It is based on the Union Jack. Red recalls bloodshed, white the Catholic faith, and green the Oak of Guernica.



CANTABRIA

White and red are the traditional colors of the area. The arms allude to the seafaring customs of the people and include an ancient seal. The flag was adopted in 1981.



ARAGÓN

The stripes of Aragón date from the 14th century. Tradition states that a King of Aragón drew bloodstained fingers over a gold shield. The flag was adopted in 1981.



BALEARES

The field is the same as the flag of Aragón, to which the islands belonged in medieval times. The canton is the emblem of Palma de Majorca, the islands' capital.



CANARY ISLANDS
(ISLAS CANARIAS)

The colors symbolize those of the Virgin Mary and the Papacy. They are also thought to evoke the blue sea, the white beaches, and the golden sun. It was adopted in 1989.



CASTILLA-LA
MANCHA

Adopted in 1989, the deep red stripe and the castle are the emblem of Castile. The white panel is intended to recall the surcoats worn by the soldiers in the Crusades.

Spain: Regional flags



CASTILLA Y LEÓN

This flag has been used by Castilla y León since 1248. It depicts the union of Castilla (castle) and León (lion). It was adopted for the region in 1989.



EXTREMADURA

This flag was adopted in 1985, but the colors are traditional regional colors. Green is for fidelity, white for truth, and black for courage.



LA RIOJA

The upper red stripe was originally to be in the color of Rioja wine, but is now simply red. The colors are taken from the arms.



MURCIA

The four castles recall Murcia's links with Castilla and the seven crowns, the seven regions of the province.



VALENCIA

The stripes recall Valencia's links with Catalonia and the stylized crown, its period of independence.

CATALONIA
(CATALUNYA)

The flag, adopted in 1932, has been used since the 13th century and has the same origin as that of Aragón. It was outlawed from 1939 to 1975.



GALICIA

Based on a traditional Galician design, white and blue are the colors of the Virgin Mary. The arms reflects loyalty to the Catholic Church.



MADRID

The flag, adopted in 1983, is in the traditional color of Castilla. The seven white stars, from the arms, are for the seven districts of the region.



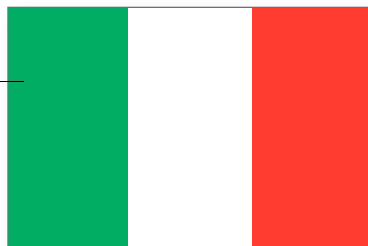
NAVARRE

The red field and golden chains of Navarre date from the 14th century. The current flag was adopted in 1982.

Italy

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: June 18, 1946 Usage: National

*Green was said
to be Napoleon's
favorite color*



The first vertical tricolor was used until 1814. It was readopted in 1861

Europe



Italy was a collection of city states, dukedoms, and monarchies before it became a unified nation in 1861. Italy became a republic in 1946.

The Italian tricolor comes from the standard designed by Napoleon during the Italian campaign of 1796. The coloring was influenced by the French *Tricolore*, at first appearing in horizontal bands. The vertical tricolor was introduced in 1798, but was only used until 1814. It was re-introduced when the new Kingdom of Italy was formed in

1861. When the monarchy ended in 1946, the coat of arms of the House of Savoy was removed from the flag. The present flag was officially adopted in 1946.

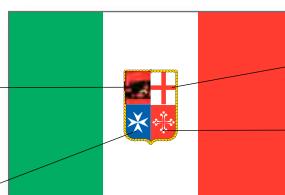
ITALIAN CIVIL ENSIGN

The most famous seafaring states of ancient Italy are commemorated in the quarters of the civil ensign.

ITALIAN CIVIL ENSIGN

The winged lion of St. Mark represents Venice

The Maltese cross recalls Amalfi



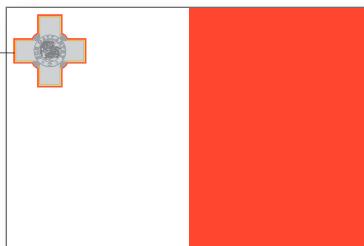
The Cross of St. George represents Genoa

The Pisan cross stands for Pisa

Malta

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: September 21, 1964 Usage: National

The George Cross is fimbriated with red



Red and white were adapted from the badge of the Knights of Malta

Europe



Malta was ruled successively by the Knights of St.John of Jerusalem, by Napoleon, and by Britain. It became independent in 1964.

A key stronghold during the Crusades, much of the heraldry of Malta is influenced by the colors and devices of the Knights of Malta. Their badge was the characteristic Maltese cross and their arms was a white cross on a red field. From these colors came the red and white shield that was used during the colonial period. The George Cross

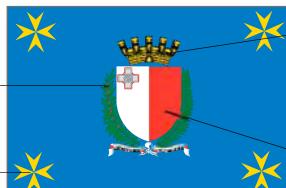
medal was added to the shield in 1943. It was awarded to the islanders by King George VI of Britain for heroism in World War II. In 1964, the blue canton on which the cross was originally placed was replaced by a red fimbriation.

The President's flag, introduced in 1988, has the shield on a blue field, with a Maltese cross in each corner.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The wreath of olive and palm branches represents peace

The Maltese cross



A gold mural crown with a sally port and eight turrets represents fortifications of Valletta

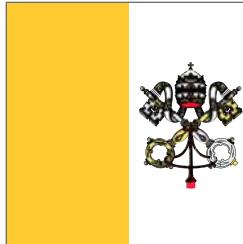
The Shield of Malta

Vatican City

Ratio: 1:1 **Adopted:** June 7, 1929 **Usage:** Civil

Yellow (gold) and white (iron) are the colours of St Peter's keys

Yellow and white were adopted as the papal colours in 1808



The emblem features St. Peter's keys supporting the papal crown

Europe



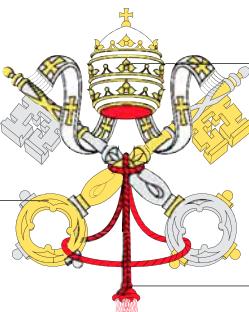
Vatican City, the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church, is the smallest independent state in the world.

The modern Vatican colors were first adopted as the papal colors in 1808. The flag was used until 1870 when the Papal States were incorporated into a new unified Italy. In 1929, the Papal States were granted independent status, but their authority was confined to Vatican City. Gold and iron, represented in

the flag as yellow and white, are the colors of the keys of St. Peter, which have accompanied papal arms since the Middle Ages. The flag's white stripe bears an emblem used since the 13th century to represent the Vatican's role as the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church.

EMBLEM OF VATICAN CITY

The crossed keys represent the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven bestowed by Christ on St. Peter



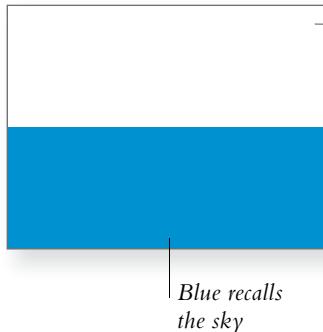
The triple crown signifies the three types of temporal power—legislative, executive, and judicial—vested in the Pope

A red rope binds the keys

San Marino

Ratio: 4:5 **Adopted:** April 6, 1862 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors are taken from the traditional arms, which is placed at the center of the flag for official purposes only



White represents the snow on Mt. Titano and the clouds above it

Blue recalls the sky

Europe



Founded in the 4th century, the Republic of **San Marino** is one of the smallest and oldest in the world. It lies on the slopes of Mt. Titano in Italy.

The flag of San Marino dates back to 1797 and was recognized by Napoleon as that of an independent state in 1799. The colors were taken from the coat of arms and were introduced in the 18th century. Blue is said to represent the sky over San Marino and white the clouds and snow on Mt. Titano.

The traditional coat of arms is placed in the center of the flag for official purposes only. It depicts three white towers crowned with ostrich plumes, representing three citadels resting on the peak of Mt. Titano, which was once vaned with ostrich feathers. They symbolize the state's ability to defend itself.

ARMS OF SAN MARINO

A wreath of laurel

The motto "Libertas," meaning "Liberty," also dates back to the 4th century, when the state was established as a refuge for those fleeing religious persecution



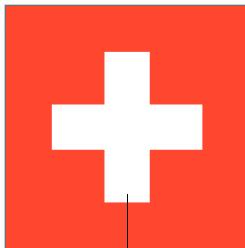
A wreath of oak

The towers represent the three citadels, Guaita, Cesta, and Montale, situated on Mt. Titano

Switzerland

Ratio: 1:1 **Adopted:** December 12, 1889 **Usage:** National and Civil

The red field with a white cross was adapted from the flag of Schwyz, one of the original three cantons



The Swiss and Vatican flags are the only square national flags

A white coupé cross

Europe



In 1291, a small confederation was formed to resist Austrian rule, beginning modern **Switzerland**. More cantons joined up to 1815.

The flag of Switzerland is one of the most typical European flags. In medieval times many European states used a plain flag with a cross.

A FLAG FOR THE CONFEDERATION

For many years, the separate cantons of Switzerland had no one common flag, but were each represented by their own flags. The present flag of Switzerland, a white coupé cross on a red field, was based on that of Schwyz, one of the three original provinces which united into a confederation against the Holy Roman Empire in 1291. It became accepted as the common badge of the Confederation in 1339 at the Battle of Laupen, when it was used to

distinguish the soldiers of the Confederation from other soldiers, and became the accepted flag of the Confederation in 1480. It was not officially confirmed as the flag of Switzerland until 1848 and it was last regulated in 1889.

Apart from that of the Vatican, the Swiss flag is the only totally square national flag. However, when used on the Swiss lakes it has the ratio of 2:3; a practice adopted in 1941.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms is simply a shield in the form of the flag. It was officially adopted in 1889. Every town or commune in Switzerland has its own flag and coat of arms.

Switzerland: Canton flags

In every case the flags are based on the arms of the canton, some of which predate the canton's joining the Swiss Confederation.



AARGAU

Adopted in 1803, the white waves on black represent the River Aare, and the white stars on blue, the districts of Baden, the Free Areas, and Fricktal, which came together to form the canton. In 1963 it was decreed that the stars should be arranged 2 and 1.



APPENZELL AUSSER-RHODEN

Adopted in 1597 when the canton separated from the Inner-Rhoden, the flag retained the bear, but added the initials VR (for Ussroden). The bear dates back to medieval banners. It was used from 1403 in battles against feudal landlords.



APPENZELL INNER-RHODEN

This is the original form of the flag before the partition from Appenzell Ausser-Rhoden in 1597. The bear emblem was widely used locally in the Middle Ages, and was taken by the Appenzellers from the arms of the abbey of Sankt Gallen.



BASEL-LAND

Basel-Land separated from the City in 1832. The arms and flag were adopted in 1834 based on the form of crozier used in Liestal, with the crook turned to the right and decorated with small spheres. This was made official in 1947.



BASEL-STADT

The emblem of Basel-Stadt is the headpiece of a bishop's crozier. The emblem dates back to the earliest days of heraldry. Since the 15th century it has been depicted as black on white. It was kept in this form when the canton was divided in 1832.



BERN

The coat of arms dates back to the 12th century. Soon after which the arms, which depict a bear on a red field with a yellow diagonal, became the canton's banner. There have, however, been many variant forms through the ages. The bear represents the name of the canton.



FRIBOURG

The original colors of Fribourg, black and white, were re-adopted when it joined the Confederation in 1831, but date back to 1410 and are related to the coat of arms.



GLARUS

The flag of Glarus depicts the figure of St. Fridolin, the patron saint of the canton, on a red field. The flag was adopted when the canton joined the Confederation in 1352.



JURA

This flag was adopted 1978, when Jura became a separate canton. It was formerly part of Basel-Land—recalled by the crozier—and Bern. The stripes are from the arms of Jura.



NEUCHÂTEL

The tricolor adopted in 1848 is in traditional colors. The white cross was added to show the canton's association with Switzerland.



GENEVA

The eagle recalls the former Holy Roman Empire. The key is the Key of St. Peter, and shows Geneva as the key to western Switzerland. The flag was adopted in 1815.



GRAUBUNDEN

The flag includes symbols for the three original parts of the canton which united in the 15th century: Graubünden, Zehgerichtenbund, and the Gotteshausbund.



LUCERNE

Lucerne was the first canton, after the original three, to join the Confederation in 1332. Its flag has the colors of its shield arranged horizontally instead of vertically.



NIDWALDEN

The key with two wards is the emblem of St. Peter, and was used in the 15th century. It was retained when the canton divided in 1815.

Switzerland: Canton flags



OBWALDEN

The red and white flag was used in Obwalden from the 13th century and it was adopted when the separate canton was formed in 1815. Further to this, a key was added in 1816.



SANKT GALLEN

The emblems of Sankt Gallen—an ax and a fasces—were adopted in 1803 when the canton was formed under French influence. They are both symbols of republicanism.



SCHAFFHAUSEN

The emblem has been in use since the 14th century. It depicts a ram (the “sheep” of the town’s name) on a yellow field. The flag’s existence was first recorded as early as 1386.



SCHWYZ

Schwyz was one of the first three cantons, and the one from which the country takes its name. Its arms existed before the Confederation was formed in 1291.



SOLOTHURN

The coat of arms dates back to 1394 and has colors derived from those of the Confederation. The flag was originally red with a white cross, but was simplified into its current form.



THURGAU

The flag of Thurgau, adopted in 1803, depicts two gold lions arranged diagonally. They are taken from the coat of arms which dates from medieval times.



TICINO

The colors of Ticino’s flag may be derived from the French *Tricolore*, or from the main colors of the arms of the united townships.



URI

The emblem is an auroch’s head (linked to the canton’s name). It dates from the 13th century, but the nose-ring was added later.



VALAIS

The modern flag of Valais is derived from that of the original republic, which had seven stars for its component townships. These were increased to 12 in 1802 and retained when the state joined the Confederation in 1814.



VAUD

The colors date from 1798 when the Léman Republic was formed, and stand for freedom. They were retained when the state entered the Confederation in 1803. The motto is "*Liberté et Patrie*" ("Freedom and Fatherland").



ZUG

Zug joined the Confederation in 1352 and again in 1364, after a brief return to Habsburg rule. The colors of the flag were originally red-white-red of Austria, but were altered to the blue and white from the arms of the Counts of Lenzburg in 1352.



ZÜRICH

The flag in this case preceded the arms and dates back to the 13th century. It was adopted in 1351 when Zürich joined the Confederation. However since 1957 it has been compulsory to depict the flag in the same format as the shield.

Liechtenstein

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** June 24, 1937 **Usage:** National and Civil

The yellow crown was introduced to distinguish Liechtenstein as a principality



Red and royal blue have been used to represent the country of Liechtenstein since the 18th century

Europe



The Principality of **Liechtenstein** was created in 1719 as part of the Holy Roman Empire. It gained full independence in 1806.

The red and blue of Liechtenstein's flag date from 1921. There was confusion at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin because the flag was very similar to that of Haiti. In 1937 the crown was introduced to the flag of Liechtenstein to establish the country's status as a principality and to distinguish it from the Haitian flag. The flag can be hung

vertically or horizontally, but the crown always remains upright.

THE PRINCE'S FLAG

The arms of Silesia, Künringen, Troppau, and East Friesland and Rietburg make up the four quarters of the shield of the Prince's arms, in the center of his flag. They represent the noble ancestors of the prince.

THE FLAG OF PRINCE OF LIECHTENSTEIN

The inner shield represents the ancient princely family



Red and yellow are the Prince's colors

The four arms within the Prince's Arms represent his noble ancestors

Austria

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** May 1, 1945 **Usage:** National and Civil

According to legend, the red and white flag was modeled on the blood-stained surcoat of a Duke wounded in battle



The traditional flag, retained after the fall of the Habsburgs in 1918

Europe



Austria once ruled much of central Europe, but lost most of its territory in 1919. Between 1938 and 1945 Austria was annexed to Germany.

Tradition states that a Duke of Austria once fought so fiercely in battle that the white surcoat he wore was soaked in blood, except for the part covered by his sword-belt. So he adopted red with a white band across the center as his colors.

ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST FLAGS

The story is probably apocryphal, but stripes of red-white-red have been an emblem of Austria for over 800 years. Their use on a flag was recorded in 1191, making the Austrian flag one of the world's oldest flags. It was officially adopted as the national flag after the fall of the Habsburg Dynasty, and the formation of a republic in 1918.

During World War II, the Austrian flag and arms were banned, they were restored in 1945.

ARMS OF AUSTRIA

The coat of arms depicts an imperial black eagle, an emblem used by the Habsburgs. It originally had two heads, but they were changed to one when the Habsburg Empire disintegrated. On the eagle's chest is a shield in the national colors. The eagle holds a hammer and sickle recalling agricultural and industrial workers. Its crown, with three turrets, also represents agriculture, industry, and commerce. The broken chains on the eagle's feet symbolize the restoration of freedom.

Austria: State flags

Most provincial flags in Austria are based on the local arms.
In many cases they existed before their official adoption.



BURGENLAND

The colors of the flag, officially hoisted in 1971, are based on the red eagle and yellow shield of the arms.



LOWER AUSTRIA

Adopted in 1954, the colors are based on the arms which contain a blue shield and five gold eagles.



STYRIA

The coat of arms of Styria is a green shield bearing a white lion. The flag, adopted in 1960, uses these colors.



UPPER AUSTRIA

Upper Austria's flag, adopted in 1949, is derived from the national colors and the arms of the province.



VORARLBERG

Like the flags of Salzburg and Vienna, Vorarlberg's bicolor flag is based on the provincial arms.



CARINTHIA

Adopted in 1946, the colors are derived from those of Austria and the yellow state shield.



SALZBURG

The flag, adopted in 1921, uses the traditional colors of the state, based on the national colors.



TYROL

The bicolored flag is derived from the arms which depicts a red eagle on a white disc. It was adopted in 1945.

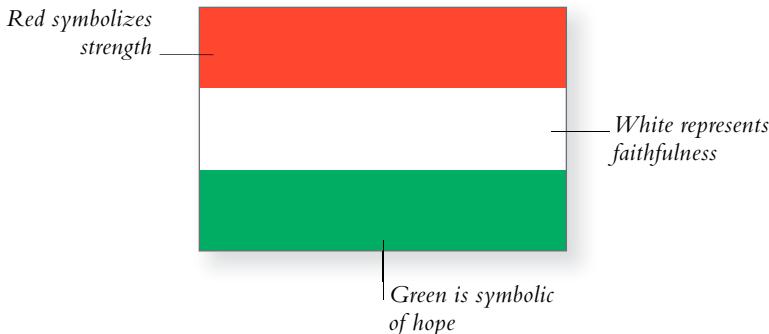


VIENNA

The flag dates from 1946. It is based on the city's arms, but is identical to the flags of Salzburg and Vorarlberg.

