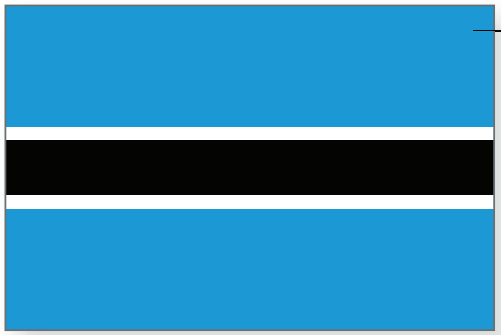
Botswana

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.

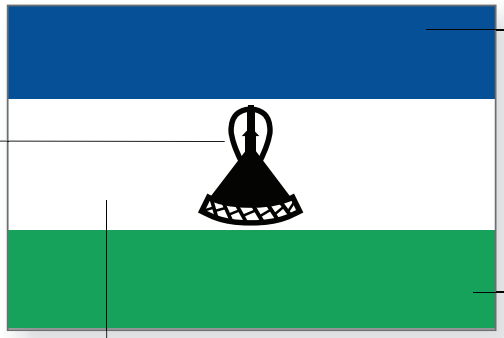
The two horizontal blue stripes represent rain and water. The importance of water is also a feature on the flag of Lesotho. The black stripe fimbriated with white in the center of the flag represents the idea of the African and European populations of Botswana living together in harmony.

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.

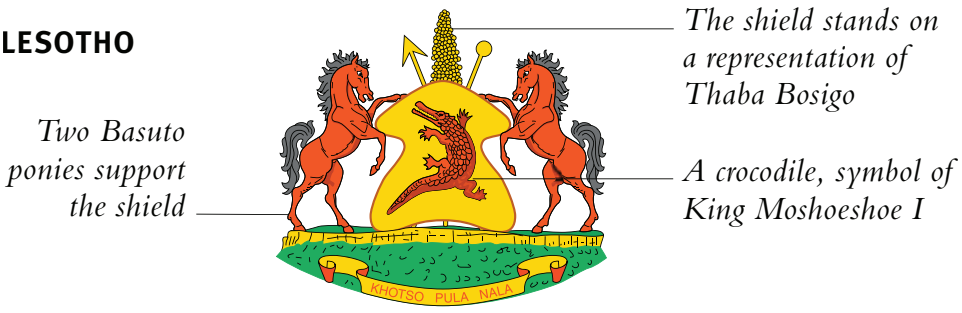
The national flag was changed to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of independence. The change from a shield to a black mokorotlo, a Basotho hat, reflects a peaceful future for the country.

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.

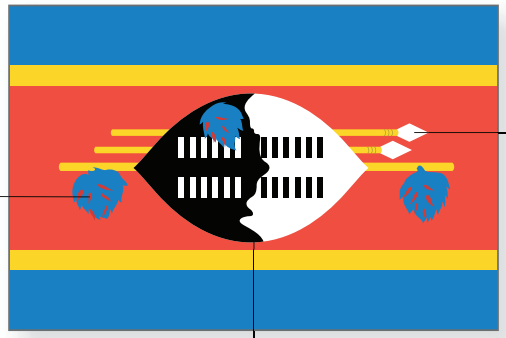
The shield, of African design, contains a crocodile, which is a symbol of King Moshoeshoe I, who founded the state in 1824. It stands on a representation of Mount Thaba Bosiu, the Mountain of Night, and is supported by two Basuto ponies. Behind the shield is a spear and a knobkerrie, a local club.

