# Flag

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For the flags belonging to nations, see [National flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag).

For other uses, see [Flag (disambiguation)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_(disambiguation)).

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United_Nations_Flags_-_cropped.jpg)

[United Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations) members' [national flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lenini_mäetipp_(J._Künnap).jpg)

Setting up a flag could also possess the meaning of conquering something. [Jaan Künnap](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaan_Künnap) with the [flag of Estonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Estonia) at the top of [Lenin Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin_Peak) (7,134 m [23,406 feet]) in 1989.

A **flag** is a piece of [fabric](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile) (most often rectangular or [quadrilateral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadrilateral)) with a distinctive design and colours. It is used as a [symbol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol), a signalling device, or for decoration. The term *flag* is also used to refer to the [graphic design](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_design) employed, and flags have evolved into a general tool for rudimentary signalling and identification, especially in environments where communication is challenging (such as the [maritime environment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_flag), where [semaphore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_semaphore) is used). The study of flags is known as "[vexillology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexillology)" from the [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) *vexillum*, meaning "flag" or "[banner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banner)".

[National flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag) are [patriotic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotic) symbols with widely varied interpretations that often include strong [military](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military) associations because of their original and ongoing use for that purpose. Flags are also used in [messaging](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messaging), [advertising](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advertising), or for [decorative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decorative) purposes.

Some military units are called "flags" after their use of flags. A *flag* (Arabic: لواء) is equivalent to a [brigade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigade) in Arab countries. In Spain, a *flag* (Spanish: *bandera*) is a [battalion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battalion)-equivalent in the [Spanish Legion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Legion).

## History

Further information: [Vexilloid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexilloid), [Heraldic flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldic_flag), and [Royal Standard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Standard)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bronze_flag,_Shadad_Kerman,_Iran.JPG)

Bronze flag found in [Shahdad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahdad), [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran), 3rd millennium BC

The origin of the flag is unknown.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-1) In antiquity, [field signs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_sign) or standards were used in warfare that can be categorised as [vexilloid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexilloid) or 'flag-like'. This originated in [ancient Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt) or [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-Britannica-2) Examples include the [Sassanid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sassanid) battle standard [Derafsh Kaviani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derafsh_Kaviani), and the standards of the [Roman legions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_legion) such as the [eagle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila_(Roman)) of [Augustus Caesar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Caesar)'s [Xth legion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legio_X_Fretensis), or the [dragon standard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draconarius) of the [Sarmatians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarmatians); the latter was let fly freely in the wind, carried by a horseman, but judging from depictions it was more similar to an elongated [dragon kite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon_kite) than to a simple flag.

Flags as recognized today, made of a piece of cloth representing a particular entity, were invented in the [Indian subcontinent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent) or [Chinese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_China) [Zhou dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhou_dynasty) (1046-256 BCE). Chinese flags depicted colorful animals and royal flags were to be treated with a similar level of respect attributed to the ruler. Indian flags were often triangular and decorated with attachments such as [yak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yak)'s tail and the state umbrella. These usages spread to [Southeast Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) as well, and were transmitted to Europe through the [Muslim world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_world) where plainly colored flags were being used due to [Islamic proscriptions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aniconism_in_Islam).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-Britannica-2)

In [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), during the [High Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Middle_Ages), flags came to be used primarily as a [heraldic device](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldic_flag) in battle, allowing more easily to identify a knight than only from the heraldic device painted on the shield. Already during the high medieval period, and increasingly during the [Late Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Middle_Ages), [city states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_state) and [communes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_commune) such as those of the [Old Swiss Confederacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Swiss_Confederacy) also began to use flags as field signs. Regimental flags for individual units became commonplace during the [Early Modern period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Modern_period).

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sujagi_(1871).jpg)

[*Sujagi*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sujagi) of [Eo Jae-yeon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eo_Jae-yeon), captured in 1871

During the peak of the [age of sail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_sail), beginning in the early 17th century, it was customary (and later a legal requirement) for ships to carry flags designating their nationality;[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-3) these flags eventually evolved into the national flags and [maritime flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_flags) of today. Flags also became the preferred means of [communications](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication) at sea, resulting in various systems of flag signals; *see,* [*International maritime signal flags*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_maritime_signal_flags).

Use of flags outside of military or naval context begins only with the rise of [nationalist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism) sentiment by the end of the 18th century, although some flags date back earlier. The flags of countries such as Austria, Denmark or Turkey emerged from the midst of legend while many others, including those of Poland and Switzerland, grew out of the heraldic emblems of the Middle Ages. The 17th century saw the birth of several [national flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag) through revolutionary struggle. One of these was the flag of the Netherlands, which appeared during the 80-year Dutch rebellion which began in 1568 against Spanish domination.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-4)

Political change and social reform, allied to a growing sense of nationhood among ordinary people, led to the birth of new nations and flags all over the world in the 19th and 20th centuries.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-5)

## National flags

Main article: [National flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flags_at_half-staff_outside_Central_Plaza.jpg)

Flags at [half-mast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Half-mast) outside [Central Plaza, Hong Kong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Plaza,_Hong_Kong), after the [2008 Sichuan earthquake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Sichuan_earthquake). The [Flag of Saudi Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Saudi_Arabia) is exempted.