Hungary

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: October 1, 1957 Usage: National and Civil



Europe



Part of Austria-Hungary until 1918,
Hungary became part of the communist
bloc from 1945–1989.

The current flag was first used in the 1848–49 uprising. Its pattern was derived from the French *Tricolore* used during the French Revolution. The colors: red, white, and green date back to the 9th century. They were first used in 1608 during the reign of King Matthias II. Until 1945, the royal crown featured in the center of the

national flag. During Hungary's brief period as a republic from 1945–1949 the royal crown was replaced by the "Kossuth" coat of arms. When the Communists took power, they added a Soviet-style emblem to the flag. In 1990, the arms of the kingdom were re-adopted but they were not replaced on the flag.

ARMS OF HUNGARY

The red and white stripes probably originated from Spain in the late 12th or early 13th century



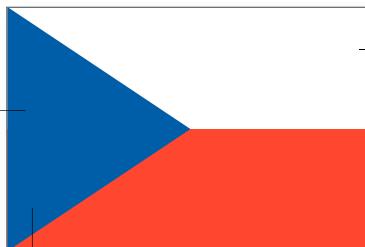
The crown of St. Stephen, the first king of Hungary

The patriarchal cross was added to the Hungarian arms about 800 years ago

Czech Republic

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** March 30, 1920 **Usage:** National and Civil

The blue triangle was added to distinguish the flag from that of Poland



White and red are the heraldic colors of Bohemia (any similarity to the pan-Slavic colors is coincidental)

Blue represents the state of Moravia

Europe



The **Czech Republic** was part of Austria until 1919, when it merged with Slovakia to form Czechoslovakia. The states separated in 1993.

The first flag of Czechoslovakia was based on the arms, and was white over red. This was identical to the flag of Poland, so a blue triangle was added at the hoist. The flag was banned by the Nazis in 1938 and a horizontal tricolor of white, red, and blue was enforced. The original flag was restored in 1949.

THE NEW CZECH REPUBLIC

When the Czech Republic and Slovakia separated in 1993, the Czechs decided to keep their existing flag, recalling the two principal parts of the country.

The greater coat of arms depicts a quartered shield reflecting the regions of the Czech Republic.

GREATER ARMS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The white lion on a red field is the traditional emblem of Bohemia



The red and white eagle on a blue field is from the arms of Moravia

The black eagle on a yellow field is taken from the arms of Silesia

The Bohemian arms are repeated to fill the shield

Slovakia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** September 1, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil

A version of this flag was first used in the 19th century



White, blue and red are pan-Slavic colors

The arms of Slovakia

Europe



Under Hungarian rule until 1919, **Slovakia** then formed part of Czechoslovakia with the Czech Republic. The two states separated in 1993.

The first Slovak flags, used during the 19th century, were like the contemporary Russian flag, to whom they looked for aid in gaining independence. As Czechoslovakia, a red and white flag with a blue triangle was used. During World War II, Slovakia re-adopted the white, blue, and red tricolor, with the arms in the center.

ARMS OF SLOVAKIA

The arms uses colors of the early flags, a white patriarchal cross rising from blue mountains on a red shield.

At independence in 1993, the red, white and blue tricolor was retained as the national flag, but the arms was placed toward the hoist.

The President's flag has the arms, bordered by the national colors.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The flag is bordered by stripes in the national colors; white, blue and red



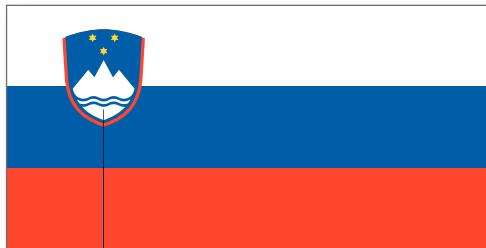
A patriarchal cross

A stylized image of Slovakia's mountains

Slovenia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 24, 1991 **Usage:** National and Civil

White, blue, and red are pan-Slavic colors, popularized in the 19th century



The order of the tricolor is the same as the flag for Slovenia, when it was part of Yugoslavia

The coat of arms was added in 1991 when Slovenia became independent

Europe



Historically under Austrian rule, **Slovenia** formed part of Yugoslavia in 1919. It declared independence on June 26, 1991.

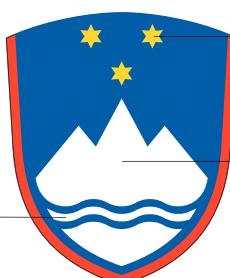
Like Slovakia, Slovenia looked to Russia in the 19th century for assistance in gaining independence. For the same reason, the pan-Slavic tricolor of blue, white, and red was adopted for Yugoslavia, with a gold fimbriated red star added by Tito in 1946. Slovenia also had its own flag within Yugoslavia, distinguished by

the order of the stripes (white, blue, red). At independence Slovenia placed its arms in the upper hoist of this tricolor, to create a distinct national flag.

The arms depicts mountain peaks, above wavy blue lines symbolizing the sea coast. The stars are from the arms of the Duchy of Selje.

ARMS OF SLOVENIA

The wavy lines symbolize Slovenia's sea coast



The three stars are from the arms of the former Duchy of Selje

The three mountain peaks represent the Triglav, part of the Alps

Croatia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** December 22, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, white, and blue are traditional Croatian colors



The tricolor charged with the coat of arms was first used during World War II

Arms of Croatia

Europe



For much of its existence, **Croatia** was under Austrian rule. It joined Yugoslavia in 1919, but declared independence on June 25, 1991.

While part of Yugoslavia, Croatia's flag was designed in the pan-Slavic colors, red, white, and blue. These are also traditional Croatian colors used in the 19th century.

During World War II Croatia became a semi-independent state and added the arms of Croatia to the center of its flag. Following the war,

Croatia retained its tricolor but a gold-edged red star was placed in the center by Tito. Before gaining independence, the present flag was adopted, based on the one used during the war.

The shield is in the red and white checks of Croatia. Above is a row of shields of its various territories.

ARMS OF CROATIA

The red and white checks are traditional emblems of Croatia



The small shields at the top are taken from the arms of Croatia's regions. From left to right the ancient arms of Croatia, Dubrovnik, Dalmatia, Istria, and Slavonia

Bosnia & Herzegovina

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 4, 1998 **Usage:** National and Civil

The dark blue and yellow, and the stars, refer to the flag of Europe



The flag was imposed by the international High Representative

The geographical shape of Bosnia is a triangle

Europe



Bosnia-Herzegovina was under Turkish rule until it was ceded to Austria in 1878. From 1945 to 1992 it formed part of Yugoslavia.

After Bosnia-Herzegovina had broken away from Yugoslavia in 1992, a neutral plain white flag was adopted by parliament. The country's independence triggered a civil war between the three ethnic groups—Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. After the Dayton, Ohio, peace agreement was signed in 1995, the “neutral” Bosnian flag became unacceptable to the

Croats and Serbs.

In February 1998, the international High Representative, who safeguards the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, imposed a new flag. However, it was designed by a committee with members from all three ethnic groups.

The country is now divided into two parts: the Bosnian-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic.

BOSNIA-CROAT FEDERATION FLAG

Red and white are Croatian colors



Green is the color of Islam

The ten stars are for the ten cantons in the Federation

Montenegro

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** 2004 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag is based on one used in the 1880s and 1890s



The modern coat of arms of Montenegro

Europe



Montenegro united with Serbia and other states in 1919, to form Yugoslavia. In 2006, Montenegro declared independence from Serbia.

Long an independent kingdom, Montenegro, like the other Yugoslav states had used the Pan-Slav colors. Montenegro, like Serbia, inverted the Russian flag into a horizontal tricolor of red, blue, and white. In 1914 it was accepted that the royal monogram of King Nikola should be added to the flag.

In the communist state (1946–1991), the monogram was replaced by a gold-edged red star. With the end of communist rule, the star was removed. To distinguish the flag from that of Serbia, the blue was made lighter. In 2004 the present, and completely different, flag was adopted.

FLAG ACCEPTED AS THE NATIONAL FLAG IN 1914

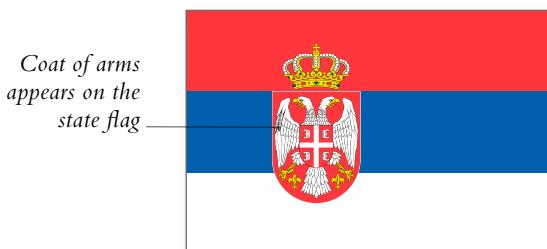


POST-COMMUNIST FLAG



Serbia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 5, 2006 **Usage:** National and Civil



Citizens usually use the flag without the arms

Europe



Serbia was a kingdom, until conquered by the Turks. It regained independence in the 19th century, Yugoslavia united in 1919, but separated 1991–2006.

Like the other southern Slav states, Serbia used the Pan-Slav colors by inverting the Russian flag. This example was followed by Montenegro. When Yugoslavia was formed, a flag was chosen of horizontal stripes of blue, white and red. This used the colors of the states, in a different pattern from any

of them. Under the communist state (1946–1991), a gold-edged red star was added to the national flag and to the state flags. After 1991 the star disappeared and the flag often bore the Serbian coat of arms. This form became official after the final separation of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006.

**FLAG OF YUGOSLAVIA
(1919-2006)**



FLAG OF SERBIA IN COMMUNIST YUGOSLAVIA (1946-1992)



KOSOVO

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** February 18, 2008 **Usage:** National and Civil

Blue and yellow are from the European Union Flag. White is for peace



Six stars are for the six communities in Kosovo

Golden map of county outline on a blue field

Europe



Formerly part of Yugoslavia and then Serbia, **Kosovo** came under United Nations administration in 1999. Kosovo declared independence in February, 2008.

In 1459, the Ottoman Turks destroyed the first Serbian kingdom in a battle in modern Kosovo. Although the country was ceded to Serbia in 1913, the majority of Kosovars are Albanian in language and culture, but the site of the battle is sacred to the Serbs.

When Yugoslavia broke apart in the 1990s, many Kosovans hoped that they

would unite with Albania. Serbia opposed this idea. In 1999, violence flared between Kosovars and Serbs. NATO forces intervened to stop Serbian attacks. In the uneasy peace which followed, there were negotiations under the United Nations. These failed and in 2008 Kosovo controversially declared its independence.

ARMS OF KOSOVO

The arms is a shield in the same design as the flag



Albania

Ratio: 5:7 **Adopted:** April 7, 1992 **Usage:** National

Albanians call their country *Shqipëria*, meaning “land of the eagle”



The traditional heraldic Albanian flag first used in 1912 when independence was restored

Europe



Once part of the Byzantine Empire, **Albania** became a kingdom in 1912. From 1944 to 1991 it was a strict communist state.

The black eagle first appeared on the Albanian flag in the 15th century when Albania became part of the Byzantine Empire. According to legend, the Albanians are the descendants of the eagle. The red flag, with the eagle in the center, was adopted in 1912, when independence was restored. Parts of the Italian arms

were included on the flag after the invasion of 1939, but the original flag was restored in 1942.

In 1946, the flag changed again, to incorporate a gold-edged red star above the eagle, representing the communist regime. The star was removed in 1991, by order of the new multiparty government.

ARMS OF ALBANIA

The black eagle has been an emblem of Albania since the 15th century



The two-headed eagle first appeared on flags used during the struggle against Turkish occupation

Macedonia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** October 5, 1995 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red was the traditional color of the Macedonian flag



The radiant sun was added in 1995 to replace the controversial "Star of Vergina"

Europe



Macedonia was under Turkish rule for centuries. It united with Serbia in 1913 and became part of Yugoslavia. It declared independence in 1992.

As part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was the only region not to use the pan-Slavic colors. Its flag was red with a gold-edged red star in the canton.

A CONTROVERSIAL NEW FLAG

At independence in 1992, Macedonia retained the red flag but added a gold star in a gold sun. This was soon

changed to the Star of Vergina, an ancient Macedonian emblem from the tomb of Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Greece objected to this, claiming the star as a Greek emblem. In 1995 the star was replaced by a radiant sun.

Macedonia's arms is similar in design to former Soviet emblems.

ARMS OF MACEDONIA

Symmetrical wreaths of wheat



The star of socialism

A radiant sun, also used on the national flag

Bulgaria

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** November 22, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red and white were taken from the pan-Slavic colors

Red is for the valor of the Bulgarian army



Before 1990 the white stripe contained the Bulgarian coat of arms

The green stripe replaced the blue of the Russian tricolor

Europe



Bulgaria became independent in 1908 after 500 years of Ottoman rule. In 1990, the communist regime, in power since 1946, collapsed.

While under Turkish rule, Bulgaria had no national flag. When it became a principality in 1878, a slight variation of the pan-Slavic colors, widely used during the independence movements of the late 19th century, was adopted. The horizontal arrangement of the tricolor was based on the Russian flag at the time, but for Bulgaria's national flag the central blue stripe was substituted by green.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

No change was made to the flag during Bulgaria's period as an independent kingdom 1908–1946, but with the formation of the People's Republic in 1947, a coat

of arms was added in the white stripe near the hoist. This depicted a rampant lion, a red star representing communism, and later a cog-wheel symbolizing industrialization. The coat of arms was removed from the flag in 1990 because of its communist connotations. No arms now appear on the flag.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

Although based on the pan-Slavic colors, the white band is said to represent a love of peace, and red, the valor of the people. The green stripe, substituted for the traditional pan-Slavic blue in 1878, was intended to represent the youthfulness of the emerging nation.

Greece

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: 1822 Usage: National and Civil

The cross in the canton represents Greek religious faith

Blue represents the sea and sky



The nine stripes represent the nine syllables in the cry "Freedom or Death," uttered during the Greek war of independence

White reflects the purity of the Greek independence struggle

Europe



Once part of the Ottoman Empire, **Greece** has seen periodic unrest since World War II. In 1974 it became a multiparty democracy.

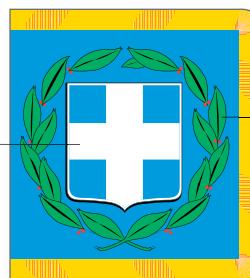
The flag flown by Greece is in the same colors as the one which was raised following independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century. At times Greece has used a plain white cross on blue as its land flag, and the striped flag at sea. Today the plain Cross Flag is

preserved in the President's flag and in the canton of the blue and white striped national flag.

The shade of blue of the flag has also varied. Today it is the original light blue color of 1822. It was altered in the 1970s and the blue was changed to a much darker, navy shade.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

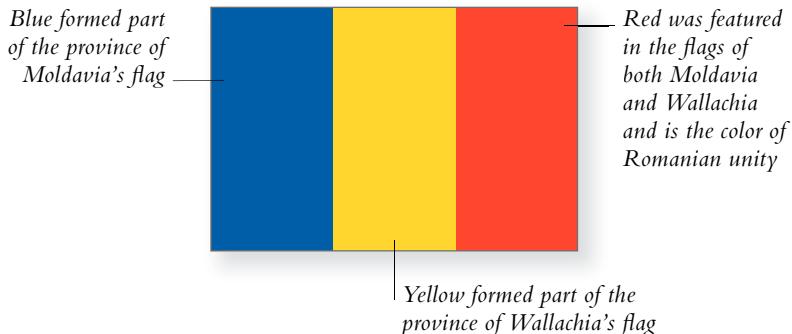
The original white cross on a blue field is retained in the President's flag and the national arms



The Cross Flag is surrounded by a wreath of laurels

Romania

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 27, 1989 **Usage:** National and Civil



Europe



Romania emerged from the Ottoman Empire as an independent kingdom in 1859. It is now a democracy, after decades of communist rule.

The current flag was created in 1848 by combining the colors of Wallachia and Moldavia—the Ottoman provinces that made up Romania. In 1867 the Royal Arms was set in the yellow stripe. The coat of arms was modified many times and in 1948 it was replaced with a communist emblem. This

was jettisoned following the fall of the Ceausescu regime in 1989.

NEW NATIONAL ARMS

In 1992, the old coat of arms was restored by the new parliament. It features a combination of motifs which look back to Romania's past as a powerful medieval state.

ARMS OF ROMANIA

The eagle grips an Orthodox Christian cross in its beak

Sword recalls St. Stephen the Great of Moldavia



The scepter of St. Michael the Brave of Wallachia

The smaller shield displays the arms of some of Romania's provinces

Moldova

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** May 12, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

The blue, yellow and red colors reflect strong links with Romania



*The arms of
Moldova*

Europe



Moldova was once part of Romania, but was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. It has been fully independent since 1991.

The blue, red, and yellow tricolor of Moldova is almost identical to the Romanian flag, reflecting the two countries' cultural affinity.

ARMS OF MOLDOVA

On Moldova's flag the yellow stripe is charged with the national arms. Like the Romanian coat of arms,

the Moldovan arms, adopted in 1990, features a golden eagle holding an Orthodox Christian cross in its beak. However instead of a sword, the eagle is holding an olive branch. The blue and red shield on the eagle's breast is also different—on it are an ox-head, a star, a rose, and a crescent, all traditional symbols of Moldova.

ARMS OF MOLDOVA



Belarus

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** May 16, 1995 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red and white are traditional Belarussian colors



Red and green were the colors of Belarus's flag while it was a Soviet republic

A national ornament representing woven cloth

Europe



Belarus, formerly White Russia, became independent of the USSR in 1991, although its ties with Russia are increasing once more.

The original flag of Belarus while under Soviet administration in 1922 was similar to that of the USSR. It was changed in 1951, and the flag used today is similar to this second flag, except that the communist hammer, sickle, and star have been removed, and the red and white portions of the hoist ornamentation have been reversed.

THE REJECTED DESIGN

Following independence from the USSR in 1991, Belarus adopted a flag of three equal horizontal stripes of white-red-white. This was the same flag which had been associated with a brief period of Belarussian independence in 1918 and its colors

were derived from the arms of the republic. The design was rejected in a referendum in 1995.

The flag of Belarus adopted following the referendum, reflects its growing ties with Russia. The unusual ornamentation in the hoist is described as a national ornament and represents woven cloth.

ARMS OF BELARUS

The Soviet-style coat of arms, retained on independence, also reflects the dominant Russian influence. This depicts an outline of the state against a sun rising from behind a globe. This is entirely surrounded by wreaths of wheat and flowers.

Ukraine

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** September 4, 1991 **Usage:** National and Civil

Originally
the flag of the
republic in 1918



*Blue represents
the sky*

*Yellow recalls the
vast grain fields*

Europe



Ukraine formed an independent state in 1918, but came under Soviet control one year later and remained so until independence in 1991.