ARMS OF LESOTHO

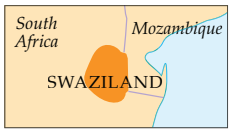


Swaziland

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



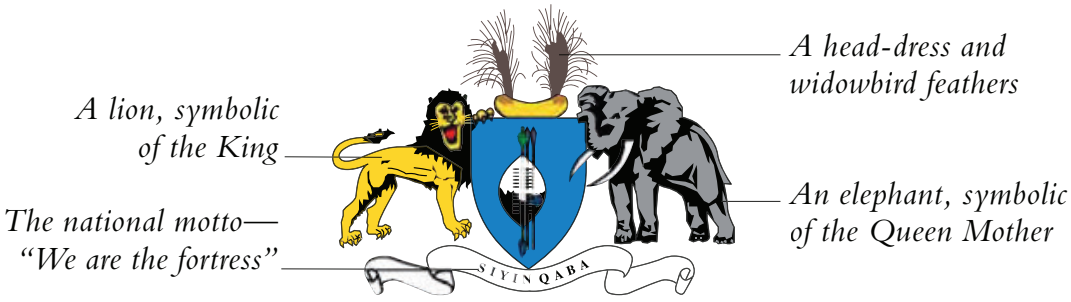
Africa



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



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.

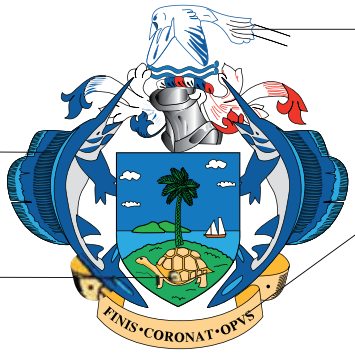
Following the adoption of the Constitution of 1993, the existence of other parties was permitted and the latest flag allows for the colors of the Democratic Party to be included in a striking new design.

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

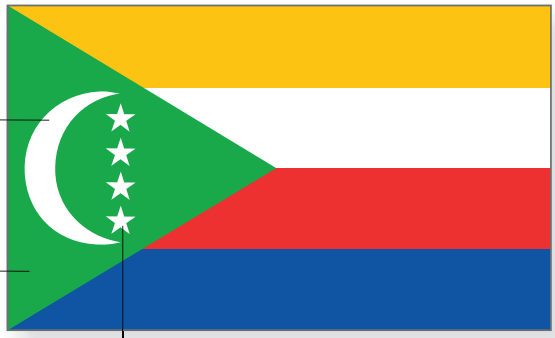


The crest is a paille-en-queue, *a native bird of the Seychelles*

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



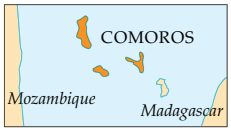
The crescent of Islam

Green is the traditional color of Islam

Four stars represent the four islands of the Comoros

Each stripe represents one of the four islands

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

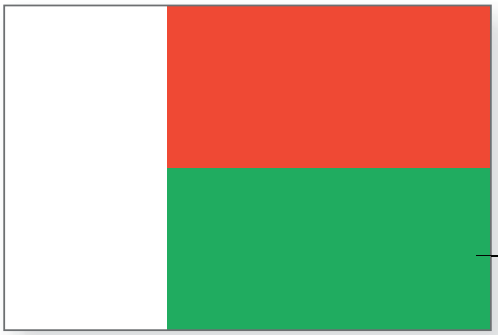
A monogram of Allah

A monogram of the Prophet Muhammad

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"

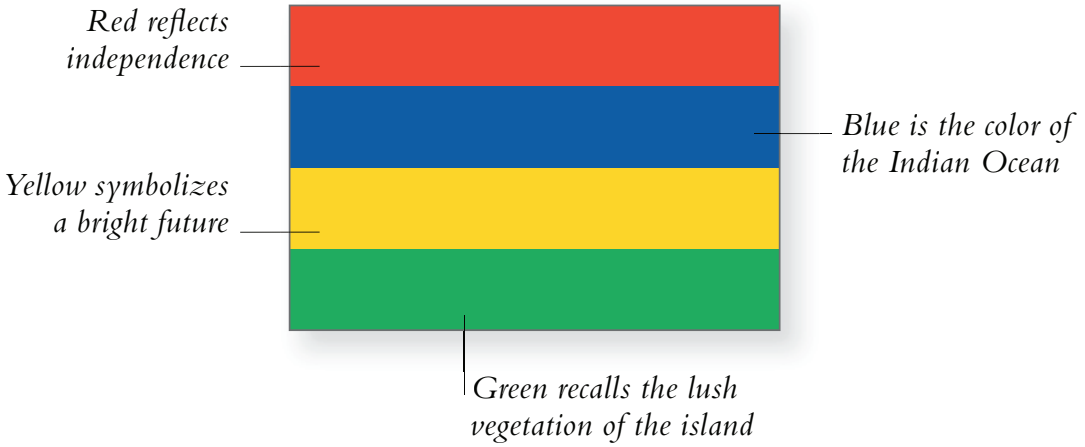
The state title is in Malagasy, the local language

