**County Names Database review instructions**

What is the Country Names Database?

Our website has a tremendous amount of information on countries around the world. However, it can be difficult to find information on countries which have changed their name over time. For example, Upper Volta changed its name to Burkina Faso in 1984. To find all the information about this country on our website, a user would have to search under both names. To improve our website’s search functionality, we need to be able to link these names together, so that a search for “Burkina Faso” will also yield the “Upper Volta” results, since there is a very good chance that the average user will be interested in both.

In order to solve this problem, we employed Virtual Student Foreign Service interns from 2012 to 2015 to create a “country names database,” tracing the history of country names worldwide from 1776 to the present. (Prior to starting, we consulted with the Office of the Geographer and also searched for a similar single dataset which would solve this need; since we were unable to find one we decided to create it ourselves.) We took as our starting point INR’s list of “Independent States in the World” (<http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm>) and “Dependencies and Areas of Special Sovereignty” (<http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/10543.htm>).

With the interns’ help, we now have a comprehensive database of country names, which we hope will let us not only improve the search capabilities of our website, but also serve as an analytical tool for researchers. The dataset will be posted on our website for public use once the project is complete.

Why do we need your help?

Our interns have built a dataset, but we do not want to deploy it on the website (or release it to the public) without some rigorous checking first. There is simply too much data here to be edited by one person. Therefore, we are asking that each of you to review between eight and ten individual countries (see the attached list of assignments). Your evaluation of the interns’ work will be the last stage in checking this material prior to our deploying it on the website. Therefore, we would be grateful if you could carefully examine the interns’ work, and supply any corrections as necessary.

What should you be looking for?

In this review, you will principally be doing two things. First, you will be checking the information provided by the interns to make sure it is accurate. The interns provided links to their sources on each country, which will allow you to retrace their steps. Second, you will be providing some additional context for the reason for each name change. When we started in 2012, we just asked our interns to define name relationships as “predecessor” and “successor” (in the above example, Upper Volta is the predecessor to Burkina Faso, and Burkina Faso is the successor to Upper Volta). But we have realized that name changes can happen for a variety of reasons. Therefore, for each name change, we would like you to add a piece of information that is not there now: a “relationship” descriptor for the reason for the change. We have started out with the following predefined descriptors:

* Independence (Country declares independence from a colonial power; example: Ghana)
* Secession (Country secedes from another country; example: South Sudan)
* Split (Country splits into two or more countries; example: Czechoslovakia becomes Czech Republic and Slovak Republic)
* Merger (Two or more countries merge to form one country; example: Egypt and Syria join to become the United Arab Republic)

There may be additional reasons for changes; if you find one that does not fit into one of the above four categories, please describe it as best you can in your notes.

Please note that a simple change of a country’s name without an accompanying change of political status (i.e., any of those actions listed above) is captured as a “name variant.” For example, in 2013, the government of Cape Verde announced that it would henceforth be known by the Portuguese name, Cabo Verde, in all languages. To account for this change in our database, we would change the name of the country’s main entry from “Cape Verde” to “Cabo Verde”, and we would move the old name, “Cape Verde,” into a “name variant” field, specifying it as relevant to the period 1975-2013.

What are the steps in the review?

1. Go to the “Assignments” section at the end of this document. Find your name, and see what countries you have been assigned.
2. Go to the project homepage at [[Insert link to documents]], click on Assignments, and find your name.
3. Click on each of your assigned countries and print them out. You may find it useful to consult the web page, since it lets you follow links to sources. But please complete your assessments on the printout.
4. Using the checkboxes on these printouts to record your assessments, review the information provided about the country and its ancestors—the country’s “lineage.” A list of other countries that list any of these entries as predecessor or successor is included too, in case any of these should be “promoted” and added to the lineage. Beneath these lists are a set of complete records about the countries listed in the lineage.
5. Consider these questions as you complete your assessment:
   1. Are all the countries in the lineage correct?
   2. Are the names, dates, and successor and predecessor relationships in the lineage correct?
   3. Are there any significant changes to the countries that are not captured?
   4. For each country in the lineage, assign a “relationship” descriptor based on the list above.
6. Give your completed assessments to Joe, Aaron, or Amanda. Once your changes are entered, we will regenerate the report and provide it to you to look over to make sure you like the final form.

When is this due?

We would be grateful if you could complete your assignment by Thursday, December 1.

Thank you!

We respect that you are busy with your other assignments and so we are grateful to you for taking the time to help move this long-standing project over the finish line. The database will improve all portions of the website and will be a useful tool, we hope, for scholars worldwide.

If you have additional questions, please speak to Aaron, Joe, or Amanda.