The bicolored flag flown in Ukraine today was the official flag of the country in 1918 when Ukraine enjoyed a brief period of independence. With the invasion of the Red Army, the flag was suppressed until the German occupation of 1941–1944. After the war it was banned again by

the Soviet Union. When Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 the country re-adopted its original flag. The blue is supposed to represent the sky and the yellow the vast fields of grain of the country's agriculture.

The Ukrainian coat of arms is in the national colors and features an ancient trident symbol.

ARMS OF UKRAINE



*Blue and yellow are
national colors*

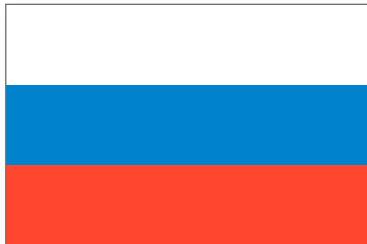
The trident of St. Volodimir

*The trident is an ancient
symbol dating back to
pre-Roman times*

Russian Federation

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** August 22, 1991 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors of the flag were originally the colors of Moscow. White, blue, and red are Pan-Slavic colors



Since its official adoption in 1799, the Russian tricolor has had a major influence on other east European flags

Europe



Russia was formed in the 15th century. The USSR was established in 1922 and included much of Asia. The USSR collapsed in 1991 and produced the **Russian Federation**.

At the end of the 17th century, Tsar Peter the Great of Russia visited western Europe. Following this visit he decided to adopt a variation of the Dutch flag as a civil ensign for Russian ships. This was a horizontal tricolor of white, blue, and red. It was only officially recognized in 1799. Peter the Great also adopted a flag for the Russian navy, which was white with the blue diagonal Cross of St. Andrew.

THE PAN-SLAVIC COLORS

Both the color and tricolor design of this first flag had a major influence on many of the flags of Eastern European nations during the 19th century, who looked to Russia for help in liberating

them from foreign domination. They have since become known as the Pan-Slavic colors.

THE HAMMER, SICKLE, AND STAR

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Communists abolished all former flags and instead adopted the Red Flag as the flag of the Soviet Union. This contained a gold hammer and sickle, symbols of the proletariat and the peasants, under a gold-edged red star, to represent unity. As a Soviet republic, Russia used this flag with a vertical blue bar at the hoist.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the former flags of Russia, including the white, blue, and red tricolor were restored.

Republic flags

Unlike most other countries, the flags of the Russian republics are all new, adopted since 1991.



ADYGEYA

Designed by a British traveler who helped resist annexation of the republic by Russia, the arrows are for resistance. Green is for agriculture and gold is for freedom.



ALTAY

Blue represents the cleanliness of the sky, mountains, rivers, and lakes of Altay. White is for eternity, and to encourage the revival of love and harmony between the Altay people.



BASHKORTOSTAN

Blue is for charity and virtue; white for openness and willingness; green for freedom and eternal life. The *kurai* flower represents the seven races of the Bashkir people.



BURYATIYA

Blue is for the sky and water; white for purity; yellow for freedom and prosperity. The *Soembo*—the moon, sun and hearth—recall reconciliation, family life, and hospitality.



CHECHENIA

Green is for Islam. Red is for the blood shed for freedom. White is the road leading to the future and the gold is the national ornament.



CHUVASHIA

The red base is the Chuvash land, from which grows the “Tree of Life.” The three suns are an ancient Chuvash emblem. Gold is for the future and prosperity.



DAGHESTAN

The upper green stripe is for agriculture and hope. The blue stripe is for the Caspian Sea which borders the republic. Red represents fidelity and courage.



INGUSHETIA

The stripe is for the pure intentions and actions of the people and green is for nature, fertility and Islam. The “sun” represents peace and creativity and its color the people’s struggles.

Russian Federation: Republic flags



KABARDINO-BALKARIA

The flag's colors evoke the blue sky, the white snow-capped mountains, and the green prairies of Kabardino-Balkaria. In the center is a stylized representation of the Elbrus Mountains.



KALMYKIA

The vibrant yellow is symbolic of the faith of the people of Kalmykia and also represents the sun warming their land. The blue circle signifies the eternal road to the sacred lotus in the center.



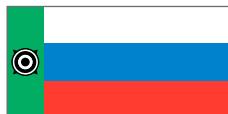
KARACHAY-CHERKESSIA

Blue symbolizes peace, kind motives, and quiet. Green represents nature, fertility, and wealth. Red is for the warmth and unity of the people. The mountains in the center recall the scenery of the republic.



KARELIA

The many lakes of Karelia are recalled by the central blue stripe and its vast pine forests by green. The red stripe symbolizes warmth, unity and continuing cooperation between the peoples of Karelia.



KHAKASSIA

The horizontal white, blue, and red stripes are taken from the Russian national flag. The vertical green stripe is for eternal life and is charged with an ancient Khakassian solar symbol.



KOMI

The three colors of the flag recall the republic's northerly location in blue, its forests in green, and its snows in white. They are also symbolic of virtues such as cleanliness, unity, and purity.



MARIY EL

The colors are adapted from the Russian national flag, with altered shades to make them distinctive. The central stylised representation of the sun is the national emblem.



MORDVINIA

The flag of Mordvinia was adopted in 1995, and has the same colors as the Russian flag. In the center is the sun emblem also found on the flags of Mariy El and Udmurtia.



NORTH OSSETIA

White symbolizes spirituality and cleanliness of intentions. Yellow represents the region's farming. The red stripe recalls both the Aryan people and their militant spirit in pursuit of freedom.



TUVA

The original Tuvan flag adopted in 1918 was also blue, yellow, and white. Today, the colors are said to represent courage and strength in blue, prosperity in yellow, and purity in white.



YAKUTIA

The flag recalls the blue sky and shining sun. Beneath is a white stripe recalling the snow. Red is for courage and constancy; green is for the forests of Yakutia.



TATARSTAN

The upper green stripe of the flag represents the majority Muslim Tatar population of Tatarstan. The lower red stripe is for the Russian minority. The white fimbriation represents the peace that unites them.



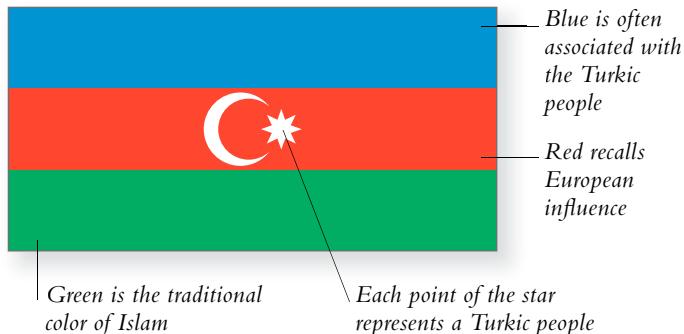
UDMURTIA

The eight-pointed solar sign in the center of the flag is said to guard the people from misfortune. The earth and stability are symbolized in black, morality and the cosmos in white, and life and the sun in red.

Azerbaijan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 5, 1991 **Usage:** National and Civil

The colors represent the Azerbaijani motto to “Turkify, Islamisize, and Europeanize”



Asia



Azerbaijan has been under consecutive Persian, Ottoman, and Russian influence. It was part of the USSR from 1920, until independence in 1991.

The flag dates back to the brief period of Azerbaijani independence between 1918–1920 and replaces the one used in the Soviet era. The white crescent and eight-pointed star were intentionally similar to the emblem on the Turkish flag, as Turkey has traditionally been an ally of the country. The eight points on the

flag's star stand for the eight groups of Turkic-speaking peoples—the Azeris, Ottomans, Jagatais, Tatars, Kipchaks, Seljuks and Turkomans.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

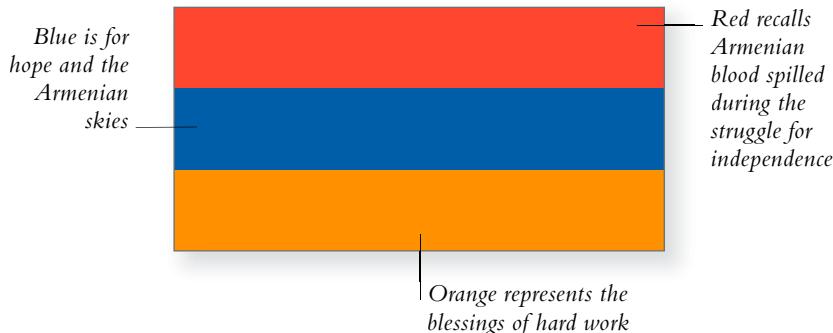
The coat of arms, adopted in 1993, is set on a round shield in the colors of the flag.

ARMS OF AZERBAIJAN



Armenia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** August 24, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Armenia became a Soviet republic in 1922. In 1991 it gained independence from the USSR and in 1995 held its first parliamentary elections.

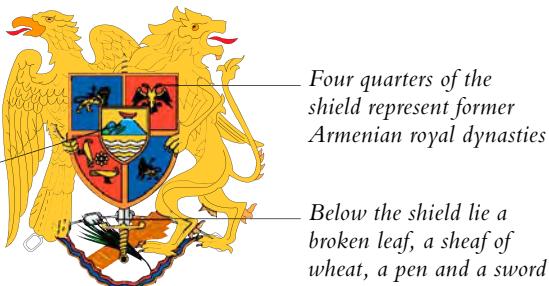
Armenia was independent from 1920–1921, and the flag used today comes from this era. Its origin is in a design from the Armenian Institute in Venice of 1885, although this flag used the colors red-green-blue. After independence from Russia in 1991, the Soviet flag was replaced by the 1920 tricolor of red-blue-orange.

ARMS OF ARMENIA

In 1991, the arms of 1920 replaced the Soviet coat of arms. The four emblems within the shield each represent an Armenian royal dynasty. In the center is a stylized image of Mount Ararat. The shield is supported by an eagle and a lion, common symbols in Armenian heraldry.

ARMS OF ARMENIA

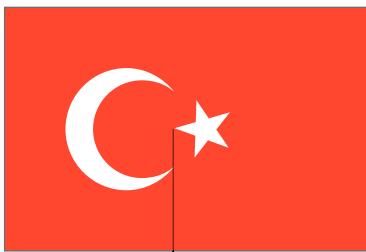
Mount Ararat, the supposed resting place of Noah's Ark, is in the center of the arms



Turkey

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** June 5, 1936 **Usage:** National and Civil

The star and crescent are both common symbols of the Islamic religion



The emblems are always placed slightly toward the hoist

One star point touches the invisible line that joins the two horns of the crescent moon

Asia



Following **Turkey's** defeat in the World War I, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk deposed the Sultan in 1922, and declared the country a republic in 1923.

Turkey's flag dates from 1844, although similar red flags were used as early as the 17th century within the Ottoman Empire. From 1920–1923, when Turkey became a republic, all the emblems of the Sultan were abolished and the flag became the main emblem.

THE CRESCENT AND STAR

Using the crescent and star emblems together is a relatively recent device, but the crescent on its own dates back to the Middle Ages. It is a symbol associated with Islam and also with Osman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire. The star first appeared on the flag in 1793. Initially it had eight points, but by

the early 19th century it usually had the five seen today. In 1936, the national flag and all the other flags used in Turkey today were fully defined and specified.

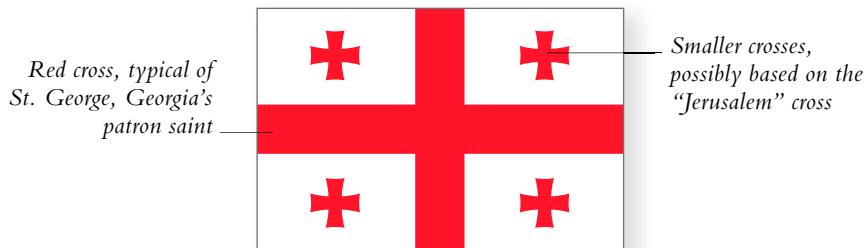
A PAN-ISLAMIC SYMBOL

The crescent and star has become an emblem of the pan-Islamic movement sponsored by Turkey in the late 19th century and these symbols are now widely used on the flags and national arms of Muslim countries.

Turkey does not have a coat of arms, but there are individual flags for the President and senior members of the Turkish navy. These also contain the traditional crescent and star.

Georgia

Ratio: 3:5 Adopted: January 14, 2004 Usage: National and Civil



Asia



Georgia was absorbed into the Russian Empire in 1801 and became part of the Soviet Union in 1921. It regained independence in 1991.

During the “Rose Revolution” of 2003, the Georgian flag achieved prominence as the symbol of the opposition National Movement. On taking power in 2004 the party adopted it as the new national flag.

OBSCURE ORIGINS

The historical background of the flag is uncertain. References are made in a 14th-century text to a similar flag from Sivas, in modern Turkey. Georgians may have adopted it after invading the territory.

Another theory suggests Georgian links with the Holy Land saw the addition of the four small crosses. These were based on the “Jerusalem” cross. However, it is true that

St. George is the patron saint of Georgia, perhaps explaining the basic red cross on a white field.

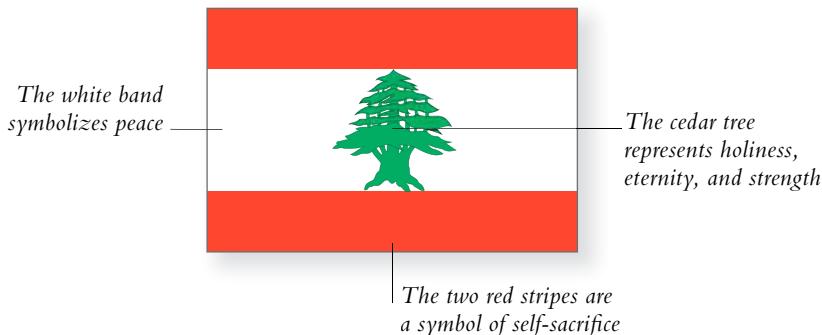
THE SOVIET ERA

While part of the USSR, Georgia flew a variant of the Red Flag, adopted in 1951. It had a red field, with a thin blue stripe close to the top. The canton contained the traditional hammer, sickle, and star emblems, unusually in red, on a blue disc from which emanated 24 rays.

Following independence from the USSR in 1991, Georgia officially re-adopted a flag used during its brief independence between 1918 and 1921. The field was deep red, with black and white stripes in the canton.

Lebanon

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 7, 1943 **Usage:** National



Asia



Lebanon became independent in 1944, after 20 years as a French mandate. The country is currently rebuilding after 14 years of civil war.

The present Lebanese flag was adopted just prior to independence from France, in 1943. It was designed to be a neutral flag, not allied to any one of Lebanon's religious groups. Red is thought to be for the color of the uniforms worn by the Lebanese Legion during World War I. Officially the red is said to represent the people of Lebanon's sacrifice during the struggle for independence, and white represents purity.

THE CEDAR OF LEBANON

Although the flag has only existed for half a century, the tree at the center of the flag—the Cedar of Lebanon—has been an emblem

of the country since the time of King Solomon, almost 3000 years ago. Specifically, the cedar is the symbol of the country's Maronite Christian community. It first appeared on a flag in 1861 when the Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. Soon after its collapse, the country became mandated to France and its flag was a French *Tricolore*, with the Cedar of Lebanon in the white band of the *Tricolore*. The cedar symbolizes happiness and prosperity for the country.

The present flag, with the cedar's foliage and trunk in green, has a variant in which the tree trunk is brown—although this is not officially recognized.

Syria

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** March 29, 1980 **Usage:** National and Civil

An earlier version of the flag had three stars, in anticipation of a union incorporating Syria, Egypt, and Iraq



Red, white, black, and green are pan-Arab colors

The two green stars originally represented Syria and Egypt, although they are now said to represent Syria and Iraq

Asia



Syria was created after the dissolution of French colonial rule in 1946. From 1958–1961 it merged with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic.

In 1920, while still a French colony, Syria flew a green-white-green tribar with a French *Tricolore* in the canton. At independence this was changed to a green, white, and black tricolor, with three red stars for its provinces across its center. Its current red, white, and black pan-Arabic flag, was adopted when Syria became part

of the United Arab Republic, but with three stars.

On leaving the union in 1961, Syria briefly reverted to its original flag, before re-adopting the Arab Liberation colors in 1963.

The arms of Syria depicts the Hawk of Quraish. It is almost identical with the arms of Libya.

ARMS OF SYRIA

The shield is in the form of a national flag



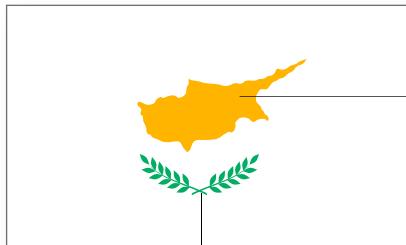
The hawk was the emblem of the Quraish tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged

The inscription reads—in Arabic—“Arab Republic of Syria”

Cyprus

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** August 16, 1960 **Usage:** National and Civil

Neutral and peaceful symbols were chosen to represent the country



The copper-colored island recalls the origins of the country's name

The two olive branches signify peace between the Turks and Greeks

Asia



In 1960, **Cyprus** gained independence after almost 100 years of British rule. In 1974, the island was partitioned, following an invasion by Turkey.

Founded in 1193, the Kingdom of Cyprus experienced centuries of conflict. Cyprus was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1571, which increased Turkish settlement on the island. It then fell under British control from 1878. The flag, adopted at independence in 1960, deliberately chose peaceful and neutral symbols in an attempt to indicate harmony between the rival Greek and Turkish communities, an ideal that has not been realized.

In 1974, Turkish forces occupied the northern part of the island, forming the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.” The two parts of the island also fly the national flags of Greece and Turkey.

THE ISLE OF COPPER

The map of the island on the flag is copper-colored, to express the meaning of the island's name—the Isle of Copper. The two olive branches on the white field represent peace between the two ethnic groups.

THE NATIONAL EMBLEM

Cyprus's national emblem is a dove holding an olive branch in its beak. This is a symbol of peace and reconciliation arising from the biblical story of Noah and the Ark. The dove is also symbolic of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess whose legend originated from the island.

Israel

Ratio: 8:11 **Adopted:** October 28, 1948 **Usage:** National

The blue and white colors of the flag are derived from the Jewish prayer shawl



The central emblem is the Shield of David, which has a long association with the Jewish people

Asia



Israel gained independence in 1948. Until 1979 there were no set borders, only cease-fire lines. The situation of the Palestine people remains unsettled.

The flag was designed for the Zionist movement by David Wolfsohn in 1891, over 50 years before the state of Israel was officially declared.

STAR OF DAVID

The central emblem in the form of a hexagram is known as the “Magen David” (Shield of David), an emblem that had been used on

Jewish flags for centuries before being adopted as the national flag of Israel. The blue and white colors are said to recall the colors of the *tallith* (Jewish prayer shawl). The blue is officially described as “Yale Blue.” It is a lighter shade than used in other Israeli flags.