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

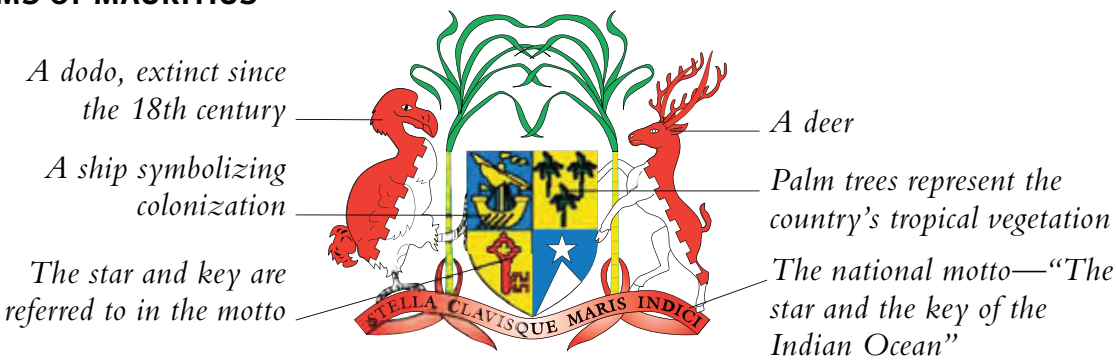
Mauritius was taken over by Britain from France in 1810. The colony achieved independence in 1968 and became a republic in 1992.

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

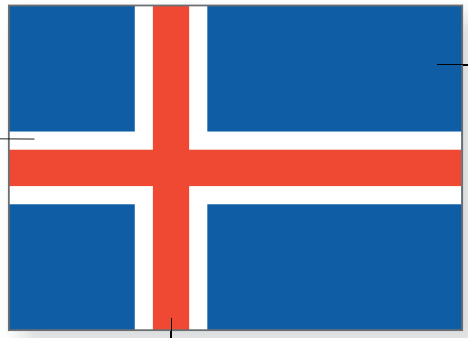
The coat of arms was granted on August 25, 1906, and depicts various attributes of the island. In the lower right quarter is a key and on the left-hand side is a white star, which are referred to in the Latin motto, *"Stella Clavisque Maris Indici"* ("The star and the key of the Indian Ocean"). The supporters 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

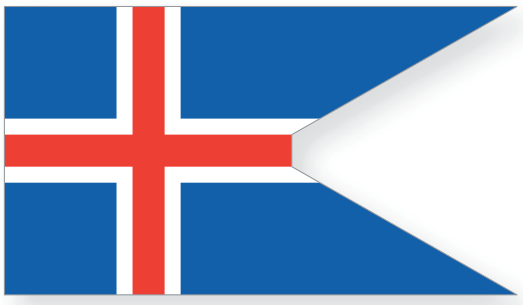
Ruled by the Danes from the 14th century, **Iceland** became a realm within the kingdom of Denmark in 1918, and a republic in 1944.

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.