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Meeting_Place_Monument.JPG)

Tribal flags at Meeting Place Monument/Flag Plaza at the Oklahoma State Capitol

One of the most popular uses of a flag is to symbolise a [nation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation) or [country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country). Some [national flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag) have been particularly inspirational to other nations, countries, or subnational entities in the design of their own flags. Some prominent examples include:

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dannebrog_isamsø.jpg)

The Danish national flag (Dannebrog) waving in [Samsø](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samsø)

* The [flag of Denmark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Denmark), the *Dannebrog*, is attested in 1478, and is the oldest national flag still in use. It inspired the [cross design](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nordic_Cross_Flag) of the other [Nordic countries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nordic_countries): [Norway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Norway), [Sweden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Sweden), [Finland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Finland), [Iceland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Iceland), and regional Scandinavian flags for the [Faroe Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Faroe_Islands), [Åland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Åland), [Scania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Skåneland) and [Bornholm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Bornholm), as well as flags for the non-Scandinavian [Shetland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Shetland) and [Orkney](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Orkney).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-6)
* The [flag of the Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Netherlands) is the oldest [tricolour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tricolour_(flag)). Its three colours of red, white and blue go back to [Charlemagne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne)'s time, the 9th century. The coastal region of what today is the Netherlands was then known for its cloth in these colours. Maps from the early 16th century already put flags in these colours next to this region, like Texeira's map of 1520. A century before that, during the 15th century, the three colours were mentioned as the coastal signals for this area, with the three bands straight or diagonal, single or doubled. As [state flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_flag) it first appeared around 1572 as the [Prince's Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince's_Flag) in orange–white–blue. Soon the more famous red–white–blue began appearing, becoming the prevalent version from around 1630. Orange made a comeback during the civil war of the late 18th century, signifying the orangist or pro-[stadtholder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadtholder) party. During World War II the pro-Nazi [NSB](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Socialist_Movement_in_the_Netherlands) used it. Any symbolism has been added later to the three colours, although the orange comes from the [House of Orange-Nassau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Orange-Nassau). This use of orange comes from Nassau, which today uses orange-blue, not from Orange, which today uses red-blue. However, the usual way to show the link with the House of Orange-Nassau is the orange pennant above the red-white-blue. It is said that the Dutch Tricolour has inspired[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-7)[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)] many flags but most notably those of [Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia), [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_of_New_York_City), and [South Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa) (the 1928–94 flag as well the current flag). As the probable inspiration for the Russian flag, it is the source too for the [Pan-Slavic colours](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Slavic_colours) red, white and blue, adopted by many [Slavic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_peoples) states and peoples as their symbols; examples are [Slovakia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Slovakia), [Serbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Serbia), and [Slovenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Slovenia).
* The national [flag of France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_France) was designed in 1794. As a forerunner of revolution, France's tricolour flag style has been adopted by other nations. Examples: [Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Italy), [Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Belgium), [Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ireland), [Romania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Romania) and [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mexico).[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]
* The [Union Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Flag) (Union Jack) of the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) is the most commonly used. British colonies typically flew a flag based on one of the ensigns based on this flag, and many former colonies have retained the design to acknowledge their cultural history. Examples: [Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Australia), [Fiji](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Fiji), [New Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_New_Zealand), [Tuvalu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Tuvalu), and also the Canadian provinces of [Manitoba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Manitoba), [Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ontario) and [British Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_British_Columbia), and the American state of [Hawaii](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Hawaii); *see* [*commons:Flags based on British ensigns*](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Flags_based_on_British_ensigns).
* The [flag of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_States) is nicknamed *The Stars and Stripes* or *Old Glory*.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-8) Some nations imitated this flag so as to symbolise their similarity to the United States and/or the [American Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolution). Examples: [Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Liberia),[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-9) [Chile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Chile), [Taiwan (ROC)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Republic_of_China), and the [French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) region of [Brittany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Brittany).

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Ethiopia_(1975–1987).svg)

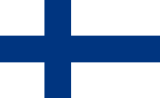
The [Flag of Ethiopia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ethiopia)'s colours inspired the colours of many African national flags.