The merchant flag was adopted in 1948. There is also a naval ensign of similar design.

THE CIVIL ENSIGN



Like other variant Israeli flags, civil and naval ensigns are a darker shade of blue than the national flag

The Shield of David is slightly elongated

THE NAVAL ENSIGN



Jordan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** April 16, 1928 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, black, green, and white are pan-Arab colors



The seven-pointed star represents the seven verses of Islamic belief which open the Qur'an

Asia



Originally called Transjordan, as part of the Ottoman Empire, **Jordan** was officially renamed when independence was gained in 1946.

The colors of the Jordanian flag are those of the pan-Arab flag. They were first used in 1917 to represent “pan-Arabianism,” which sought independence from the Ottoman Empire. The star at the hoist was added in 1928, when Jordan gained nominal independence. It represents seven verses of Islamic belief.

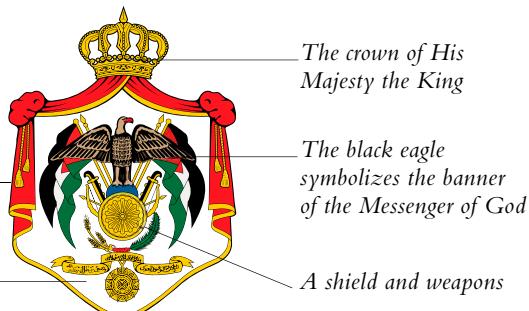
JORDAN'S COAT OF ARMS

The coat of arms is similar to that designed in 1949 for the King. The crest is a crown in his honor. The current inscription on the scroll reads “The King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Abdullah bin al-Hussein bin A'oun, Beseeches the Almighty for Aid and Success.”

ARMS OF JORDAN

The current coat of arms is very similar to that designed for King Abdullah I in 1949

An Arabic inscription asking for the Almighty's aid



The crown of His Majesty the King

The black eagle symbolizes the banner of the Messenger of God

A shield and weapons

Saudi Arabia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** 1973 **Usage:** National and Civil

A number of versions of the green flag have been used by the Wahabi sect since the 19th century



The shahada, is the Muslim Statement of Faith

Green was thought to be a favorite color of the prophet Muhammad

Asia



The Kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** was unified under King Abd-al Aziz (ibn Sa'ud) in 1932. The Sa'ud family are the country's absolutist rulers.

The flag of Saudi Arabia symbolizes the Arab peoples of the desert. Used in various forms since the late 19th century, the green is favored by the Wahabi sect and is believed to be the favorite color of the prophet Muhammad.

FLAG INSCRIPTION

In 1901, the shahada, the Muslim Statement of Faith, was added to

the flag in white letters, making it one of the few national flags to contain an inscription.

By law it must be able to be read correctly—from right to left—on both sides of the flag. The sword is the symbolic sword of Abd-al-Aziz, who conquered part of Arabia in the early 20th century. It has appeared in different forms in the past, sometimes as two crossed swords.

THE SHAHADA



The inscription reads “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah”

This version of the sword was added in 1981



The sword represents that given to Abd-al-Aziz by his father

Yemen

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** May 22, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, white and black, are pan-Arab colors



The flag adopted for the united state was based on the common tricolor of former flags of North and South Yemen

Asia



Yemen was originally two countries, the Kingdom of Yemen, in the north, and the British Aden Protectorate in the south. The two united in 1990.

The first flag of the Yemen, used while the Imams were in power, was red, with a white sword placed horizontally in the center and five white stars representing the five duties of a devout Muslim. Yemen was originally two countries, each having their own flag.

SOUTH YEMEN

Formally the British Aden Protectorate, the flag of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was modeled on the Egyptian pan-Arab flag. It was a red, white, and black tricolor and it bore a blue triangle, representing the Yemeni people in the hoist, while a red star represented the Socialist ruling party.

NORTH YEMEN

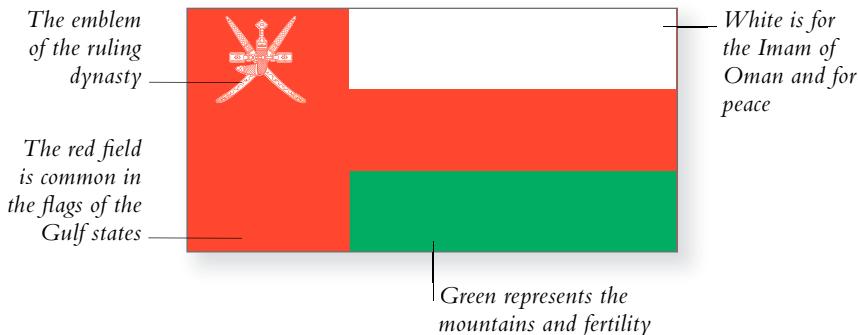
The flag of the Yemen Arab Republic, formally the Kingdom of Yemen, was also modeled on the Egyptian flag. It was a red, white, and black tricolor, but it was simply charged with a single, five-pointed green star in a central white band, representing Arab unity.

A UNIFIED FLAG

When Yemen unified, the stars and the triangle were dropped, but the common elements of their flags—the pan-Arab red, white, and black stripes—were preserved for the united flag. The new flag's pattern suggests a compromise between the officially secular south and the Islamic north.

Oman

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** April 25, 1995 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



From the mid-19th century, **Oman** was a British protectorate. In 1970, it achieved independence as the Sultanate of Oman.

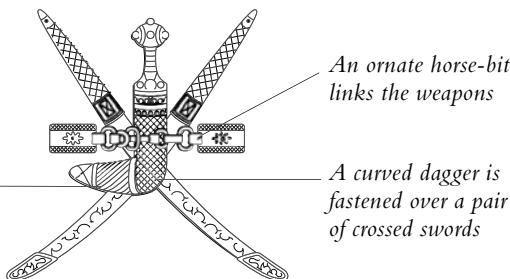
Until 1970, Oman used the plain red banner of the indigenous people, the Kharrijite Muslims. In 1970, the Sultan introduced a complete new set of national flags. Bands of green and white were added to the fly, and the national emblem, the badge of the Abusaidi Dynasty, was placed in the canton. This depicts crossed swords surmounted by a *gambia*, a traditional curved dagger.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

White has been associated historically with the Imam, the religious leader of Oman and at times the political rival to the ruling Sultan. It also symbolizes peace. Green is traditionally associated with the *Jebel al Akhdar* or “Green Mountains,” which lie toward the north of the country. Red is a common color in Gulf state flags.

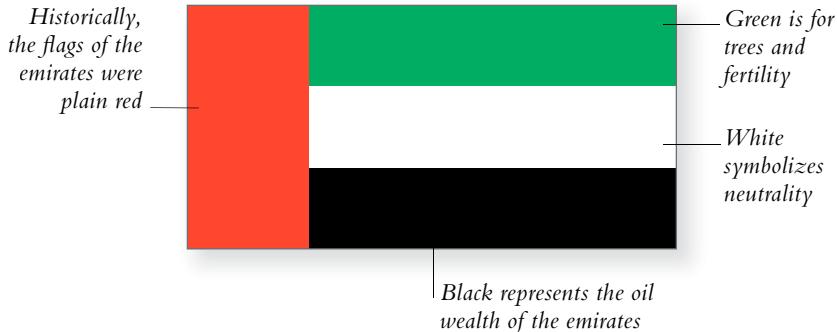
THE NATIONAL EMBLEM

The national emblem is said to date back to the middle of the 18th century



United Arab Emirates

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** December 2, 1971 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



The **United Arab Emirates** is an amalgamation of seven emirates, formerly known as the Trucial States, that came together in 1971.

Following a General Treaty in 1820, the seven emirates that now form the United Arab Emirates came under British protection. Red and white flags were taken up by all except the Emirate of Fujairah, a non-signatory to the treaty, which adopted a plain red flag. With minor alterations, the flags are still retained for local use. The first flag of the federation,

adopted in 1968, was also red and white, but with a green star.

THE PAN-ARAB COLORS

On independence in 1971, a flag in the pan-Arab colors—red, green, white and black—was adopted to express Arab unity and nationalism. The red also recalls the color of the flags of the member states.

FLAG OF DUBAI

Like the other six emirates, Dubai retains its individual red and white flag



Qatar

Ratio: 11:28 Adopted: c. 1949 Usage: National and Civil



The maroon coloring and proportions distinguish the flag from Bahrain's flag

"Qatar maroon" derives from the action of sun on natural red dye

Asia



Formerly linked to Bahrain, **Qatar** was in a treaty relationship with Britain from 1916 until 1971, when it gained full independence.

Qatar's flag was originally plain red, like the flag of Bahrain, to which it was once linked. The peoples of both countries are Kharjite Muslims, whose traditional banner was red. The flag evolved in its present form around the middle of the 19th century, and was officially adopted when Qatar became independent from Britain in 1971.

“QATAR MAROON”

The flag's maroon color is said to have come about from the action of the desert sun's heat on the red vegetable dyes formerly used for its flags. This color, now known as “Qatar maroon,” was officially adopted in 1948. The nine-pointed,

zigzag, white interlock derives from a British request in the 1820s that all friendly states around the Gulf add a white band to their flags, to distinguish them from pirate flags. During its earlier usage, before Qatar's independence, the flag also bore the name of the state in white lettering and red diamonds were placed on the white band.

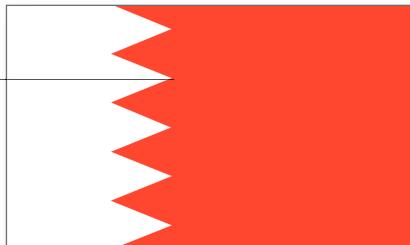
THE EMBLEM OF QATAR

The circular badge of Qatar uses both the colors and serrated pattern of the flag, around its edge. In the center is a local sailing boat, passing an island. This is set between two crossed swords. It is inscribed with the name of the state in Arabic.

Bahrain

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** 2002 **Usage:** National and Civil

The serrated edge was originally a straight line.



Red and white are the traditional colors of the Gulf states

Asia



Despite Iran's claims of sovereignty, **Bahrain**, an archipelago in the Gulf, has retained its independence gained from Great Britain in 1971.

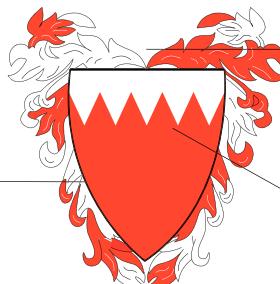
Bahrain was under British protection from 1820 to 1971. By the terms of the General Maritime Treaty of 1820, all friendly states in the Gulf undertook to add white borders to their red flags, so that they would not be taken for pirate flags. The various states of the "Pirate Coast" then developed flags

with differing white patterns on them. A plain vertical white strip was added to Bahrain's flag. In 1932 the line was made serrated. In 2002, Bahrain became a kingdom and the number of serrations was set at five.

The national arms was adopted in 1932. It is based on the colors and design of the national flag.

ARMS OF BAHRAIN

The coat of arms dates from 1932; it was designed by Sir Charles Belgrave, the Sheik's political adviser

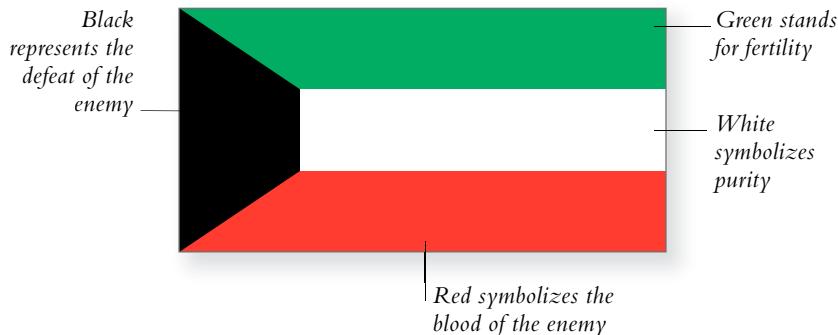


Until independence in 1971, there was an oriental crown above the shield

The shield contains the characteristic serrated division line, as on the national flag

Kuwait

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** September 7, 1961 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



The State of **Kuwait** traces its independence to 1710, but it was under British rule from the late 18th century until 1961.

Before 1961, the flag of Kuwait, like those of other Gulf states, was red and white. The present flag is in the pan-Arab colors, but each color is also significant in its own right. Black symbolizes the defeat of the enemy, while red is the color of blood on the Kuwaiti swords. White symbolizes purity and green is for the fertile

land. The idea for the flag's distinctive design—a horizontal tricolor with a black trapezium in the hoist—may have come from the flag used by Iraq until the late 1950s.

KUWAIT'S COAT OF ARMS

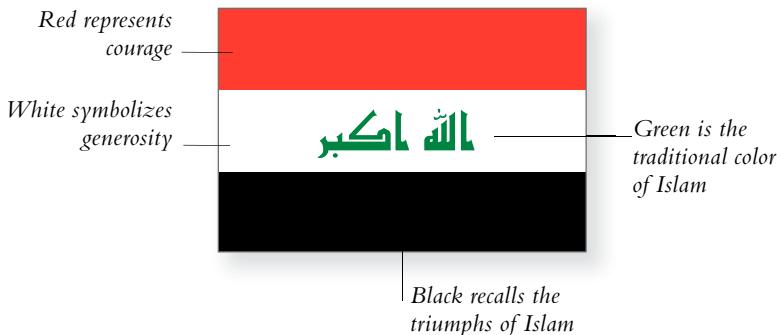
The arms depicts a hawk containing an Arab *dhow* on stylized waves.

ARMS OF KUWAIT



Iraq

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** February 19, 2008 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Iraq has been independent since 1932. The republic was proclaimed in 1958. Period of instability since 2003, following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

The flags of Iraq have always included the pan-Arab colors of red, white, black, and green. The colors represent the qualities of those who follow Islam. Red represents courage; white stands for generosity; black is for the triumphs of Islam, and green is for Islam itself.

Three green stars were added to the flag in 1963, based on the then

flag of Egypt (see page 60). In 1991, the inscription was added. It was modified and the stars removed in 2008.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

Also in 1963 the golden Eagle of Saladin became the national arms. It always shows the national flag on its chest.

ISLAMIC VERSE

The Islamic verse was added to the flag in 1991 and modified in 2004 and 2008

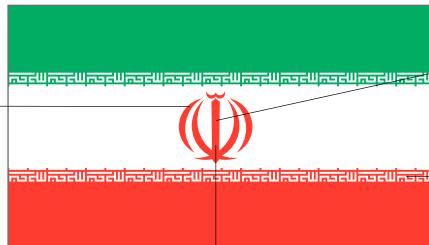


The takbir reads "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great")

Iran

Ratio: 4:7 **Adopted:** July 29, 1980 **Usage:** National and Civil

The four crescents symbolize the growth of the Muslim faith



The sword represents strength and fortitude

Kufic script from the Qur'an

The globe shape stands for the power of the world's downtrodden people

Asia



Iran was a monarchy until 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini deposed the Shah. An Islamic republic was formed in 1980.

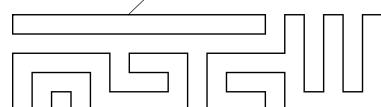
The traditional green, white, and red of the Iranian flag date back to the 18th century, although there is no agreed explanation of the colors. The colors were arranged in horizontal stripes in 1906. In 1980 a new flag was introduced with the addition of emblems expressive of the Islamic Revolution.

A REVOLUTIONARY EMBLEM

The emblem in the center of the flag is a highly stylized composite of various elements representing different facets of Islamic life: Allah, the Book, the Sword, the five principles of Islam, balance, unity, neutrality, and the universal government of the downtrodden.

THE KUFIC SCRIPT (STYLIZED VERSION)

Along the edges of the green and red stripes appears the phrase "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great")

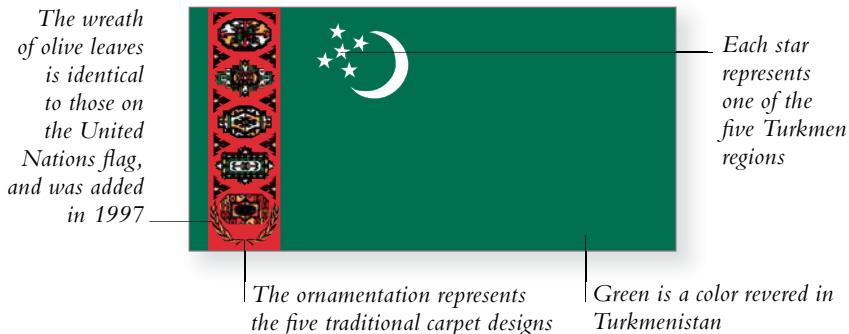


A stylized version of Kufic script, used for the Qur'an

The script, repeated 22 times, is the date in the Islamic calendar on which Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile in 1979

Turkmenistan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** February 19, 1997 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Turkmenistan was originally one of the 15 federated states of the USSR. It broke away and became an independent republic in 1991.

The original design of the flag was adopted on February 19, 1992, following a competition, and is based on national traditions. In the official interpretation, the five stars stand for the new regions established by the constitution of 1992. The carpet design contains five medallions or *guls*, said to represent the traditional

designs used by the tribes who produced the country's famous carpets. The wreath of olive leaves was added in 1997 to "immortalize the policy of neutrality" declared by Turkmenistan in 1995.

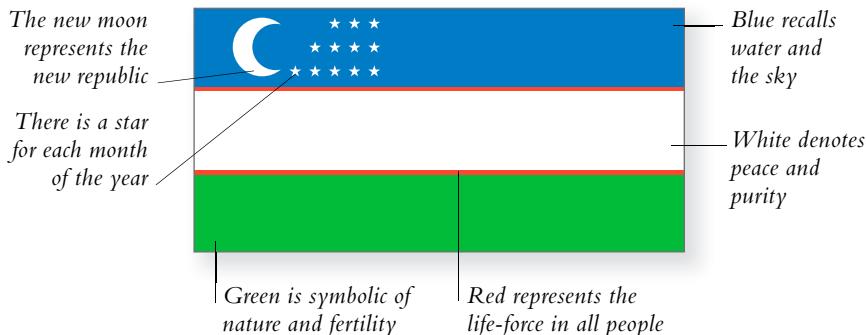
The coat of arms recalls the region's important agricultural products and famous horses.

ARMS OF TURKMENISTAN



Uzbekistan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** November 18, 1991 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Once part of the Mongol Empire, **Uzbekistan** fell to Russia in the late 19th century. It became independent from the USSR in 1991.

Uzbekistan was the first of the Central Asian republics to adopt its own non-communist national flag, although the new design is based on that of the former Soviet Uzbekistan.