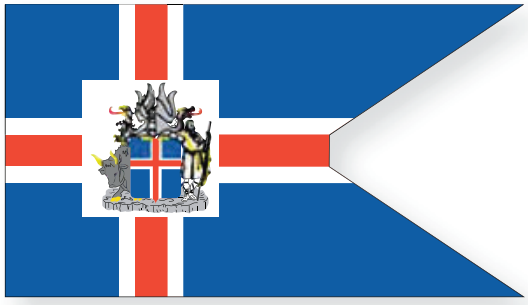
NAVAL ENSIGN

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



THE PRESIDENT'S FLAG

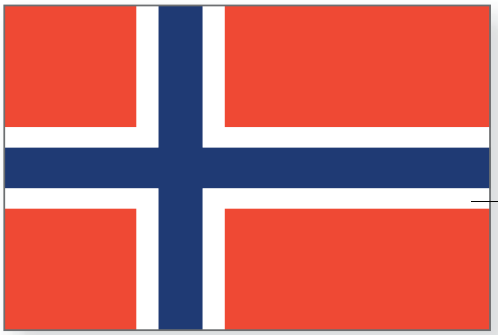
The shield is supported by a bull, an eagle, a dragon, and a giant, the mythical defenders of the island.



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

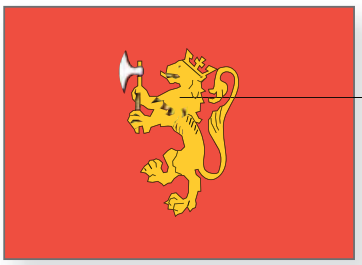
Ruled by Denmark from 1397, **Norway** passed to Sweden in 1814. It gained independence in 1905, when its union with Sweden was dissolved.

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

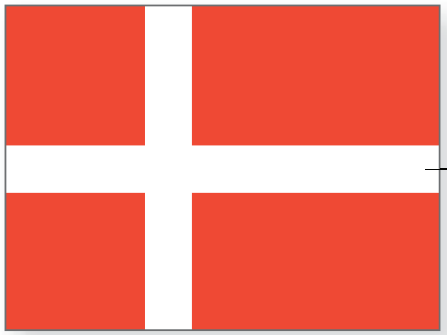


A tall, slender lion bearing the ax of St. Olav

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.

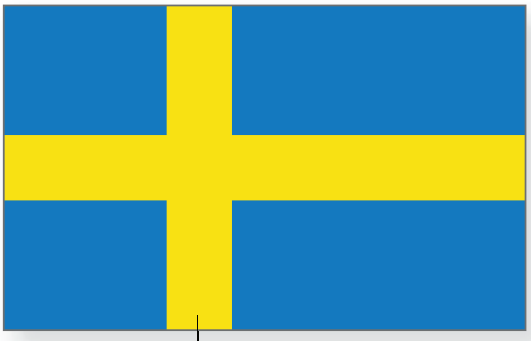
GREENLAND

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.

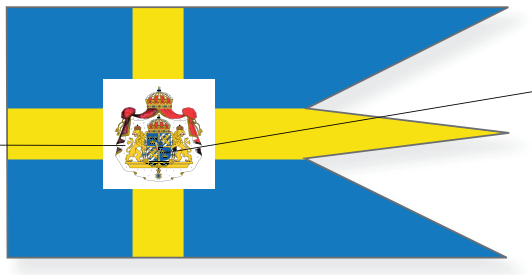
On this day in 1523 King Gustav Vasa was elected and, on the same date in 1809, Sweden adopted a new constitution.