* [Ethiopia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia) was seen as a model by emerging [African](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) states of the 1950s and 1960s, as it was one of the oldest independent states in Africa. Accordingly, its [flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ethiopia) became the source of the [Pan-African colours](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-African_colours), or 'Rasta colours'. Examples: [Benin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Benin), [Togo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Togo), [Senegal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Senegal), [Ghana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ghana), [Mali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mali), [Guinea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Guinea).
* The [flag of Turkey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Turkey), which is very similar to the last flag of the old [Ottoman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire), has been an inspiration for the flag designs of many other Muslim nations. During the time of the Ottomans the [crescent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescent) began to be associated with [Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) and this is reflected on the flags of [Algeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Algeria), [Azerbaijan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Azerbaijan), [Comoros](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Comoros), [Libya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Libya), [Mauritania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mauritania), [Pakistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Pakistan), [Tunisia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Tunisia) and [Maldives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Maldives)
* The [Pan-Arab colours](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Arab_colours), green, white, red and black, are derived from the flag of the [Great Arab Revolt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Revolt) as seen on the flags of [Jordan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Jordan), [Libya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Libya), [Kuwait](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Kuwait), [Sudan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Sudan), [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Syria), the [United Arab Emirates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_United_Arab_Emirates), [Western Sahara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Sahrawi_Arab_Democratic_Republic), [Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Egypt), [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Iraq), [Yemen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Yemen) and [Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_flag).
* The [Soviet flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Soviet_Union), with its golden symbols of the [hammer and sickle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammer_and_sickle) on a red field, was an inspiration to flags of other [communist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communism) states, such as [East Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_East_Germany), [People's Republic of China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_People's_Republic_of_China), [Vietnam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Vietnam), [Angola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Angola), [Afghanistan (1978–1980)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Afghanistan) and [Mozambique](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mozambique).
* The [flag of Venezuela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Venezuela), created by [Francisco de Miranda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_de_Miranda) to represent the independence movement in Venezuela that later gave birth to the ["Gran Colombia"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Gran_Colombia), inspired the flags of [Colombia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Colombia), [Ecuador](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ecuador), and [the Federal Territories in Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Federal_Territory_(Malaysia)), all sharing three bands of yellow, blue and red with the flag of Venezuela.
* The [flag of Argentina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Argentina), created by [Manuel Belgrano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel_Belgrano) during the war of independence, was the inspiration for the [United Provinces of Central America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Provinces_of_Central_America)'s flag, which in turn was the origin for the flags of [Guatemala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Guatemala), [Honduras](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Honduras), [El Salvador](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_El_Salvador), and [Nicaragua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Nicaragua).

National flag designs are often used to signify nationality in other forms, such as [flag patches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_patch).

### Civil flags

Main article: [Civil flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_flag)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Finland.svg)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Finland_(state).svg)

The civil and state flags of [Finland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland) share the same blue cross with the white bottom, but only the state flag (right) is [defaced](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defacement_(flag)) with the national ensign.

A *civil* flag is a version of the national flag that is flown by civilians on non-government installations or craft. The use of civil flags was more common in the past, in order to denote buildings or ships that were not crewed by the military. In some countries the civil flag is the same as the [war flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_flag) or [state flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_flag), but without the coat of arms, such as in the case of [Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Spain), and in others it's an alteration of the war flag.

### War flags

Main articles: [War flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_flag) and [Colours, standards and guidons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colours,_standards_and_guidons)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Air_Force_Ensign_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg)

Standard for the [UK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK)'s [Royal Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force), the [Ensign of the RAF](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force_Ensign) displays the RAF [roundel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roundel) that is also displayed on the fuselage and wings of British warplanes.

Several countries, including the [British Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Army) and the [Royal Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) ([White Ensign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Ensign)) of the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) ([Great Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain)) and the [Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) have had [unique flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Jack) flown by their [armed forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armed_forces) separately, rather than the [national flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_flag).

Other countries' armed forces (such as those of the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) or [Switzerland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland)) use their standard [national flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_States), in addition, the U.S. has alongside flags and seals designed from long tradition for each of its six uniformed military services/military sub-departments in the [U.S. Department of Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Defense) and the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Homeland_Security). The [Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines)' armed forces may use their [standard national flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Philippines), but during times of war the flag is turned upside down. [Bulgaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Bulgaria)'s flag is also turned upside down during times of war. These are also considered war flags, though the terminology only applies to the flag's military usage.

Large versions of the war flag flown on the [warships](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warship) of countries' [navies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navy) are known as [battle ensigns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_ensign). In addition besides flying the national standard or a military services' emblem flag at a military fort, base, station or post and at sea at the stern (rear) or main top mast of a warship, a [Naval Jack flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_(flag)) and other [Maritime flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_flag), [pennants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennant_(commissioning)) and emblems are flown at the bow (front). In times of war waving a white flag is a banner of truce, talks/negotiations or surrender.

Four distinctive [African](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) flags currently in the collection of the [National Maritime Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Maritime_Museum) in [Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) were flown in action by [Itsekiri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itsekiri) ships under the control of [Nana Olomu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nana_Olomu) during the conflict in the late 19th century. One is the flag generally known as the [Benin Empire flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Benin_Empire) and one is referred to as Nana Olomu's flag.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-10)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_United_Nations.svg)

The [Flag of the United Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_Nations), sky blue field with north polar view looking down on a world map in white with two olive branches wreaths curved around. First version presented April–June 1945 to the [United Nations Organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations) (UNO) at the [San Francisco Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=United_Nations_Conference_on_World_Organization&action=edit&redlink=1), second version adopted by the U.N., December 1946

### International flags

Among international flags are the [Flag of the United Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_Nations), the [Olympic flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_symbols" \l "Flag), and the [Paralympic flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paralympic_symbols" \l "Flag).