The blue stripe symbolizes water and the sky. It is also the color of the flag of Timur, who ruled an

Uzbek empire in the 14th century. The white stripe is a sign of peace and purity. Green is a Muslim symbol of nature and fertility. Red is for the life-force found in all people. The new moon suggests the birth of the new republic, while the 12 stars represent the months of the Islamic calendar.

ARMS OF UZBEKISTAN

The arms features a bird whose outstretched wings form a crescent framing a rising sun over a landscape of mountains and rivers

Cotton is Uzbekistan's chief cash crop



Kazakhstan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 4, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Part of Central Asia conquered by Russia in the 18th century, **Kazakhstan** was the largest republic to secede from the USSR.

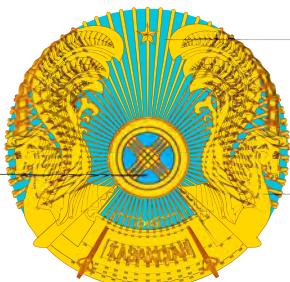
Kazakhstan's post-communist flag was adopted in 1992. Its sky-blue background recalls the endless skies over the Kazakh people. It also symbolizes well-being, tranquility, peace, and unity. In the center of the flag, below a golden sun with 32 rays, soars a bird of the species known locally as the *berkut*, or

steppe eagle. Together they represent love, freedom and the aspirations of the Kazakh people. A pattern of what is described as “national ornamentation” forms a vertical stripe near the hoist.

The new coat of arms is also based around a radiant sun. It depicts traditional features of Kazakhstan.

ARMS OF KAZAKHSTAN

The center of the arms is like the upper part of a yurt, the ancient felt tent of the Kazakh nomads



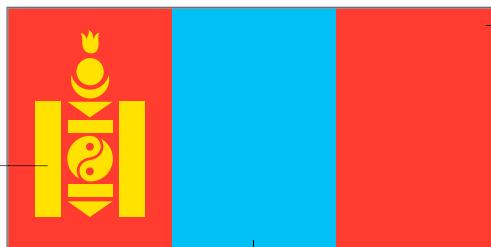
The sun’s rays spread out like a yurt’s supporting structure

Winged and horned horses represent historical traditions and beliefs

Mongolia

Ratio: 2:1 Adopted: 1992 Usage: Civil and State

The soyonbo device combines a number of Buddhist emblems



Originally the color of communism, today red represents progress

Sky blue is the national color of Mongolia

Asia



Mongolia is a remote state that has been under communist rule since 1924. The former Communist Party was democratically re-elected in 1997.

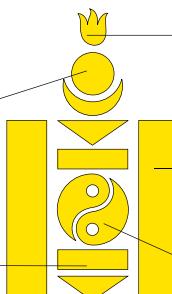
The current national flag replaced the Red flag of revolution in 1940. The red field is retained at the fly and hoist, although the color's original socialist connotations have given way to more general themes of progress and prosperity. The sky-blue panel represents the people of Mongolia and invokes the imperial

days of Genghis Khan. The flag bears a 17th-century Buddhist emblem at hoist called the *soyonbo*. The *soyonbo* comprises various ideograms representing different elements from the Buddhist view of the world. The communist star which appeared above the *soyonbo* was removed in 1992.

THE SOYONBO

The sun and moon represent ancestors of the Moguls

Horizontal bars indicate that vigilance is required from the highest and lowest in society



The tongues of the flame stand for past, present, and future

The vertical columns illustrate the Mongolian proverb “Two friends are stronger than stone”

The fish stand for vigilance because fish never sleep

Kyrgyzstan

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** March 3, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil

*Red is for Manas
the Noble, the
national hero*



*The sun's 40
rays stand for the
40 tribes and
40 heroes of the
Kyrgyz nation*

*A stylized yurt, the traditional
home of nomadic people*

Asia



Conquered by Russia under the tsars, in 1991 the Republic of **Kyrgyzstan** became the last of the Soviet Union Republics to declare sovereignty.

Independent since 1991, a post-communist flag was not adopted until 1992. The flag's red background is supposed to be the flag color used by the national hero, Manas the Noble, who welded 40 tribes together to form the Kyrgyz nation.

In the center of the flag is a yellow sun with 40 rays, representing the tribes and the legendary 40 heroes of Manas. The sun's rays run clockwise on the obverse of the flag and counterclockwise on the reverse.

A TRADITIONAL YURT

At the sun's center is a stylized bird's-eye view of the roof, or *tunduk*, of a Kyrgyz *yurt*, the traditional tent used by the nomadic

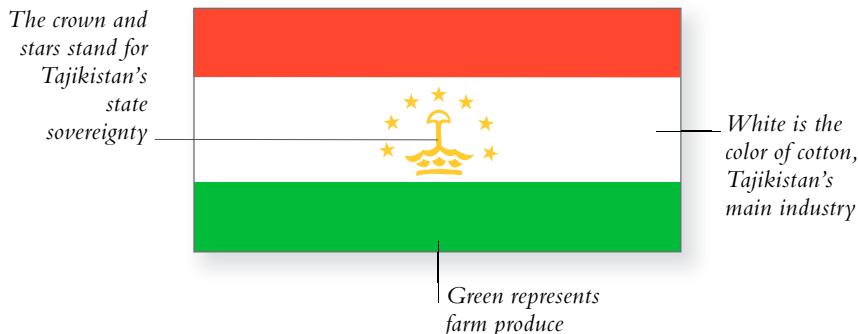
people of the steppe. It symbolizes the unity of time and space, the origin of life, hearth and home, and the history of the nomads.

ARMS OF KYRGYZSTAN

Like the arms of its neighbor, Kazakhstan, the coat of arms of Kyrgyzstan is round and does not contain a traditional shield. In the center is a white eagle with spread wings. Behind this are snow-capped mountains, representing the mighty Tien Shan and a radiant, rising sun. This scene is bordered by wreaths of cotton and wheat, both major agricultural products in Kyrgyzstan. The name of the state is inscribed in Cyrillic script at the top.

Tajikistan

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: November 24, 1992 Usage: National and Civil



Asia



A former member of the USSR, **Tajikistan** proclaimed independence in 1991, but Russian and communist influences remain strong.

In 1992, Tajikistan became the last of the former USSR republics to adopt a new flag. The red, white, and green stripes are the same as those chosen in 1953 for the flag of the Tadzhik Soviet Socialist Republic. Red is the color of the flag of the USSR; white is for cotton, Tajikistan's main export and green recalls other farm produce.

SYMBOLS OF THE NEW STATE

The center of the flag features a gold crown and an arc of seven stars. These symbols refer to the state sovereignty of Tajikistan, friendship between all nations and the “unbreakable union of workers, peasants, and the intellectual classes” of the republic.

ARMS OF TAJIKISTAN



Afghanistan

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: 2004 Usage: National

Black recalls previous flags used in Afghanistan



Green represents Islam

The new arms of Afghanistan

Asia



Afghanistan has had a troubled history. This is shown by the no less than 14 distinct national flags it has used in the 20th and 21st centuries.

With the election of a democratic government in 2004, the present flag was adopted. Black, red, and green have been traditional in most Afghan flags. Black is from the first recognized Afghan flag; red is for bravery, and green for Islam. The white emblem in the center is the state coat of arms. This too is a traditional design.

The arms show the Muslim Mehrab, the niche which shows the direction to the Muslim Holy City of Mecca, and Minbar, the pulpit from which sermons are preached. These are shown within a traditional image of a mosque, flanked by two national flags and surrounded by a wreath of wheat and beneath a rising sun. Four inscriptions also appear.

ARMS OF AFGHANISTAN

*The Arabic inscription
“God is Great”*

The name of Afghanistan in Arabic script

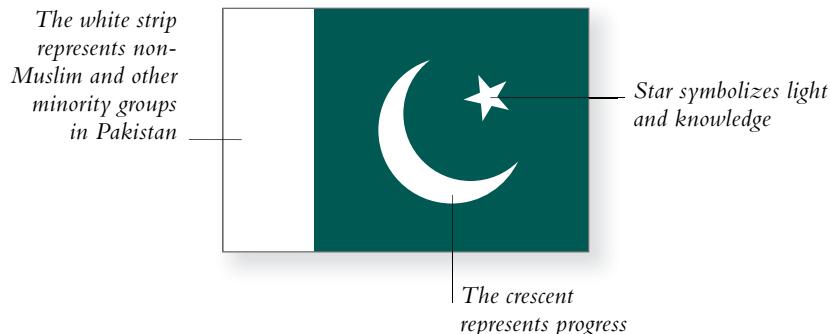


The Arabic inscription reads: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah”

The date 1298 in the Muslim calendar (AD 1919), is the date Afghanistan was internationally recognized as independent.

Pakistan

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: August 14, 1947 Usage: National



Asia



Once a part of British India, **Pakistan** was created in 1947 as an independent Muslim state. Today, it is divided into four provinces.

The flag was designed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the nation. It is associated with the flag used by the All-India Muslim League as an emblem of its aim of achieving an independent Muslim state. Their flag was green, with a central white star and crescent. At independence, a white stripe was added at the hoist to represent the state's minorities.

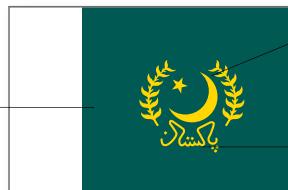
THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

The green and white together stand for peace and prosperity. The crescent symbolizes progress and the star represents light and knowledge.

The flag of the President is similar to the national flag. The emblems are in gold and are enclosed within a wreath of laurel. Beneath is the name of the state in Urdu.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The field of the President's flag is green and white, like the national flag

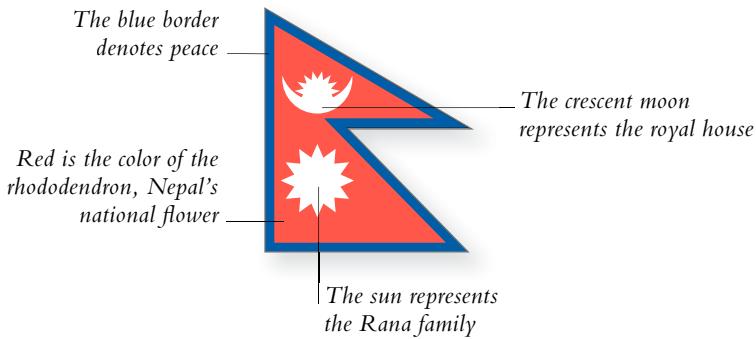


The crescent and star are symbols of Islam

The name of the state is written in Urdu

Nepal

Ratio: 4:3 (plus border) **Adopted:** December 16, 1962 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



From 1960 **Nepal** was ruled by an absolute monarchy. This regime ended in 1991 when the first multiparty elections were held.

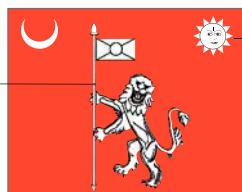
The flag of Nepal is the only national flag that is not rectangular or square. Originally, two separate triangular pennants were flown one above the other; these were then joined to form a single flag. Its crimson red is the color of the rhododendron; the country's national flower. Red is also the sign of victory in war. The blue border is the color of peace.

THE SUN AND THE MOON

Until 1962, the flag's emblems, the sun and the crescent moon, had human faces. They were removed to modernize the flag. The sun retains the face on the Royal Standard. The crescent represents the royal house and the sun denotes the Rana family, who were hereditary prime ministers until 1961.

THE ROYAL STANDARD (1960–2008)

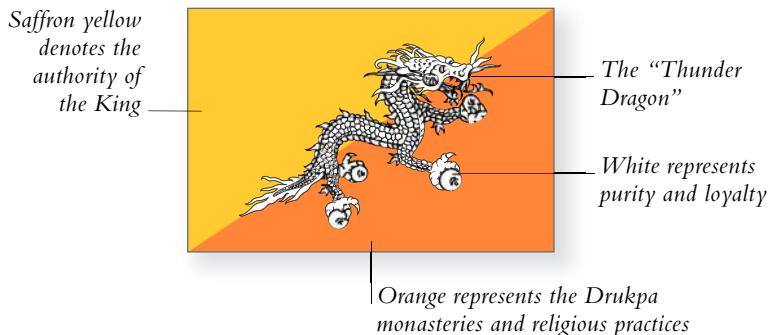
The Royal Standard shows a rampant lion holding a lance with a flag



The sun has a face, as did the national flag until 1962

Bhutan

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: c. 1965 Usage: National and Civil



Asia



Bhutan is a Buddhist state where power is shared by the king and government. The country's name in the local dialect means "Land of the Dragon."

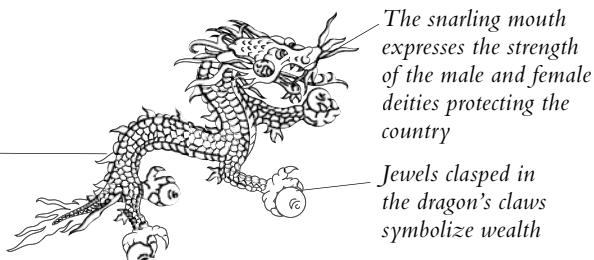
In Bhutan, thunder is believed to be the voices of dragons roaring. In about 1200, a monastery was set up called the *Druk* (the "Thunder Dragon"), with a sect called the Drukpas named after it. The name and the emblem of the dragon have been associated with Bhutan ever since. The dragon on the flag is white to symbolize purity.

TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL POWER

The two colors of the flag, divided diagonally, represent spiritual and temporal power within Bhutan. The orange part of the flag represents the Drukpa monasteries and Buddhist religious practice, while the saffron yellow field denotes the secular authority of the royal dynasty of the Wangchukhs.

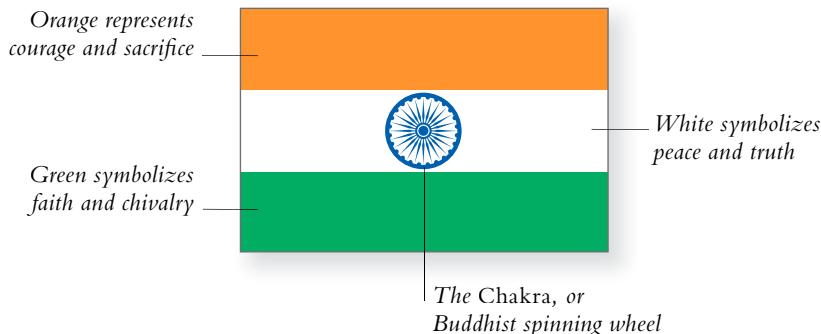
EMBLEM OF BHUTAN

The dragon symbolizes Druk, the Tibetan name for the Kingdom of Bhutan



India

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 22, 1947 **Usage:** National



Asia



Under British rule from 1763, the Indian subcontinent divided into Pakistan and **India** in 1947 upon independence.

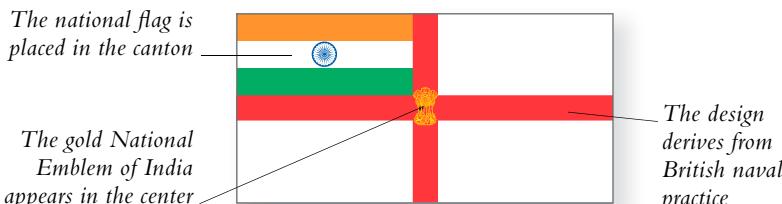
The national flag, adopted in 1947, is based on the flag of the Indian National Congress which was established in 1885 to press for independence. The flag's orange color symbolizes courage and sacrifice, white stands for peace and truth, green is for faith and chivalry, and blue represents the color of the sky and the ocean.

THE CHAKRA

The central motif is a *Chakra*, or Buddhist spinning wheel. The 24 spokes of the wheel correspond with the 24 hours of the day, implying that there is life in movement and death in stagnation.

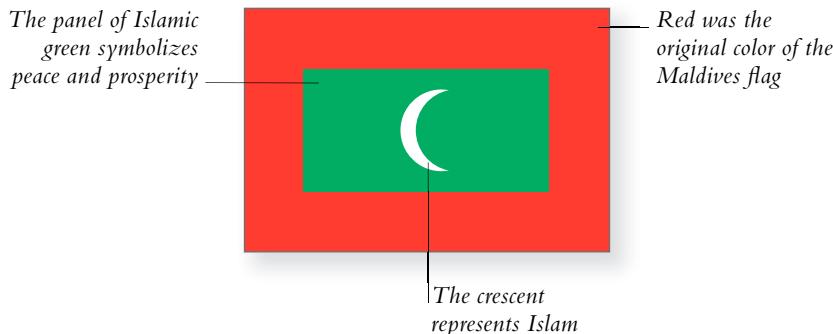
The naval ensign is adapted from British practice. The gold National Emblem was added in 2004.

INDIAN NAVAL ENSIGN



Maldives

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 26, 1965 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



The archipelago of small islands that forms the **Maldives** was once a British Protectorate. The Maldives became fully independent in 1965.

Until the beginning of the 20th century the flag of the Maldives was plain red, reflecting the culture of the Arab traders from the Persian Gulf who operated among the islands. This flag remained in use after the British Protectorate was set up in 1887. The flag later acquired a white crescent facing the hoist—another sign of Islamic influence.

A NEW DESIGN

The flag was redesigned in 1948 after the independence of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) of which the islands had been a dependency. The crescent was turned around and placed on an Islamic green panel. A pattern of black and white diagonal stripes was

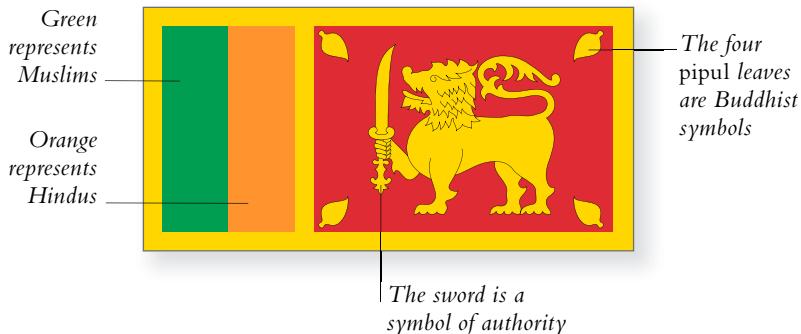
added along the hoist. This was dropped after independence from Britain in 1965. A modern interpretation of the colors suggests that red symbolizes the blood shed in the struggle for independence, while green stands for peace and progress.

THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms of the Maldives contains the Islamic crescent and star emblem beneath a date palm. Below the crescent is a scroll with the inscription, in Dihevi, “State of a Thousand Islands,” which recalls the many islands—over 2000—that make up the Maldives. The crescent is flanked by two national flags.

Sri Lanka

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** December 17, 1978 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



The island of Ceylon was a British colony until independence in 1948. It became a republic under the name **Sri Lanka** in 1972.

