**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.