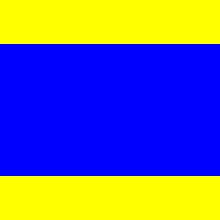
## Maritime flags

Main article: [Maritime flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_flag)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Arndt_Flag_Tallinn_31_July_2014.JPG)

[Ensigns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ensign) are flown on boats to indicate the country of registration of the boat.

Flags are particularly important at sea, where they can mean the difference between life and death, and consequently where the rules and regulations for the flying of flags are strictly enforced. A national flag flown at sea is known as an [ensign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ensign). A courteous, peaceable [merchant ship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merchant_navy) or [yacht](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yacht) customarily flies its ensign (in the usual ensign position), together with the flag of whatever nation it is currently visiting at the mast (known as a [courtesy flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courtesy_flag)). To fly one's ensign alone in foreign waters, a foreign port or in the face of a foreign warship traditionally indicates a willingness to fight, with [cannon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannon), for the right to do so. As of 2009, this custom is still taken seriously by many naval and port authorities and is readily enforced in many parts of the world by boarding, confiscation and other civil penalties. In some countries [yacht ensigns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yacht_ensign) are different from merchant ensigns in order to signal that the yacht is not carrying [cargo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo) that requires a [customs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customs) declaration. Carrying commercial cargo on a boat with a yacht ensign is deemed to be [smuggling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smuggling) in many jurisdictions. Traditionally, a vessel flying under the courtesy flag of a specific nation, regardless of the vessel's country of registry, is considered to be operating under the law of her 'host' nation.

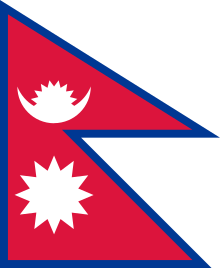
[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ICS_Delta.svg)

The international maritime signal flag *Delta* (letter *D*)

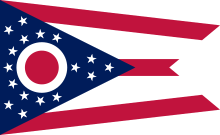
There is a system of [international maritime signal flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_maritime_signal_flags) for numerals and letters of the alphabet. Each flag or pennant has a specific meaning when flown individually. As well, [semaphore flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_semaphore) can be used to communicate on an *ad hoc* basis from ship to ship over short distances.

Another category of maritime flag flown by some [United States Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Government) ships is the [distinguishing mark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distinguishing_mark). Although the [United States Coast Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard) has its own service ensign, all other U.S. Government ships fly the national ensign their service ensign, following [United States Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy) practice. To distinguish themselves from ships of the Navy, such ships historically have flown their parent organisation's flag from a forward mast as a distinguishing mark. Today, for example, commissioned ships of the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Oceanic_and_Atmospheric_Administration) (NOAA) fly the [NOAA flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Oceanic_and_Atmospheric_Administration" \l "Flag) as a distinguishing mark.

## Shapes and designs

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Nepal.svg)

The [flag of Nepal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Nepal), a non-rectangular flag that is a [double-pennon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennon)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Ohio.svg)

The Ohio flag, a [pennon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennon)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Mauritania.svg)

The [flag of Mauritania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mauritania), a red, yellow moon and star and green border.

Flags are usually rectangular in shape (often in the ratio 2:3, 1:2, or 3:5), but may be of any shape or size that is practical for flying, including square, triangular, or swallow tailed. A more unusual flag shape is that of the [flag of Nepal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Nepal), which is in the shape of two stacked triangles. Other unusually shaped flags include the civil flags of [Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Ohio) (a [swallowtail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swallowtail_(flag))); [Tampa, Florida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Tampa,_Florida); and [Pike County, Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pike_County,_Ohio).[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-11)

Many flags are dyed [through and through](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through_and_through) to be inexpensive to manufacture, such that the reverse side is the [mirror image](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_image) of the [obverse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obverse) (front) side, generally the side displayed when, from the observer's point of view, the flag flies from pole-side left to right. This presents two possibilities:

1. If the design is [symmetrical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symmetric) in an axis parallel to the flag pole, obverse and reverse will be identical despite the mirror-reversal, such as the [Indian Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_India) or [Canadian Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Canada)
2. If not, the obverse and reverse will present two variants of the same design, one with the [hoist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_terminology" \l "Description_of_standard_flag_parts_and_terms) on the left (usually considered the obverse side), the other with the hoist on the right (usually considered the reverse side of the flag). This is very common and usually not disturbing if there is no text in the design.

Some complex flag designs are not intended to be shown on both sides, requiring separate obverse and reverse sides if made correctly. In these cases there is a design element (usually text) which is not symmetric and should be read in the same direction, regardless of whether the hoist is to the viewer's left or right. These cases can be divided into two types:

1. The same (asymmetric) design may be duplicated on both sides. Such flags can be manufactured by creating two identical through and through flags and then sewing them back to back, though this can affect the resulting combination's responsiveness to the wind. Depictions of such flags may be marked with the symbol [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:IFIS_Equal.svg), indicating the reverse is congruent to (rather than a mirror image of) the obverse.
2. Rarely, the reverse design may differ, in whole or in part, from that of the obverse. Examples of [flags whose reverse differs from the obverse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_whose_reverse_differs_from_the_obverse) include the [flag of Paraguay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Paraguay), the [flag of Oregon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Oregon), and the historical [flag of the Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Soviet_Union). Depictions of such flags may be marked with the symbol [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:IFIS_Two-sided.svg).