The original flag of Sri Lanka featured just the lion and sword on a red field, recalling that the Sinhalese word for lion—"Sinhala"—is the basis of the island's name. The flag's yellow border symbolized the protection of the nation by Buddhism.

The flag was derived from the flag of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy. It proved unpopular with minority

groups, so vertical bands of green, for Muslims, and orange, for the Hindu Tamils, were added in 1951.

When the country's name changed from Ceylon to Sri Lanka in 1972, four leaves were added. They denote the tree under which Siddhartha sat when he received enlightenment and became the Buddha. This version of the flag was in official use from 1978.

FLAG OF KANDY

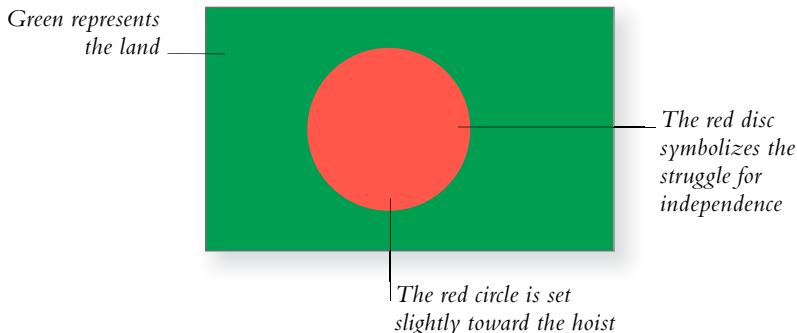
The "Lion Flag" was the national flag of Ceylon prior to 1815 when it became a British colony



The finials are derived from the spire on top of a Buddhist temple

Bangladesh

Ratio: 3:5 Adopted: January 25, 1972 Usage: National



Asia



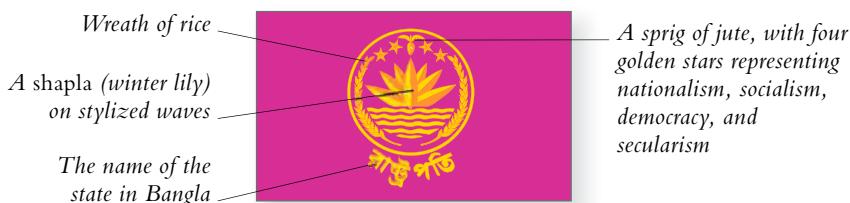
Bangladesh was formerly the eastern province of Pakistan. After a civil war with Pakistan, it became a separate country in 1971.

The flag was originally adopted in March 1971, when the country gained independence, at which time it had a yellow silhouette map of the country in the red disc. This flag was used throughout the struggle for independence, but when the state was formally established in 1971 the outline map was omitted from the new national flag.

ARMS OF BANGLADESH

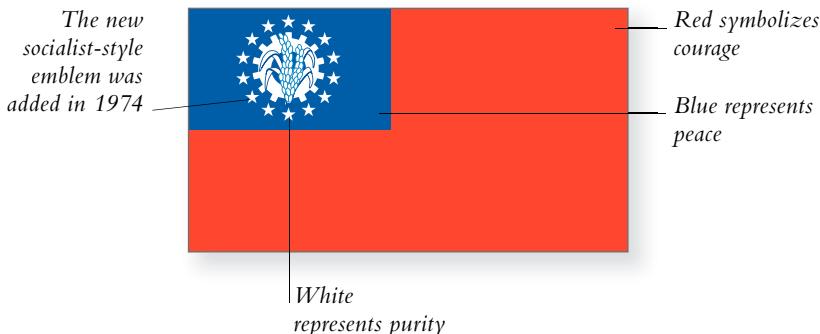
The coat of arms was adopted in 1972 and consists of the national flower, a water lily, known locally as the *shapla*, growing from stylized waves. Around it are ears of rice, and above is a sprig of jute, with four golden stars. The arms appears in the center of the President's flag, set on a deep purple field.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG



Myanmar (Burma)

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** January 4, 1974 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



In 1886, **Myanmar** became a province of British India. It separated from India in 1937, and gained independence from British colonial control in 1948.

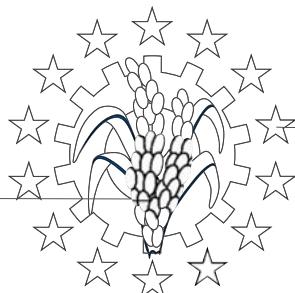
The flag originated in the Burman Resistance, which adopted a red flag with a white star when fighting the occupying Japanese forces during World War II. At independence, the star was modified to a blue canton with five small stars surrounding one large one, symbolizing the uniting of the country's diverse

peoples. Red stands for the courage of the people, blue is for peace, and white is for purity.

The emblem was changed in 1974 to represent the new socialist ideology in the country. The five stars were changed to 14, encircling a cog-wheel, for industry and a rice plant for agriculture.

EMBLEM OF MYANMAR

On the new socialist emblem, the rice stands for agriculture, while the cog-wheel represents industry



14 stars represent the unity and equality between the 14 member states of the Union

Thailand

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** September 28, 1917 **Usage:** National and Civil

The blue and white stripes were added during World War I

Red symbolizes life-blood



Blue represents the monarchy

White stands for the purity of the Buddhist faith

Asia



Formerly known as the Kingdom of Siam, **Thailand** is the only Southeast Asian nation never to have been colonized.

Thailand is also known as the “Land of the White Elephant,” and this emblem appeared on its plain red flag in the 19th century. During World War I, horizontal white stripes were added above and below the elephant.

In 1917 the elephant was abandoned, and a blue stripe was

added to the middle of the flag in order to express solidarity with the Allies, whose flags were mostly red, white and blue. This flag is known as the *Trairanga* (tricolor).

The Royal Arms of Thailand was introduced in 1910. The arms feature the *garuda*, a bird-man in Hindu mythology.

ARMS OF THAILAND

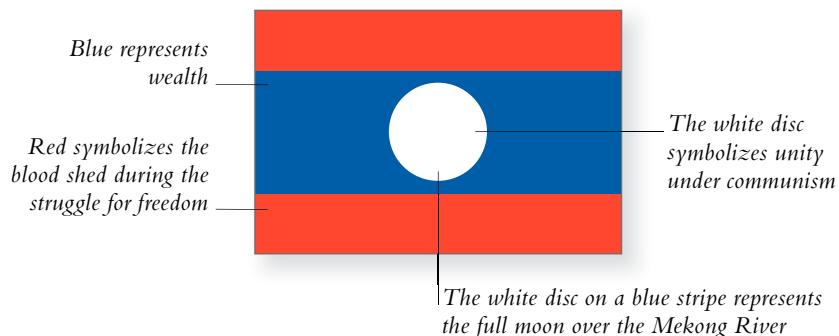
The garuda of Hindu mythology is the enemy of all things poisonous



The red garuda is placed on a field of royal yellow for the Royal Standard

Laos

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 2, 1975 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



A French protectorate from the end of the 19th century, **Laos** gained full independence in 1953. It has been under communist rule since 1975.

The national flag of Laos was adopted in 1975, when the country became a people's republic. It is one of the few communist flags that does not use the five-pointed star as an emblem. This flag replaced the original flag of Laos, which was red, with a triple-headed white elephant on a pedestal beneath a parasol. This expressed the ancient name of the country, "Land of a Million Elephants," and dated from the 19th century.

A FLAG FOR THE REPUBLIC

From 1953 onward, the royal government waged war with the Pathet Lao, whose flag was blue with a white disc and red borders

at the top and bottom. From 1973–1975, the Pathet Lao formed part of the government coalition, before assuming power directly and prompting the abdication of the king. Their flag was then adopted as the national flag.

In the center is a white disc symbolizing the unity of the people under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the country's bright future. The red stripes stand for the blood shed by the people in their struggle for freedom, and the blue symbolizes their prosperity.

The white disc on a blue background is also said to represent a full moon against the Mekong River.

Cambodia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** June 29, 1993 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red and blue are traditional colors



The famous temple of Angkor Wat has appeared in various forms on Cambodia's flag

Asia



Cambodia was a French Protectorate until 1949 when it became nominally independent once more. Full independence was achieved in 1953.

The flag used today is the same as that established in 1948, although since then five other designs have been employed. These have almost all made use of the image of the temple of Angkor Wat in one form or another. This famous temple site, dates from the 12th century, was

built by the Mahidharapura monarchs. It has five towers, but these were not always all depicted in the stylized version used on flags. The temple also appears on the arms. The monarchy was restored in September 1993, the 1948 flag having been re-adopted in June of that year.

ARMS OF CAMBODIA

The glowing sun represents national rebirth

The inscription is the name of the country



Angkor Wat is a symbol of the nation and its greatness

Vietnam

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** November 30, 1955 **Usage:** National and Civil

The gold five-pointed star is for the unity of five groups of workers in building socialism



Red symbolizes revolution and bloodshed

Asia



In 1954 **Vietnam** was divided into north and south. In 1976, the north finally achieved its aim of reunification under communism.

Vietnam's national flag was adopted in 1976 at the end of the Vietnam War when North and South Vietnam were reunited under the new name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This flag had been used by communist North Vietnam since 1955, a year after partition.

It is basically the same as the flag used by the national resistance movement, the Vietminh, led by Ho Chi Minh, in its struggle against the occupying Japanese forces during World War II.

SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

The red color of the field stands for the revolution and for the blood shed by the Vietnamese people. The five-

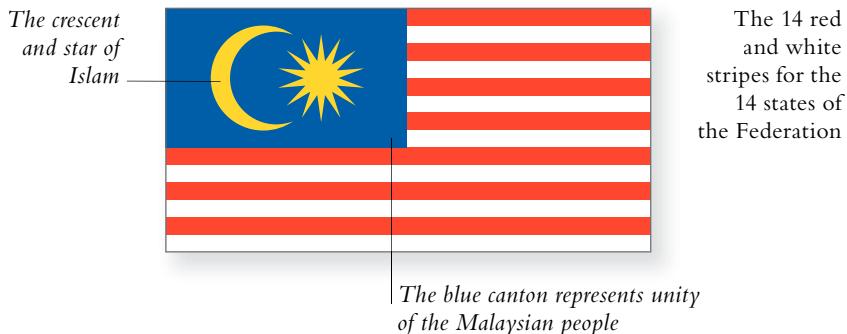
pointed yellow star represents the unity of workers, peasants, intellectuals, youths, and soldiers in the building of socialism.

ARMS OF VIETNAM

The national coat of arms, which was also re-adopted in 1976, had been used by North Vietnam since 1956. It depicts a cog-wheel, symbolic of industry, and the yellow five-pointed star of socialism, enclosed by a garland of rice—the country's main agricultural product. The name of the country is inscribed on a scroll at the base of the emblem. The symbols on both the arms and the flag were inspired by the Chinese flag.

Malaysia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** September 16, 1963 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



Malaya became independent of Britain in 1957. In 1963, the Federation of **Malaysia** was formed, although Singapore seceded in 1965.

The first flag of independent Malaya was based on the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America, combined with Islamic symbolism. It had 11 red and white stripes and a blue canton, like the US flag, with a gold crescent and an eleven-pointed star, traditionally associated with Islam. Both the number of stripes and points on the star denoted the 11 states of the Federation.

THREE NEW STATES

In 1963 three new states—Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak—joined the Federation to form Malaysia. To reflect this the flag was amended to 14 red and white stripes representing the 14 states. When Singapore

seceded in 1965, the flag remained unaltered. The fourteenth stripe is now said to stand for the federal district of Kuala Lumpur.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

The blue canton represents the unity of the Malaysian people. The crescent is for Islam, the dominant religion. The 14 points of the star are for unity among the states of the country. Yellow is the traditional color of the rulers of the Malay states. Red and white are also traditional colors in Southeast Asia.

The national motto appears on a scroll in the coat of arms. It is repeated in both Jawi and Roman script and means “Unity is Strength.”

Malaysia: State flags

The flags of the Malaysian states were mostly derived from those of the 19th century, and were originally flags of the princes or sultans.



JOHORE

The blue field represents the government. The red canton is for the "Hulubalang" warrior caste, who defend the state. The crescent and star represent the ruler.



KEDAH

Red is the traditional color of Kedah. The sheaves of yellow padi, or rice, are for prosperity. The green crescent signifies Islam and the yellow shield is for sovereignty.



KELENTAN

The red field is symbolic of the loyalty and sincerity of the people, while the white emblem represents the ruler. Kelantan has 36 royal and official flags.



KUALA LUMPUR

Blue is for the unity of the population of Kuala Lumpur; red for courage and vigor; white is for purity, cleanliness and beauty; yellow for sovereignty and prosperity.



LABUAN

The colors are those of the national flag and they have the same symbolism; white recalls the purity of Buddhism and red represents the life-blood of the people.



MELAKA

The colors and pattern are taken from the national flag. Unlike the Malaysian flag, the flag of Melaka only has one stripe of red and one of white and a five-pointed star.



NEGERI SEMBILAN

This flag reflects the hierarchy of power in Malaysia. The yellow field symbolizes the ruler, the black triangle, the district rulers and the red triangle, the people.



PAHANG

White is for the ruler, because it can change to any other color, reflecting how a ruler can be influenced by popular opinion. Black represents the people, standing firm.



PERAK

The three stripes represent different levels of the royal family. The Sultan is evoked by white, the Raja Muda by yellow and the Raja di-Hilir by black. The latter two are junior members of the ruling family.



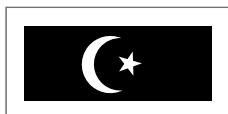
PINANG

Light blue represents the blue seas around the island of Penang. White is for the peace and serenity of the state and yellow for its prosperity. The tree is the Pinang palm, after which the state is named.



SARAWAK

Yellow is the traditional color of Borneo, where the state lies. Red and black are from the flag of the former Raja of Sarawak. The star has nine points for the nine districts of the state.



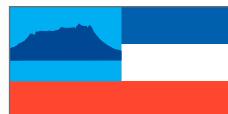
TERENGGANU

The white background stands for the Sultan. It envelopes the black field, symbolizing the people. This reflects how the Sultan provides protection around his subjects.



PERLIS

Yellow represents the ruler and blue represents the people. The colors are arranged as two equal horizontal stripes to signify the close cooperation that should exist between the ruler and his subjects.



SABAH

The zircon blue (top stripe) is for tranquillity, white for purity and justice, red for courage, ice-blue (canton) for unity and prosperity, and royal blue for strength. The mountain is Kinabalu.



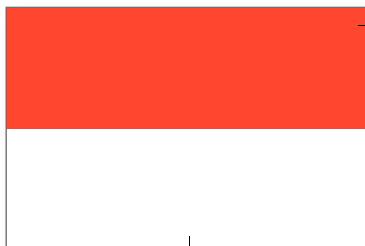
SELANGOR

The yellow and red quarters are symbolic of flesh and blood, the combination necessary for life. The crescent and star in the canton represent Islam, the dominant religion of the state.

Indonesia

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** August 17, 1945 **Usage:** National and Civil

The flag is based on the banner of the 13th-century Indonesian Empire



Red represents the body

White symbolizes the soul

Asia



A former Dutch colony, **Indonesia** gained independence in 1949. Western New Guinea (Irian Jaya) was ceded to Indonesia in 1963.

The flag is based on the banner of the 13th-century Empire of Majapahit, red and white being the holy colors of Indonesia at that time. These colors were revived in the 20th century as an expression of nationalism against the Dutch. The first red and white flag flew in Java in 1928 and was adopted

as the national flag of the republic in 1945 when the country declared its independence. The red stripe is symbolic of physical life, while white represents spiritual life. Together they stand for the complete human being, body and soul. Red and white are also traditional colors of the Southeast Asian nations.

ARMS OF INDONESIA

The arms show a shield supported by a mythical bird, the garuda. The 17 wing-feathers and 8 tail-feathers refer to the day and month (August 17) on which independence was declared in 1945



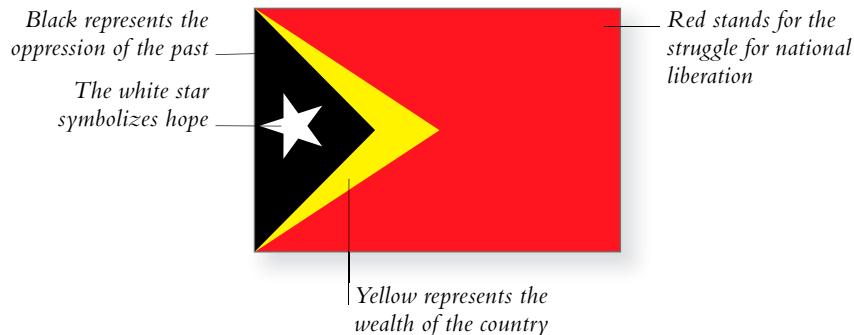
The shield depicts a buffalo head, a banyan tree, and sheaves of rice and cotton

The yellow star represents religious belief

The national motto means “Unity in Diversity”

East Timor

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** May 20, 2002 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999. A UN administration was in place until official independence on May 20, 2002.

At midnight on May 19, 2002, the UN flag was removed from outside the government offices in Dili, the capital. The new country, now officially recognized as a national state, has its own parliament, its own president, and its own flag.

NEW STATE, OLD FLAG

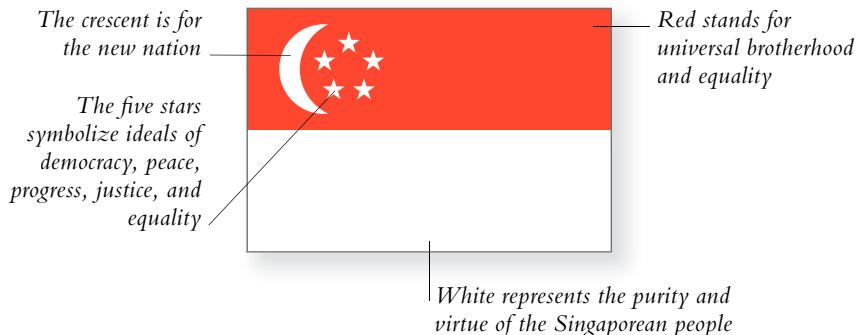
The flag illustrated above is actually the flag designed by the Frettilin party for the “Democratic Republic of Timor” in 1975, following the transition from Portuguese colony to independence. However, the infant nation’s subsequent invasion and occupation by Indonesia led to the adoption of that country’s flag for the last quarter of the twentieth century.

SYMBOLISM OF THE FLAG

The black triangle represents the darkness of four centuries of colonial oppression under the Portuguese. The golden-yellow arrowhead recalls the long struggle for independence, as well as the hope of the country’s future prosperity. The red field reflects the blood shed by the Timorese people on their journey toward autonomy—a symbol which has taken on greater poignancy since the referendum for independence and the massacre of thousands of East Timorese by pro-Indonesian militias in 1999. The white of the star symbolizes peace, while the star itself represents the guiding light which gives hope for the future.