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

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

White recalls the snows of winter

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

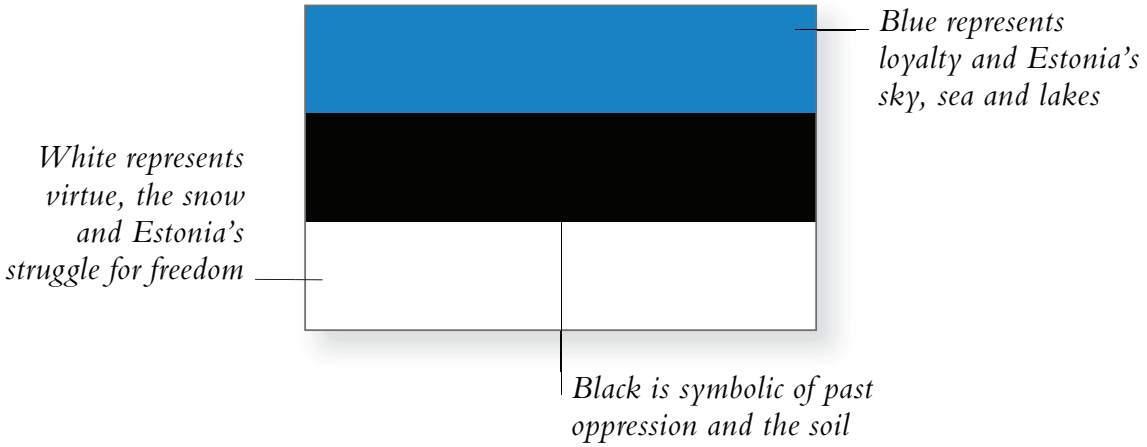
The Åland Islands are an autonomous group of Finnish islands with their own flag since 1954. The design incorporates a Scandinavian cross.

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

Latvia

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

Europe

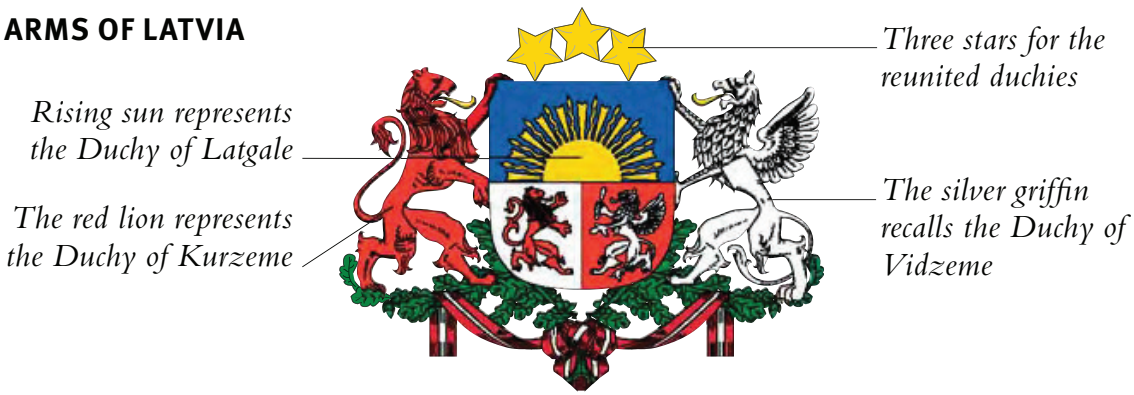
Over the centuries, **Latvia** has been invaded by Swedes, Poles, and Russians. It became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.

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

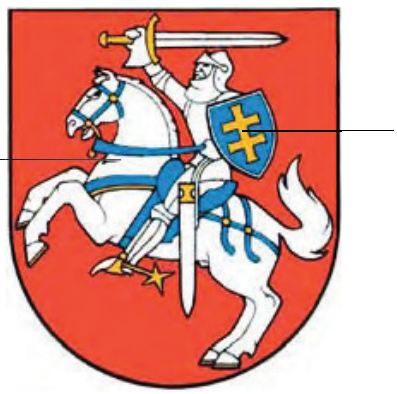
After declaring independence from Russia in 1918, **Lithuania** was again occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. It declared independence in 1991.

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



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 became 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

Europe

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-WÜRTTEMBURG

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.