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Kiribati.svg)

The [flag of Kiribati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Kiribati), a [banner of arms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banner_of_arms)

Common designs on flags include crosses, stripes, and divisions of the surface, or *field*, into bands or quarters—patterns and principles mainly derived from [heraldry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry). A heraldic coat of arms may also be flown as a [banner of arms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banner" \l "Heraldic_banners), as is done on both the state [flag of Maryland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Maryland) and the [flag of Kiribati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Kiribati).

The *de jure* [flag of Libya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Libya) under [Muammar Gaddafi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muammar_Gaddafi), which consisted of a rectangular field of green, was for a long period the only national flag using a single colour and no design or insignia. However, other historical states have also used flags without designs or insignia, such as the short-lived [Soviet Republic of Hungary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Soviet_Republic) and the more recent [Sultanate of Muscat and Oman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muscat_and_Oman), whose flags were both a plain field of red.

Colours are normally described with common names, such as "red", but may be further specified using [colourimetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorimetry).

The largest flag flown from a flagpole worldwide, according to Guinness World Records, is the [flag of the United Arab Emirates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_Arab_Emirates) flown in [Sharjah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharjah). This flag was 2,448.56 m2 (26,356.1 sq ft).[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-12) The largest flag ever made was the [flag of Qatar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Qatar); the flag, which measures at 101,978 m2 (1,097,680 sq ft), was completed in December 2013 in [Doha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doha).[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-13)

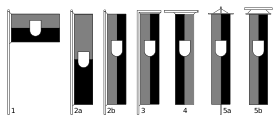
### Parts of a flag

Main article: [Glossary of vexillology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_vexillology)

The general parts of a flag are: canton (the upper inner section of the flag), field or ground (the entire flag except the canton), the hoist (the edge used to attach the flag to the hoist), and the fly (the furthest edge from the hoist end).[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-14)

### Vertical flags

Vertical flags are sometimes used in lieu of the standard horizontal flag in central and eastern Europe, particularly in the German-speaking countries. This practice came about because the relatively brisk wind needed to display horizontal flags is not common in these countries.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-DGF-15)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_Types.svg)

The standard **horizontal flag** (no. 1 in the preceding illustration) is nonetheless the form most often used even in these countries.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-16)

The **vertical flag** (German: *Hochformatflagge* or *Knatterflagge*; no. 2) is a vertical form of the standard flag. The flag's design may remain unchanged (No. 2a) or it may change, e.g. by changing horizontal stripes to vertical ones (no. 2b). If the flag carries an emblem, it may remain centred or may be shifted slightly upwards.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-DGF-15)[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-17)

The **vertical flag for hoisting from a beam** (German: *Auslegerflagge* or *Galgenflagge*; no. 3) is additionally attached to a horizontal beam, ensuring that it is fully displayed even if there is no wind.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-DGF-15)[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-18)

The **vertical flag for hoisting from a horizontal pole** (German: *Hängeflagge*; no. 4) is hoisted from a horizontal pole, normally attached to a building. The topmost stripe on the horizontal version of the flag faces away from the building.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-DGF-15)[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-19)

The **vertical flag for hoisting from a crossbar** or [banner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banner) (German: *Bannerflagge*; no. 5) is firmly attached to a horizontal crossbar from which it is hoisted, either by a vertical pole (no. 5a) or a horizontal one (no. 5b). The topmost stripe on the horizontal version of the flag normally faces to the left.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-DGF-15)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-20)

## Religious flags

See also: [Religion in national symbols](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_national_symbols)

Flags can play many different roles in religion. In [Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism), [prayer flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_flags) are used, usually in sets of five differently coloured flags. Several flags and banners including the [Black Standard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Standard) are [associated with Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_flags). Many [national flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_national_flags) and other flags include religious symbols such as the cross, the crescent, or a reference to a patron saint. Flags are also adopted by religious groups and flags such as the [Jain flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jain_flag), [Nishan Sahib](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nishan_Sahib) ([Sikhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism)), the [Saffron Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saffron_Flag&action=edit&redlink=1) ([Hindu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu)) and the [Christian flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_flag) are used to represent a whole religion.

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pro2.2.jpg)

Poland (Gorzów Wlkp.). Religious flags

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:In-jain.png)

[Jain – Five-Coloured Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jain_flag)

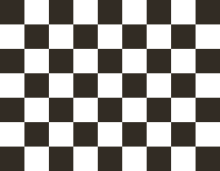
* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Christian_flag.svg)

[Christian Flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Flag)

## In sports

Because of their ease of signalling and identification, flags are often used in [sports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport).