Addendum: Editorial introduction

*To help you and in preparation for a public release of this database, we have included the draft introduction to the resource. It includes the principles of inclusion and editorial practices.*

This database aims to capture major changes in the names and statuses of countries during the span existence of the United States, that is, the period 1776-present. The purpose is to enable the automated reference and lookup of countries past and present using historically accurate, temporally specific names. This database allows users to associate countries on today's map with earlier incarnations (e.g., Vietnam and Indochina) and track changes in names and status, among other kinds of changes.  
  
Even though we call this the "historical country names database," the project actually uses a somewhat broader term than “country” to refer to the basic unit: "territories." This concept encompasses independent states, dependencies, and areas of special sovereignty. We borrow these distinctions from the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), which publishes tables of "Independent States in the World" and "Dependencies and Areas of Special Sovereignty." (See these respective lists at <http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm> and <http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/10543.htm>.)   
  
This database tracks INR's current lists, which capture today's map, and introduces a historical component, inspired by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Office’s “Geopolitical Ontology.” (See [www.fao.org/countryprofiles/geoinfo/en/](http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/geoinfo/en/).) Specifically, we track when each territory began and its immediate "predecessor," or previous incarnation. For each predecessor, we track its dates of validity, and its own immediate predecessors and successors. Thus, for each "territory" in this database, we track the following items:  
  
1. **Name:** We borrow INR's distinction between a territory's "short-form name" and "long-form name." For example, in the case of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan" is the short-form name, and "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" is the long-form name. For today's map, we follow INR’s lists. Not all territories have long-form names different from the short-form name (e.g., Canada), which we indicate by supplying "-" for the long-form name. A simple name change (without any accompanying change of political status, as listed in “predecessors and successors” below, is tracked in the existing entry as a “name variant with dates of relevance.” For example, when the Czech Republic officially declared Czechia to be its short-form name in 2016, we revised the short-form name for the existing entry to be Czechia, entering “Czech Republic” in as a variant short-form name for the period 1993–2016..  
  
2. **Type of territory:** As noted above, we borrow INR's distinction between "independent states" and "dependencies and areas of special sovereignty." (In contrast, the U.N. distinguishes between “self-governing,” “non-self-governing,” “disputed,” and “other.”) The primary distinction between independent states and other types is rooted in the Westphalian model of state foundation. "Independent states" have an independent, sovereign government and a stable territory, well-defined borders, and population. "Dependencies" are colonies or territorial possessions of independent states. "Areas of special sovereignty" indicate areas whose sovereignty is disputed, indeterminate, or where the U.S. does not recognize claims; these disputes are summarized in the footnotes of INR's lists, and we can capture this information in the Notes field of each dependency. Whereas INR tracks the state with sovereignty over a dependency, our database does not systematically track this at present; but if we know information about sovereignty, we can use the Notes field to indicate this. When a territory's type changes, we create a new entry to reflect the change. For example, we have two records for Korea in the period 1910-48. In the first record, Korea is a dependency (of the Japanese Empire) from 1910-45, and in the second record, Korea is an independent state (1945-48).  
  
3. **Years of validity:** The year that a territory, as named and typed above, starts and ends. If we know more precisely when a transition occurred (i.e., the month, or month and day), use the Notes field to indicate this.  
  
4. **Predecessors and successors:** The terms "predecessor and successor" are used in a general, judgement-free sense. They indicate simply that some significant political event happened, such as a change of “type,” as described in the discussion of these items above. To supplement this general information, we characterize each historical change regarding a territory using the following typology:

* Independence (Country declares independence from a colonial power; example: Ghana)
* Secession (Country secedes from another country; example: South Sudan)
* Split (Country splits into two or more countries; example: Czechoslovakia becomes Czech Republic and Slovak Republic)
* Merger (Two or more countries merge to form one country; example: Egypt and Syria join to become the United Arab Republic)

Principles of Inclusion

In deciding which territories to include in the database, we used the following principles, in order of most to least important:

* (Must) All territories on INR’s list today; we also follow it for changes in today’s map.
* (Must) All territories where U.S. has had diplomatic posts. (It will undergird the Consular Cards project and the in-progress redesign of the Chiefs of Mission database.)
* (Must) All countries with which the U.S. had diplomatic relations. (It will undergird the Recognitions and Relations project.)
* (Must) All territories covered in FRUS, the Travels of the President and Secretary, and Visits of Foreign Leaders and Heads of State. (It will undergird the taxonomy used to tag FRUS volumes, and eventually, compilations and documents; and it will undergird the reorganization of Travels & Visits.)
* (Should) All other territories on the map during the period 1776-present, regardless of U.S. diplomatic relations.