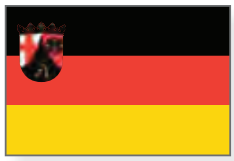
Germany: Länder flags

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

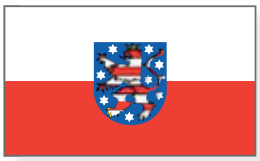
The flag was adopted in 1991, but the coat of arms is the traditional arms of the rulers of Saxony; black and yellow bands and the green crown of rue. The white and green flag dates from the 19th century.

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 *Stadtholder*, 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

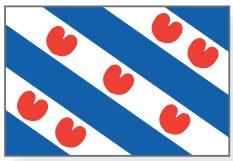
The Dutch coat of arms depicts a golden lion on a blue shield, holding a sword and a sheaf of arrows. It is a combination of the coat of arms of the Dutch Republic and that of the House of Orange. The seven arrows represent the seven original provinces in the Netherlands.

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.

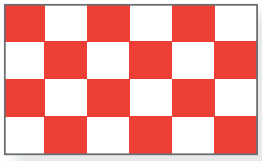


FRIESLAND

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.

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.



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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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 .

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.

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

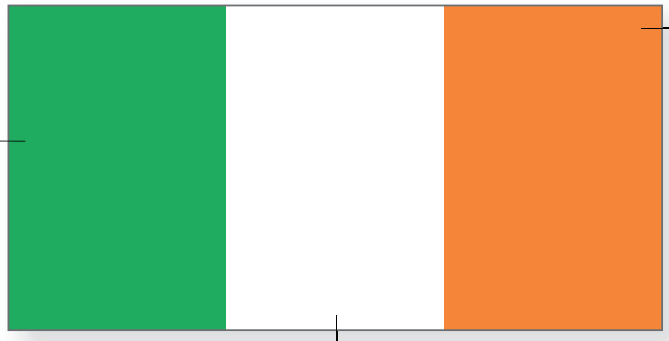
Adopted in 1990, the lion recalls former owner, Limburg; 9 roses are for the 9 communes.

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



Green represents the Catholic people

Orange is for the Protestant people

White is for the union between Catholics and Protestants

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 counter-changed 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

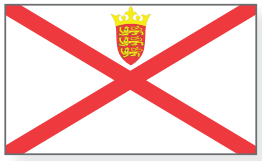
Originally used in 1191, the flag of St. George became the flag of England after 1277. The white flag has a red upright cross throughout. At sea it is the flag of an Admiral.

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)

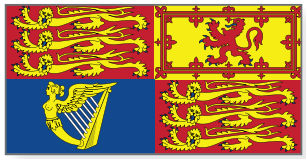
In use since 1512, the Scottish flag is the Cross of St. Andrew. As James was King of Scotland before he was King of England, this flag formed the basis of the Union Flag.

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.

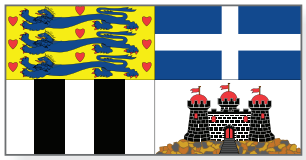
UK: Royal Standards

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."



PRINCE PHILIP DUKE OF EDINBURGH

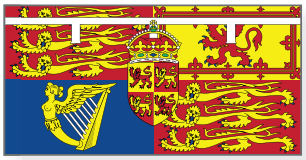
The banner for Prince Philip has quarters representing his descent from the royal families of both Denmark and Greece, and from the Mountbattens, and his title Duke of Edinburgh is represented by the arms of the city.

HRH PRINCE CHARLES 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.

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 chaplet of roses.



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.

OTHER ROYAL STANDARDS

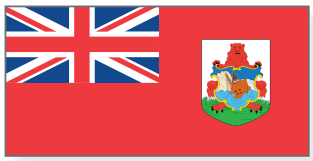
Other members of the Queen's family who have standards based on the Royal Standard are the Princess Royal, the Duke of York, Earl of Wessex, and the Queen's royal cousins. There is a general banner for those members of the royal family not entitled to an individual standard.

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.

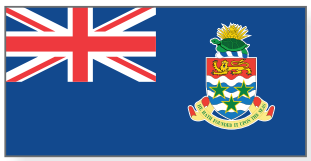


BERMUDA

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.