* In [association football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_football), [linesmen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assistant_referee_(association_football)) carry small flags along the touch lines. They use the flags to indicate to the [referee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Referee_(Football)) potential infringements of the laws, or who is entitled to possession of the ball that has gone out of the field of play, or, most famously, raising the flag to indicate an [offside](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offside_(association_football)) offence. Officials called *touch judges* use flags for similar purposes in both codes of [rugby](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_football).
* In [American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_football) and [Canadian football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_football), [referees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Referee) use [penalty flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penalty_flag) to indicate that a foul has been committed in game play. The phrase used for such an indication is *flag on the play*. The flag itself is a small, weighted handkerchief, tossed on the field at the approximate point of the infraction; the intent is usually to sort out the details after the current play from scrimmage has concluded. In American football, the flag is usually yellow; in Canadian football, it is usually orange. In the [National Football League](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Football_League), coaches also use red challenge flags to indicate that they wish to contest a ruling on the field.
* In [yacht racing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yacht_racing), flags are used to communicate information from the race committee boat to the racers. Different flags hoisted from the committee boat may communicate a false start, changes in the course, a cancelled race, or other important information. Racing boats themselves may also use flags to symbolise a protest or distress. The flags are often part of the nautical alphabetic system of [International maritime signal flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_maritime_signal_flags), in which 26 different flags designate the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet.

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:F1_chequered_flag.svg)

Flags flown at a [car race](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto_racing)

* In [auto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto_racing) and [motorcycle racing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motorcycle_sport), [racing flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racing_flags) are used to communicate with drivers. Most famously, a checkered flag of black and white squares indicates the end of the race, and victory for the leader. A yellow flag is used to indicate caution requiring slow speed and a red flag requires racers to stop immediately. A black flag is used to indicate penalties.

Main article: [Racing flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racing_flags)

* In addition, fans of almost all sports wave flags in the stands to indicate their support for the participants. Many sports teams have their own flags, and, in individual sports, fans will indicate their support for a player by waving the flag of his or her home country.
* [Capture the flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_the_flag) is a popular children's sport.
* In [Gaelic football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaelic_football) and [Hurling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurling) a green flag is used to indicate a goal while a white flag is used to indicate a point
* In [Australian rules football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_rules_football), the [goal umpire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umpire_(Australian_rules_football)) will wave two flags to indicate a goal (worth six points) and a single flag to indicate a behind (worth one point).
* For safety, [dive flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_underwater_diving_terminology) indicate the locations of underwater [scuba divers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SCUBA_diving) or that diving operations are being conducted in the vicinity.
* In water sports such as wakeboarding and Water-Skiing, an orange flag is held in between runs to indicate someone is in the water.
* In [golf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf), the hole is almost always marked with a flag. The flagpole is designed to fit centered within the base of the hole and is removable. Many courses will use colour-coded flags to determine a hole location at the front, middle or rear of the green. However colour-coded flags are not used in the professional tours. (A rare example of a golf course that does not use flags to mark the hole is the East Course of [Merion Golf Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merion_Golf_Club), which instead uses flagpoles topped by [wicker baskets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merion_Golf_Club" \l "Wicker_baskets).)
* Flag poles with flags of all shapes and sizes are used by marching bands, drum corps, and winter guard teams use flags as a method of visual enhancement in performances.

## Diplomatic flags

Main article: [Diplomatic flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomatic_flag)

Some countries use diplomatic flags, such as the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) (see [Image of the Embassy flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:British_Ambassador_Ensign.svg)) and the Kingdom of [Thailand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand) (see [Image of the Embassy flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Embassador_Flag_of_Thailand.svg)).

The [socialist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) movement uses [red flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_flag_(politics)) to represent their cause. The [anarchist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism) movement has a variety of different flags, but the primary flag associated with them is the [black flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchist_symbolism" \l "Black_flag). In the [Spanish civil war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_civil_war), the anarchists used the red-and-black bisected flag. In the 20th century, the [rainbow flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_flag_(gay_movement)) was adopted as a symbol of the [LGBT social movements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_social_movements). Its derivatives include the [Bisexual pride](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bisexual_pride_flag) and [Transgender pride flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender_pride_flag).

Some of these political flags have become national flags, such as the red flag of the [Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) and national socialist banners for [Nazi Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany). The present [Flag of Portugal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Portugal) is based on what had been the political flag of the [Portuguese Republican Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_Republican_Party) previous to the [5 October 1910 revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_October_1910_revolution) which brought this party to power.

## Personal flags

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Personal_flag_of_Queen_Elizabeth_II.svg)

Personal flag of Queen [Elizabeth II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II)

Throughout history, [monarchs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy) have often had personal flags, representing the royal person, including in [personal union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_union) of national monarchies.

## Vehicle flags

Flags are often representative of an individual's affinity or allegiance to a country, team or business and can be presented in various ways. A popular trend that has surfaced revolves around the idea of the 'mobile' flag in which an individual displays their particular flag of choice on their vehicle. These items are commonly referred to as car flags and are usually manufactured from high strength polyester material and are attached to a vehicle via a polypropylene pole and clip window attachment.