Singapore

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: December 3, 1959 Usage: National and Civil



Asia



Granted self-government by Britain in 1959, **Singapore** became part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, and fully independent in 1965.

The flag dates from when Singapore became a self-governing British colony in 1959. It was preserved when Singapore joined the Malaysian Federation and adopted as the national flag when Singapore became fully independent in 1965.

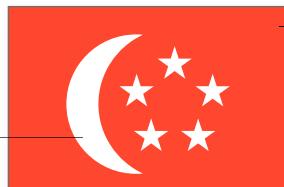
The colors of red and white are those of the Malay people. Red is supposed to represent universal

brotherhood and equality, while white symbolizes purity and virtue. The white crescent signifies the new nation of Singapore, while the five stars next to it represent the ideals of democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality.

The President's flag is a plain red field with the crescent and star emblem in the center.

THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

The President's flag simply enlarges and centers the crescent and stars motif from the national flag



Red and white represents the Malay people

Brunei

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: September 29, 1959 Usage: National and Civil

The national emblem was placed in the center in 1959



Black and white stripes represent Brunei's chief ministers

Yellow represents the Sultan of Brunei

Asia



Brunei became a British Protectorate in 1888. It gained full independence in 1984, and is now an absolute monarchy under its Sultan.

A similar version of this flag, without the coat of arms, was first used in 1906. The flag's main color, yellow, is associated with the Sultan, while the black and white stripes that cut across it are the colors of the Brunei's two chief ministers. The coat of arms in the center of the flag was added in 1959.

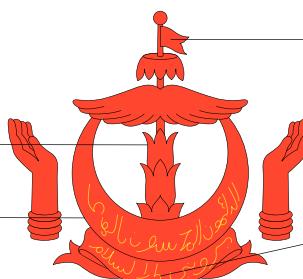
THE NATIONAL ARMS

The coat of arms bears testament to Brunei's Muslim traditions with the crescent, a traditional symbol of Islam, at its center. The Arabic motto on the crescent translates as, "Always render service by God's guidance"; below it, a scroll bears the inscription "Brunei Darussalam" (City of Peace).

ARMS OF BRUNEI

The central mast is a symbol of the state

The crescent is symbolic of the Islamic faith



The flag and umbrella are symbols of royalty

The upturned hands signify the benevolence of the government

The inscription is the country's official title "Brunei Darussalam"

Philippines

Ratio: 1:2 Adopted: May 19, 1898 Usage: National and Civil



Asia

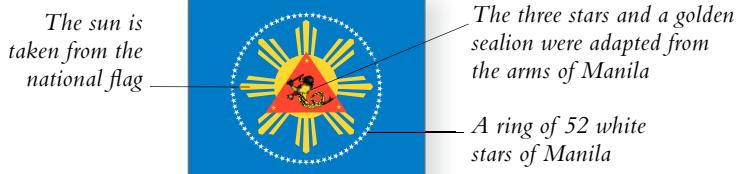


The **Philippines** was a Spanish colony until 1898, when it was ceded to the United States of America. It gained its independence in 1946.

The flag was first used by Filipino nationalists in exile while the Spanish still controlled the islands. When they were ceded to the USA, the Philippines became far more autonomous, and the flag was flown freely from 1898. It was banned by the Americans from 1907–1919, and the Stars and Stripes was flown exclusively on the islands.

The sun and stars are Masonic in origin. The eight rays of the sun are for the eight provinces that revolted against the Spanish. The three stars represent the country's three main geographical areas. White stands for purity and peace; red for bravery and blue for patriotism. When used at war, the red stripe is flown at the top of the flag, representing courage.

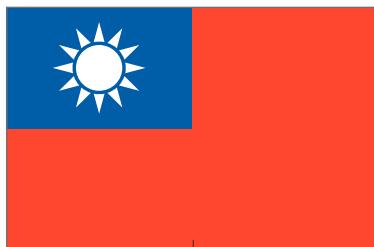
THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG



Taiwan

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 28, 1928 **Usage:** National

A blue flag with a white sun was the party flag of the Kuomintang. Each ray represents two hours of a day



The flag is said to represent “a white sun in a blue sky over red land”

Red recalls the Han Chinese, the dominant ethnicity in China

Asia



Taiwan was formerly part of China. It became a separate state in 1949 under the Nationalist Party, which was expelled from government in Beijing.

The flag adopted for Taiwan or Formosa, as it was known, had been the national flag of China. It was used from 1928–1949 when the Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist Party was in power.

The red field represents China, the blue canton and white sun was the party flag of the Kuomintang. The 12 rays of sunshine symbolize

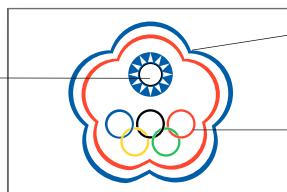
unending progress, each ray represents two hours of the day.

THE TAIPEI OLYMPIC FLAG

This flag was adopted by Taiwan specifically for use at the Olympic Games, where its national flag was not accepted. It combines red, white, and blue; the national colors of Taiwan and the Olympic emblem.

THE TAIPEI OLYMPIC FLAG

The sun symbol is taken from the national flag

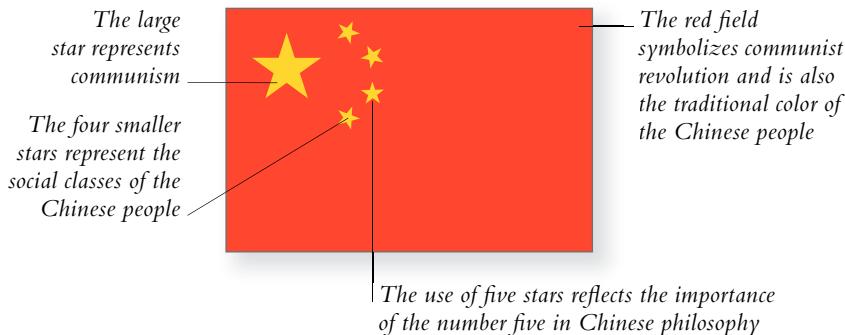


Blue, red, and white are the national colors

The emblem of connected rings shows that it is an Olympic flag

China

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 1, 1949 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia



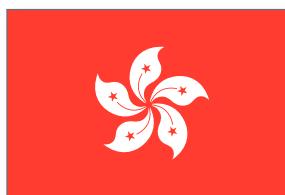
China has the world's oldest continuous civilization. The communist Chinese People's Republic was established in 1949.

China's first national flag originated in 1872. It was yellow with a blue dragon, representing the Manchu (Qing) Dynasty which ruled China for many years. The revolt of 1911 saw the changing of the flag to five different colored stripes. Soviet republics were established in the 1920s, each of which was represented by a red flag referring

to the Soviet fatherland. The present flag dates from 1949, when the People's Republic was formed.

The large star represents communism. The red field signifies revolution and echoes the ancient Han Dynasty of 206 bc. The four stars represent the four social classes: peasants, workers, petty bourgeoisie, and patriotic capitalists.

FLAG OF HONG KONG (XIANGGANG) IN 1997



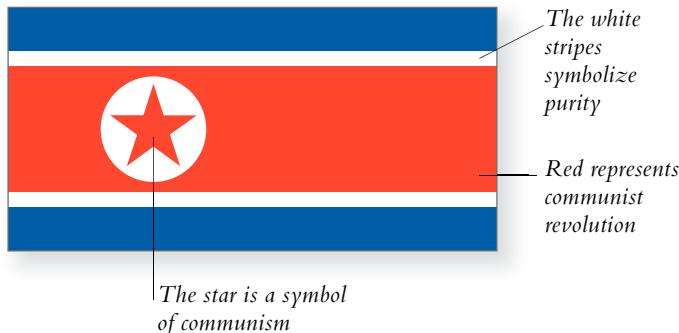
FLAG OF MACAO IN 1999



North Korea

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** September 9, 1948 **Usage:** National and Civil

Two blue stripes stand for sovereignty, peace and friendship



Asia



The Kingdom of Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910. In 1948, the peninsula was partitioned into democratic South and communist **North Korea**.

The flag was adopted in 1948, when North Korea became an independent communist state. The traditional Korean flag was red, white and blue. The regime retained these colors—with more prominence given to the red—and added a red star on a white disc. The disc recalls the Chinese yin-yang symbol, which is found on the

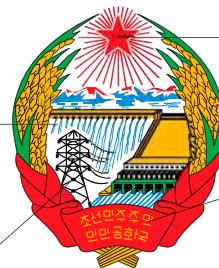
flag of South Korea, and represents the opposing principles of nature. The red stripe expresses revolutionary traditions; while the red star is for communism.

The prominent theme of the Soviet-style coat of arms is industrialization, depicted with an electricity pylon and a large dam.

ARMS OF NORTH KOREA

A hydroelectric power station within a wreath of rice-ears

Industrial elements feature heavily on the arms of Korea and include a large dam and electricity pylon

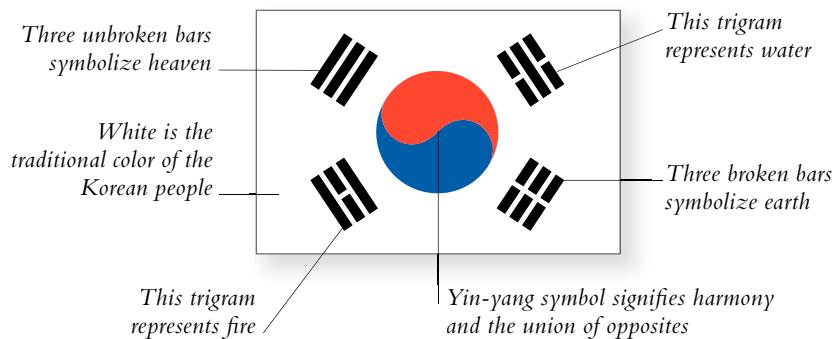


The star of communism

The inscription on the scroll is the country's official name—The Democratic People's Republic of Korea

South Korea

Ratio: 2:3 Adopted: September 8, 1948 Usage: National and Civil



Asia



South Korea forms the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, which was partitioned close to the 38th parallel after World War II.

The flag used by the Kingdom of Korea before 1910 featured the traditional colors: red, white, and blue. When South Korea separated from the north in 1948, the original flag was retained, but a few alterations were made.

A NEW SOUTH KOREAN FLAG

At the flag's center is a disc containing an S-shaped line, the upper half being red, the lower half blue. This is derived from the Eastern yin-yang symbol, which represents the harmony of opposites in nature, for example, good and evil; male and female. When North and South Korea separated, the shape of the yin-yang was stylized in the

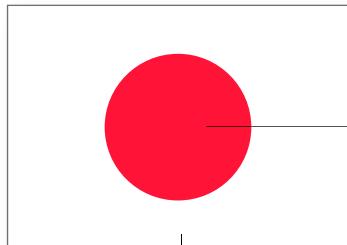
form of a Japanese *mon*. These are simplified versions of everyday objects, shown in symmetrical and regular forms. Yang is represented by red, and yin by blue.

The other alteration to the original flag in 1948 was to the trigrams (*kwaes*) surrounding the yin-yang, which were reduced from eight to four. They are the basic trigrams from the *I-Ching*, a divination system widespread in the East. On the South Korean flag they symbolize the four polarities; heaven (upper hoist), water (upper fly), fire (lower hoist), and earth (lower fly). The white field of the flag represents peace and the white clothing traditionally worn by the Korean people.

Japan

Ratio: 7:10 **Adopted:** January 27, 1870 **Usage:** National and Civil

The sun symbol has been an element in Japan's flags for thousands of years



The red disc is named Hinomaru or disc of the Lucky Sun

The white field expresses honesty and purity

Asia



Isolated from the world for centuries, **Japan** began to modernize in the 19th century. After defeat in World War II, it became a democracy.

Japan is known as “The Land of the Rising Sun.” The Emperor of Japan and his predecessors descend from the House of Yamato, which united the country in AD 200 and they claim to be direct descendants of the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami.

The current flag was officially established as the national flag of Japan in 1870.

THE HINOMARU

The Lucky Sun or *Hinomaru*, in the center of the flag, has been an imperial badge since the 14th century. The white field stands for purity and integrity, and some suggest the red disc represents brightness, sincerity and warmth.

The Japanese Maritime SDF ensign is an unusual adaptation of the national flag.

JAPANESE MARITIME SDF ENSIGN

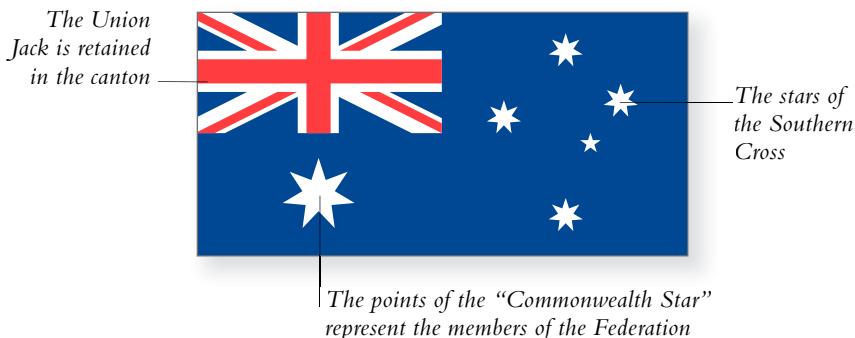
Adopted in 1889, the naval ensign consists of the sun-disc with red rays extending to the border of the flag



Rays extend to the edge of the flag to recall the rising sun

Australia

Ratio: 2:1 Adopted: May 29, 1909 Usage: National and Civil



Australasia and Oceania



The great southern continent of **Australia** was unified in 1901, as a commonwealth of six formerly separate British subject states.

The first national flag was adopted in 1901 following various design competitions, but its use was restricted. It includes a blue ensign and three motifs, celebrating key aspects of Australian statehood.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

This constellation is visible throughout the year in southern night skies and has been used as a navigational aid for centuries. It helped guide early European ships to the continent and became a popular emblem for the new settlers. The five stars of the cross appear on the fly, with seven points for the brightest stars and five for the lesser Epsilon Crucis.

THE UNION JACK

First flown on Australian soil by Captain Cook, it was the national flag from 1788 and remained the official citizens' land flag until 1954. It occupies the canton, denoting Australia's historical links with Great Britain.

THE "COMMONWEALTH STAR"

This large star affirms the federal nature of government in Australia. Originally there were six points for the six federal states. The seventh point was added in 1909, to represent the Northern Territory together with the six other external territories administered by the Australian Federal Government.

State flags

The state flags all use the British Blue Ensign, with the state badge in the canton. The two territories do not follow this pattern.



AUSTRALIAN
CAPITAL
TERRITORY

The capital territory became self-governing in 1989. The flag, adopted in 1993, depicts Canberra's city coat of arms and the Southern Cross in the city colors of blue and gold.



NORTHERN
TERRITORY

Adopted by the territory in 1978, the flag depicts the Southern Cross and a stylized Sturt's desert rose against black and ochre, which are the territorial colors.



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The state emblem of the piping shrike (a magpie) is shown with outstretched wings on a yellow background. The piping shrike was adopted as the flag badge in 1904.



VICTORIA

The Royal Crown was added in 1877. The present arrangement, with the crown surmounting the Southern Cross, became the state arms in 1910.



NEW SOUTH
WALES

A gold star adorns each arm of the St. George's Cross, with a golden lion *passant guardant* at the center. This more distinctive badge replaced a previous design in 1876.



QUEENSLAND

The state badge depicts the Royal Crown at the center of a Maltese cross. The design of the crown was altered at the coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.



TASMANIA

The Red Lion *passant* on a white background recalls historical ties with England and has remained essentially unchanged since its adoption in 1875.



WESTERN
AUSTRALIA

The Black Swan has been Western Australia's emblem since the first British colony was founded at Swan River. The flag was adopted in 1953.

Vanuatu

Ratio: 11:18 **Adopted:** February 18, 1980 **Usage:** National and Civil



Australasia and Oceania



Vanuatu, formerly known as the New Hebrides, was jointly administered by Britain and France from 1906. In 1980, it gained its independence.

During its time as an Anglo-French condominium, the New Hebrides flew the French *Tricolore* side by side with the Union Jack. After the anglophone Vanuaaku Party led the country to independence as Vanuatu in 1980, the colors of the party flag—red, black, green, and yellow—were adopted as the basis for the design of a new national flag. The final design was chosen a few months before independence by a parliamentary committee from designs submitted by a local artist.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

The yellow symbolizes sunshine; the green, the richness of the islands. The red is symbolic of blood, and

the black is for the Melanesian people. The Prime Minister requested the inclusion of the yellow and black fimbriations to give more prominence to the color representing the people. The yellow Y-shape denotes the pattern of the islands in the Pacific Ocean.

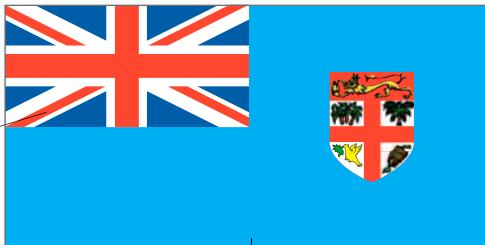
THE BOAR'S TUSK

Between the arms of the “Y” lies the traditional emblem of a boar’s tusk—the symbol of prosperity, worn as a pendant on the islands—crossed by two leaves of the local *namele* fern. The leaves are a token of peace, and their 39 fronds represent the 39 members of Vanuatu’s legislative assembly.

Fiji

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** October 10, 1970 **Usage:** National and Civil

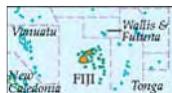
The Union Jack denotes the historical links with Great Britain



The design is based on the British Blue Ensign

The blue field represents the Pacific Ocean

Australasia and Oceania



Fiji became part of the British Empire in 1874, and an independent nation with dominion status within the Commonwealth in 1970.

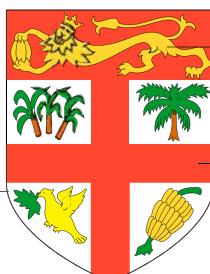
The flag was adopted in 1970, when Fiji achieved independence. Its bright blue background symbolizes the Pacific Ocean, which plays an important part in the lives of the islanders, both in terms of the fishing industry, and the burgeoning tourist trade. The Union Jack reflects the country's links with Great Britain.

ARMS OF FIJI

The shield is derived from the country's official coat of arms, which was originally granted by Royal Warrant in 1908. The images depicted on the shield represent agricultural activities on the islands, and the historical associations with Great Britain.