## Swimming flags

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flags_-_swim_between_the.png)

Open swimming area

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flags_crossed_-_do_not_swim.png)

Closed swimming area

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Red_flag_at_beach.jpg)

Red flag at a beach in Ireland, indicating that the water is not safe for swimming

In [Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia), [Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada), [New Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand), the [Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines), [Republic of Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland) and the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), a pair of red-yellow flags is used to mark the limits of the bathing area on a beach, usually guarded by [surf lifesavers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surf_lifesaving). If the beach is closed, the poles of the flags are crossed. The flags are coloured with a red triangle and a yellow triangle making a rectangular flag, or a red rectangle over a yellow rectangle. On many Australian beaches there is a slight variation with beach condition signalling. A red flag signifies a closed beach (in the UK also other dangers), yellow signifies strong current or difficult swimming conditions, and green represents a beach safe for general swimming. In [Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland), a red and yellow flag indicates that it is safe to swim; a red flag that it is unsafe; and no flag indicates that there are no lifeguards on duty. Blue flags may also be used away from the yellow-red lifesaver area to designate a zone for surfboarding and other small, non-motorised watercraft.

Reasons for closing the beach include:

* [dangerous rip](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dangerous_rip)
* [hurricane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane) warning
* no [lifeguards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifeguard) in attendance
* [overpolluted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollution) water
* [sharks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shark)
* [tsunami](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsunami)
* [waves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave) too strong

A surf flag exists, divided into four quadrants. The top left and bottom right quadrants are black, and the remaining area is white.

[Signal flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_maritime_signal_flags) "India" (a black circle on a yellow square) is frequently used to denote a "blackball" zone where surfboards cannot be used but other water activities are permitted.

## Railway flags

Railways use a number of coloured flags. When used as wayside signals they usually use the following meanings (exact meanings are set by the individual railroad company):

* red = stop
* yellow = proceed with care
* green or white = proceed.
* a flag of any colour waved vigorously means stop
* a blue flag on the side of a locomotive means that it should not be moved because someone is working on it (or on the train attached to it). A blue flag on a track means that nothing on that track should be moved. The flag can only be removed by the person or group that placed it. In the railway dominated steel industry this principle of "blue flag and tag" was extended to all operations at Bethlehem Steel, [Lackawanna, New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lackawanna,_New_York). If a man went inside a large machine or worked on an electrical circuit for example, his blue flag and tag was sacrosanct.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-21) The "[Lock Out/Tag Out](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockout-tagout)" practice is similar and now used in other industries to comply with safety regulations.

At night, the flags are replaced with lanterns showing the same colours.

Flags displayed on the front of a moving locomotive are an acceptable replacement for classification lights and usually have the following meanings (exact meanings are set by the individual railroad company):

* white = extra (not on the timetable)
* green = another section following
* red = last section

Additionally, a railroad brakeman will typically carry a red flag to make his or her hand signals more visible to the engineer. [Railway signals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railway_signal) are a development of railway flags.[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-22)

## Flagpoles

"Flagpole" redirects here. For the magazine, see [Flagpole Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagpole_Magazine).

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SienaFlagpole1.jpg)

One of the two 60-foot-tall flagpoles in the [Siena Cathedral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siena_Cathedral). During the [battle of Montaperti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Montaperti) (1260), Bocca degli Abati, a Sienese spy, brought Florence's flag down, causing panic among the Florentine soldiers and ultimately their defeat.

A flagpole, flagmast, flagstaff, or staff can be a simple support made of wood or metal. If it is taller than can be easily reached to raise the flag, a cord is used, looping around a pulley at the top of the pole with the ends tied at the bottom. The flag is fixed to one lower end of the cord, and is then raised by pulling on the other end. The cord is then tightened and tied to the pole at the bottom. The pole is usually topped by a flat plate or ball called a "[truck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truck_(rigging))" (originally meant to keep a wooden pole from splitting) or a [finial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finial) in a more complex shape. Very high flagpoles may require more complex support structures than a simple pole, such as a [guyed mast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guyed_mast).

[Dwajasthambam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwajasthambam) are flagpoles commonly found at the entrances of [South Indian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_India) [Hindu temples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_temple).[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-23)

### Record heights

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flagpole,_Kew_Gardens_-_geograph.org.uk_-_227188.jpg)

The former flagpole in Kew Gardens, taken shortly before its removal in 2007

Since 23 September 2014, the [tallest free-standing flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_flagpoles_by_height) in the world is the [Jeddah Flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeddah_Flagpole) in [Saudi Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia) at a height of 171 m (561 ft), exceeding the former record holders- the [Dushanbe Flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dushanbe_Flagpole) in [Tajikistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tajikistan)[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-Jeddah_Flagpole-24)[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-25) (height: 165 m, 541 ft) and the [National Flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Flag_Square) in [Azerbaijan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan) (height: 162 m, 531 ft)[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-26). The flagpole in North Korea is the 4th tallest flagpole in the world, however, it is not free-standing. It is a radio tower supported flagpole. Besides the first two flagpoles mentioned beforehand as the tallest, the previous six world-record holders were all built by the American company Trident Support: the [Ashgabat flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashgabat_Flagpole) in Turkmenistan at 133 m (436 ft); the [Aqaba Flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aqaba_Flagpole) in Jordan at 130 m (430 ft); the [Raghadan Flagpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raghadan_Flagpole) in Jordan at 126.8 m (416 ft); and the Abu Dhabi Flagpole in the United Arab Emirates at 122 m (400 ft).[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-27)

The current tallest flagpole in India (and the tallest flying the tricolour) is the 110-metre (360 ft) flagpole in [Belgaum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgaum), Karnataka which was first hoisted on 12 March 2018.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-28)[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-29) The tallest flagpole in the United Kingdom from 1959 until 2013 stood in [Kew Gardens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kew_Gardens). It was made from a Canadian Douglas-fir tree and was 68.5 m (225 ft) in height.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-30)

The current tallest flagpole in the United States (and the tallest flying an American flag) is the 400-foot (120 m) pole completed before [Memorial Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_Day) 2014 and custom-made with an 11-foot (3.4 m) base in concrete by [wind turbine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind_turbine) manufacturer Broadwind Energy. It is situated on the north side of the [Acuity Insurance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acuity_Insurance) headquarters campus along [Interstate 43](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstate_43) in [Sheboygan, Wisconsin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheboygan,_Wisconsin), and is visible from [Cedar Grove](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedar_Grove,_Wisconsin). The pole can fly a 220-pound flag for in light wind conditions and a heavier 350-pound flag in higher wind conditions.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-31)

### Design

Flagpoles can be designed in one piece with a taper (typically a steel taper or a [Greek entasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entasis) taper),[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-32) or be made from multiple pieces to make them able to expand. In the United States, [ANSI/NAAMM](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ANSI) guide specification FP-1001-97 covers the engineering design of metal flagpoles to ensure safety.

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bickleigh_,_Bickleigh_Maize_Maze_-_Flagpole_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1223767.jpg)

Flagpole of modest size, with simple [truck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truck_(rigging))

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:New_Zealand_flag_at_Auckland_Airport.jpg)

Large flagpole, showing structured [truck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truck_(rigging)) ([New Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand))

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Two_official_flags_of_New_Caledonia_on_same_flagpole.png)

[New Caledonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Caledonia) has two official flags, flown here in Nouméa, the capital city, on a single flagpole with a crossbar.

* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Thanjavur_periya_kovil-tamil_nadu.JPG)

[Dwajasthambam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwajasthambam) (flagpole) at [Brihadeeswarar Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadeeswarar_Temple), [Thanjavur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur), [Tamil Nadu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu), [India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India).

## Hoisting the flag

Hoisting the flag is the act of raising the flag on the flagpole. Raising or lowering flags, especially national flags, usually involves ceremonies and certain sets of rules, depending on the country, and usually involve the performance of a [national anthem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_anthem).

A flag-raising squad is a group of people, usually troops, cadets, or students, that march in and bring the flags for the flag-hoisting ceremony. Flag-hoisting ceremonies involving flag-raising squads can be simple or elaborate, involving large numbers of squads. Elaborate flag-hoisting ceremonies are usually performed on national holidays.

The cord or rope that ties a flag to its pole is called a halyard. Flags may have a strip of fabric along the hoist side called a *heading* for the halyard to pass through, or a pair of [grommets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grommet) for the halyard to be threaded through. Flags may also be held in position using [Inglefield clips](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inglefield_clip).[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-33)

## Flags in communication

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Semaphore_Signals_A-Z.jpg)

Semaphore signals for the letters of the English alphabet

[Semaphore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_semaphore) is a form of communication that utilises flags. The signalling is performed by an individual using two flags (or lighted wands), the positions of the flags indicating a symbol. The person who holds the flags is known as the signalman. This form of communication is primarily used by [naval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navy) signallers. This technique of signalling was adopted in the early 19th century and is still used in various forms today.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-34)

The colours of the flags can also be used to communicate. For example; a white flag means, among other things, surrender or peace, a red flag can be used as a warning signal, and a black flag can mean war, or determination to defeat enemies.

Orientation of a flag is also used for communication, though the practice is rarely used given modern communication systems. Raising a flag upside-down was indicative that the raising force controlled that particular area, but that it was in severe distress.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag" \l "cite_note-35)

## See also

Lists and galleries of flags

* [Gallery of sovereign state flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallery_of_sovereign_state_flags)
* [List of flag names](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_flag_names)
* [Lists of flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_flags)
* [Timeline of national flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_national_flags)
* [Unofficial flags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unofficial_flags)

Notable flag-related topics

* [False flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_flag)
* [Flag Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_Day)
* [Flag desecration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_desecration)
* [Flag protocol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_protocol)
* [Flag patch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_patch)
* [Flag semaphore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_semaphore)
* [Flag throwing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_throwing)
* [Glossary of vexillology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_vexillology)
* [Pledge of Allegiance (United States)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pledge_of_Allegiance_(United_States))
* [Standard-bearer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard-bearer) (also enumerates various types of standards, both flag types and immobile ensigns)
* [Vexillology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexillology)
* [Flags of the World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_of_the_World_(website)), an Internet-based vexillological association and resource
* [Windsock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windsock)