ARMS OF FIJI

The first quarter shows sugar cane, the second a coconut palm, the third a dove of peace, and the fourth a bunch of bananas



On the chief, a British lion holds a coconut between its paws

The coat of arms was granted in 1908. It is a white shield, with a red cross and a red chief (the upper third of a shield)

Papua New Guinea

Ratio: 3:4 Adopted: June 24, 1971 Usage: National and Civil

The five stars represent the Southern Cross, but also refer to a local legend about five sisters



Red and black are the predominant colors in the native art of Papua New Guinea

A golden bird of paradise

Australasia and Oceania



Papua New Guinea gained full independence in 1975, following its status as a United Nations Trusteeship under Australian administration.

The Australian administration attempted to introduce Papua New Guinea's first official national flag in 1970. Its choice was a vertically divided flag: blue at the hoist, with the stars of the Southern Cross as in the Australian flag, then white, then green, with a golden bird of paradise. The proposed design was never popular with the local people.

A LOCAL DESIGN

The current flag of yellow and white on black and red was designed by a 15-year-old art student, Susan Karike, and officially accepted in 1971. When Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, it was retained as the national flag.

THE COLORS OF NATIVE ART

The colors of the field—red and black—were chosen because of their widespread use in the native art of the country. The bird of paradise has long been a local emblem, and its feathers are used for traditional dress and in festivals and ceremonies.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

The flag is halved diagonally. The lower half features the Southern Cross constellation in white on black, as it would appear in the night sky, over Papua New Guinea. This signifies the link with Australia and also recalls a local legend about five sisters. The red upper half bears a golden bird of paradise in flight.

Solomon Islands

Ratio: 5:9 **Adopted:** November 18, 1977 **Usage:** National and Civil

The five stars represent the five main groups of islands



Green represents the land

The yellow stripe symbolizes sunshine

Australasia and Oceania



The **Solomon Islands** were a British colony from 1883, until they became self-governing in 1976, and subsequently independent in 1978.

Before the current flag was adopted in 1977, three different coats of arms had represented the islands.

The national flag, adopted in 1977, is divided diagonally by a stripe of yellow representing the sunshine of the islands. The two triangles formed by the diagonal stripe are blue and green, signifying

water and the land. The five stars were initially incorporated to represent the country's five districts. The islands were later divided into seven districts and the symbolism of the stars was modified to refer to the five main groups of islands.

The coat of arms is also in the colors of the national flag.

ARMS OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

The crest is a traditional canoe (in section) and a shining sun

A freshwater crocodile

The national motto – "To lead is to serve"



A shark

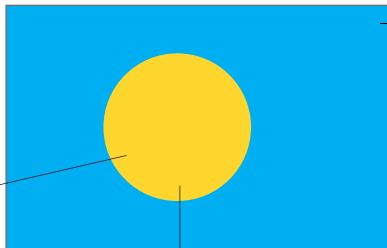
The shield depicts frigate birds, an eagle, two turtles, a shield and bow and arrow, all representing districts of the Solomon Islands

The compartment is a stylized frigate bird

Palau

Ratio: 5:8 Adopted: January 1, 1981 Usage: National and Civil

The golden disc depicts the full moon, considered by Palauans to be the best time for celebrations and harvesting



Blue symbolizes the freedom of self-rule

The full moon is set slightly toward the hoist

Australasia and Oceania



Under US control since 1945, **Palau** became a republic in 1981. In 1994, it became independent in association with the United States.

The current flag was introduced in 1981 when Palau became a republic. Previously, the flag of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was flown jointly with the United Nations and United States flags.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FLAG

The flag's very simple design belies the depth of meaning attributed to it. The explanation for the choice of colors is rooted in the history and customs of the Palauan people. The bright blue of the field, which might be assumed to be symbolic of the Pacific Ocean, is in fact a representation of the transition from foreign domination to self-government. The golden disc, which

sits slightly off center toward the hoist, represents the full moon. The Palauans consider the full moon to be the optimum time for human activity. This time of the month when celebrations, harvesting and planting, fishing, tree-felling, and the carving of traditional canoes are carried out. The moon is a symbol of peace, love and tranquility.

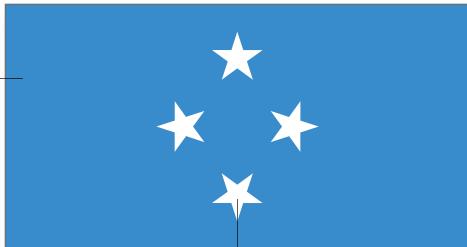
THE SEAL OF PALAU

Palau does not have a coat of arms, but has a seal, adopted in 1981, when the country became a republic. The seal is not colored. It depicts a traditional Palauan triangular hut, above the date of adoption. This is surrounded by the title of the state.

Micronesia

Ratio: 10:19 Adopted: November 30, 1978 Usage: National and Civil

The light blue field recalls the Pacific Ocean



The colors are similar to those of the UN flag

The four stars each represent an island group

Australasia and Oceania



Micronesia was part of the US-administered United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, until it became independent in 1979.

The flag, adopted in 1978, is in the colors of the UN flag. The light blue also represents the Pacific Ocean.

In an echo of US practice, the stars are for the four islands, arranged like the points of the compass.

Micronesian States



CHUUK

The white coconut palm shows that the people depend on coconut resources. The white stars represent the 38 municipal units in the territory.



KOSRAE

The olive branches symbolize peace. The four stars are for the islands' four units. The *fafa* stone is traditionally used for grinding food.



POHNPEI

The eleven stars are for the district's eleven municipalities. The half coconut shell represents the *sakau* cup used in traditional ceremonies.



YAP

The outer and inner rings show a *rai*, a traditional symbol of unity. The white outrigger canoe symbolizes the desire to reach state goals.

Marshall Islands

Ratio: 10:19 **Adopted:** May 1, 1979 **Usage:** National and Civil

A 24-pointed star, one for each of the districts on the islands



The two stripes, orange over white, represent the two parallel chains of the Marshall Islands

Blue field for the Pacific Ocean

Australasia and Oceania



The **Marshall Islands** were part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from 1945–1986. They became fully independent in 1990.

The Marshall Islands became a self-governing territory on May 1, 1979, and on that day a new national flag was adopted. Designed by Emlain Kabua, wife of the president of the new government, it was the winning entry in a competition that had attracted 50 designs.

A FLAG FOR A PACIFIC ISLAND

The flag's dark blue field represents the vast area of the Pacific Ocean over which the islands are scattered. The star symbolizes the geographical position of the islands, which lie a few degrees above the Equator. The star has 24 points, representing the 24 municipalities of the Marshall Islands. Four of its rays extend

further than the others and stand for the capital, Majuro, and the administrative districts of Wotji, Yaluit, and Kwajalein. They also form a cross, signifying the Christian faith of the Marshallese.

SYMBOLS OF PROSPERITY

The two parallel stripes extending across the flag symbolize the two parallel chains of the Marshall Islands: the Ratak (Sunrise) Chain is white, the Ralik (Sunset) Chain is orange. The stripes extend and widen upward. This is said to signify the increase in growth and vitality of life on the islands. Orange also symbolizes courage and prosperity, while white represents peace.

Nauru

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** January 31, 1968 **Usage:** National and Civil

The blue field represents the island's blue skies and the Pacific Ocean



The gold stripe represents the Equator

The 12-pointed star recalls the 12 original tribes of Nauru

Australasia and Oceania



Nauru was jointly administered by Australia, the UK and New Zealand from 1947 until independence was granted in 1968.

The flag, chosen in a local design competition, was adopted on the day of independence. It depicts Nauru's geographical position, one degree below the Equator. A gold horizontal stripe representing the Equator runs across a blue field for the Pacific Ocean. Nauru itself is symbolized by a white twelve-pointed star. Each

point represents one of the 12 indigenous tribes on the island.

ARMS OF NAURU

This is also a local design and includes the chemical symbol for phosphorus; phosphates are Nauru's main export. Beneath it are a frigate bird and a sprig of *tomano*.

ARMS OF NAURU

The shield is surrounded by coconut leaves for phosphorus

The chemical symbol for phosphorus

A frigate bird



The 12-pointed star, as featured on the flag, representing the 12 tribes of Nauru

The feathers of a frigate bird

A sprig of *tomano*

Kiribati

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** July 12, 1979 **Usage:** National and Civil

The red shield in the coat of arms also depicts a gold flying frigate bird above a rising golden sun



The frigate bird symbolizes command of the sea

The blue and white wavy bands represent the Pacific Ocean

Australasia and Oceania



Once part of the British colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, the Gilberts became independent in 1979 and adopted the name **Kiribati**.

Kiribati's flag is one of only three national flags which are armorial banners—flags having a design which corresponds exactly to that of the shield in the coat of arms.

ARMS OF KIRIBATI

The coat of arms dates back to May 1937 when it was granted to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, as Kiribati and Tuvalu were then known. The shield, was then incorporated into the center of the fly half of a British Blue Ensign as the state ensign of the colony.

Shortly before independence was granted in 1979, a local competition was held to choose a new national flag and a design based on the

colonial coat of arms, was submitted to the College of Arms. The College of Arms decided to modify the design. Both the golden frigate bird and the sun were enlarged to occupy more of the top of the flag and the width of the blue and white wavy bands was reduced.

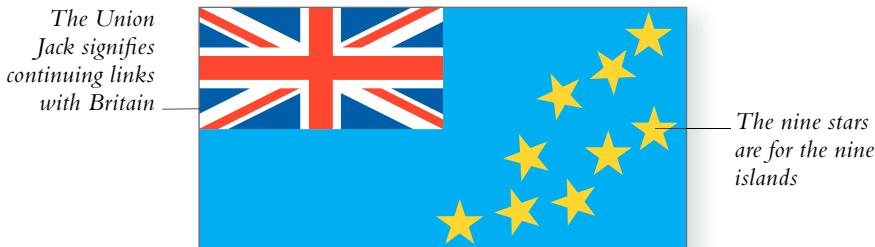
THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

However, the local people insisted on the original design, in which the top and bottom halves of the flag were equal, the sun and local frigate bird small, and the various design elements outlined in black.

The new flag was hoisted during the independence day celebrations in the capital, Tarawa on July 12, 1979.

Tuvalu

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** October 1, 1978 **Usage:** National and Civil



Australasia and Oceania



The Ellice Islands separated from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1975, and adopted the name **Tuvalu**. Independence was gained in 1978.

Tuvalu means “eight islands,” although there are in fact nine, each of which is represented by a star on the flag. The stars’ arrangement is supposed to reflect the islands’ geographic distribution.

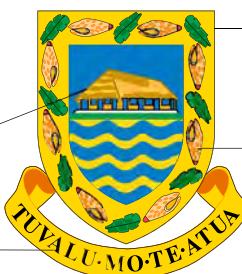
This flag was chosen because it symbolizes the continuing links with Britain and the Commonwealth.

However, anti-Commonwealth feeling rose and in 1995, the government decided on a new flag without the Union Jack. The new flag introduced later that year, retained the stars, but included the arms in a triangle at the hoist. In April 1997 the original design was re-adopted, following a change of government.

ARMS OF TUVALU

The coat of arms depicts a local meeting house or maneapa

The motto means “Tuvalu for God”

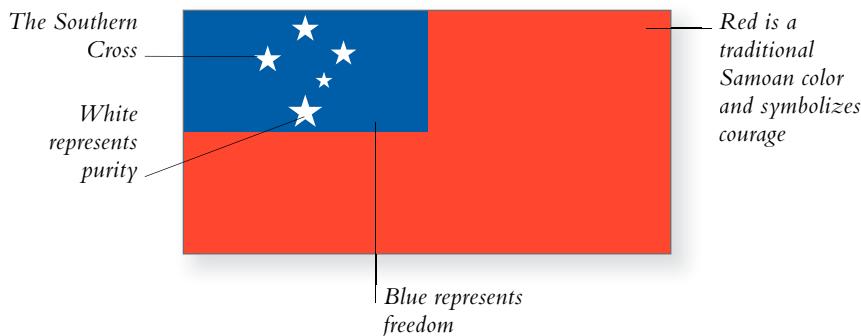


Eight sets of objects reflect the country’s title, “Eight Together”

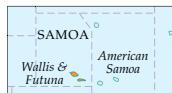
The border contains eight sea shells and eight banana leaves

Samoa

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** January 1, 1962 **Usage:** National and Civil



Australasia and Oceania



Under the administration of Germany, the USA and later New Zealand, **Samoa** became the first independent Polynesian nation in 1962.

Prior to 1899, when Samoa was partitioned by Germany and the USA, it was ruled by the rival kingdoms of Malietoa and Tamasese.

The flag of Malietoa was probably inspired by missionaries. It was a plain red field, with a white cross and a white star in the canton. The rival King of Tamasese favored the German cause and used flags with black crosses.

A UNITED FLAG

In 1948, by then a territory of New Zealand, Samoa was granted its current flag. This was created jointly by the kings of Malietoa and Tamasese. It comprised a red field taken from the former flag of

Malietoa and the Southern Cross from the flag of New Zealand, on a blue field in the canton.

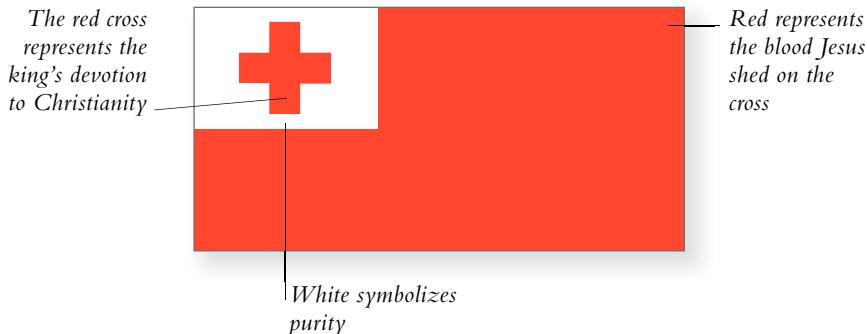
In 1949, the smaller fifth star was added, making the Southern Cross more like that on the Australian flag. The flag was retained when independence was granted in 1962.

ARMS OF SAMOA

The coat of arms was adopted in 1951 and contains symbols reflecting the Christian faith of the Samoan people. It depicts a shield of the Southern Cross, below a coconut palm from the previous colonial badge. Above the shield is a cross recalling the national motto—"May God be the foundation of Samoa."

Tonga

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** November 4, 1875 **Usage:** National and Civil



Australasia and Oceania



Tonga was unified under King George Tupou I in 1820. In 1900, it became a British protectorate before regaining its independence in 1970.

The flag dates from 1862 when the king at the time, who had converted to Christianity in 1831, called for a national flag which would symbolize the Christian faith.

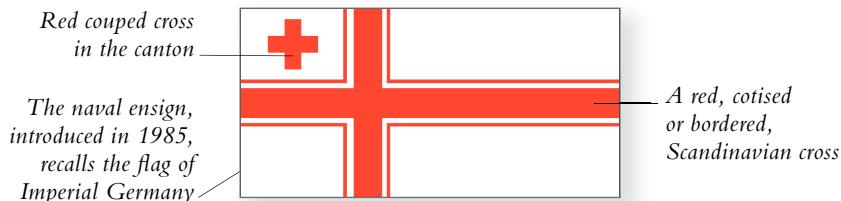
A NEW “CHRISTIAN” FLAG

The first design was a plain white flag with a red couped cross, but this was later found to be too similar to

the International Red Cross flag, adopted in 1863, and so the white flag was placed in the canton of a red one. The cross and the red color signify the sacrifice of Christ’s blood. The 1875 constitution states that the flag shall never be altered.

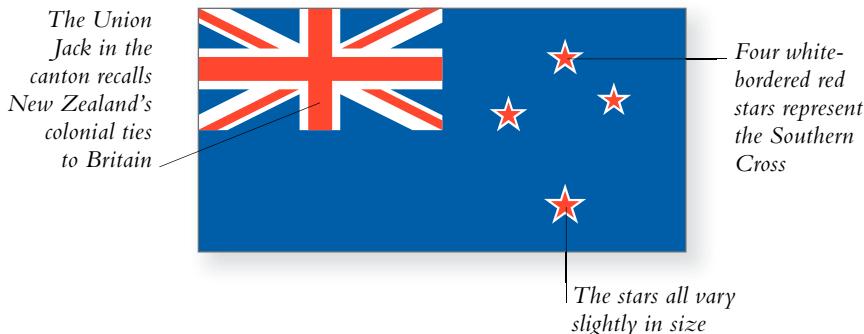
The naval ensign, introduced in 1985, also has a red couped cross on white in the canton.

TONGAN NAVAL ENSIGN



New Zealand

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 12, 1902 **Usage:** National



Australasia and Oceania



New Zealand was settled by the British in the 1800s and was a colony from 1841. It became a dominion in 1907 and fully independent in 1947.

New Zealand's first flag was adopted before it became a British colony. Chosen by an assembly of Maori chiefs in 1834, the flag was of a St. George's Cross with another cross in the canton containing four stars on a blue field. After the formation of the colony in 1841, British ensigns began to be used.

A NEW NATIONAL FLAG

The current flag was designed and adopted for restricted use in 1869 and became the national flag in 1902. It is the British Blue Ensign, with a highly stylized representation of the Southern Cross constellation. It depicts only four of the five stars in the constellation.

Overseas Territories



COOK ISLANDS

The 15 stars on the fly represent the 15 main islands of the group; they are arranged in a ring to indicate that each island is of equal importance.



NIUE

The link with the UK is shown by the use of the Union Jack; that with New Zealand by the four stars. The large central star represents Niue itself.

International flags

Many international organizations also adopt flags. Below is a selection of the most well-known.



ARAB LEAGUE



ASSOCIATION
OF SOUTHEAST
ASIAN NATIONS



CARICOM

(Caribbean Community
and Common Market)



THE
COMMONWEALTH



CIS

(Commonwealth of
Independent States)



EUROPEAN UNION



FIAV

(International Federation of
Vexillological Associations)



NATO

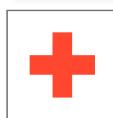
(North Atlantic
Treaty Organization)



OLYMPIC MOVEMENT



ORDER OF ST JOHN



RED CROSS



RED CRESCENT



RED CRYSTAL

In 2006, the Red Crystal was adopted for use with, or in place of, the Red Cross or Red Crescent flags. It is non-religious-specific, but the cross and crescent may be added in the center.



OPEC

(Organization of
Petroleum-Exporting
Countries)



AU

(African Union)



SECRETARIAT OF THE
PACIFIC COMMUNITY



UNITED NATIONS
(UN)

Signal flags



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EUROPE (see front endpaper for World Map)



THE CARIBBEAN





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