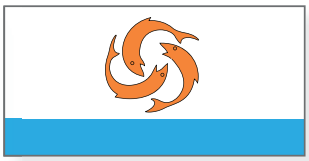
BRITISH ANTARCTIC TERRITORY

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.



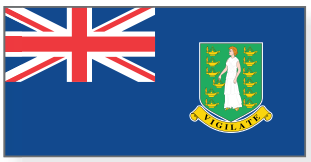
CAYMAN ISLANDS

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)

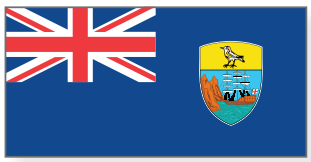
The local flag of Gibraltar City is a banner of the arms officially granted in 1926. It is based on the original arms granted by Spain in 1502. The banner was granted for use exclusively on land in 1983. Like the badge it depicts a red fortress with a gold key. The red and white field is derived from 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.

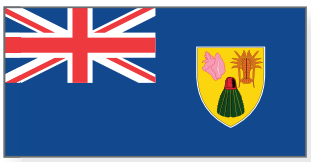
PITCAIRN ISLANDS

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.



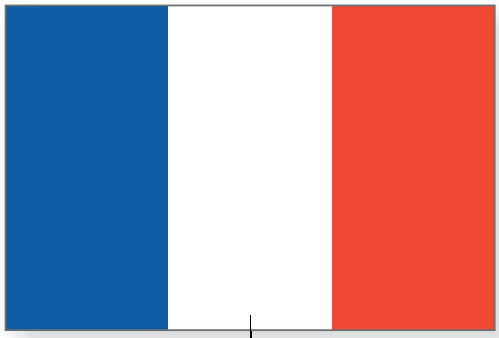
TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

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

France was a monarchy until the 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 *pirogue*—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.

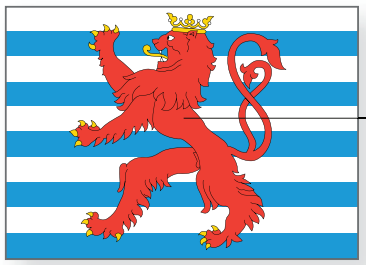
Luxembourg had no flag until 1830, when patriots were urged to display the national colors. The flag was defined as a horizontal tricolor of red, white and blue in 1848, but it was not officially adopted until 1972. The tricolor flag is almost identical to that of the Netherlands, except that it is longer 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.

Red, white, and blue coloring gave rise to colors of national flag

LUXEMBOURG CIVIL ENSIGN

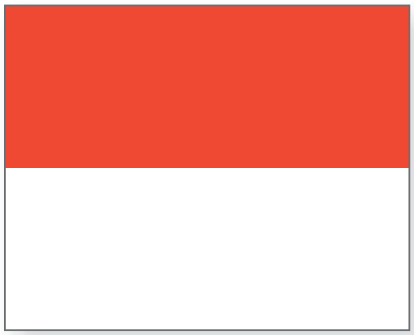


A crowned two-tailed lion rampant

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

A princely crown

The Grimaldi motto— Deo Juvante *("With God's Help")*

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

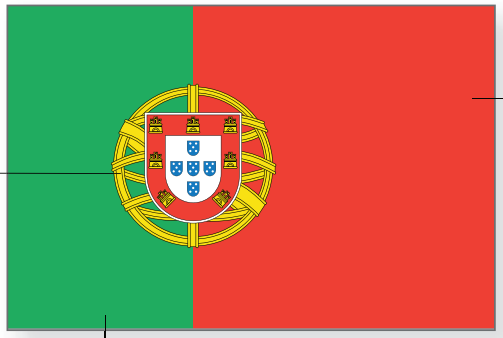
The three red stripes recall the Counts of Foix

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



The armillary sphere—an early navigational tool

Red represents revolution

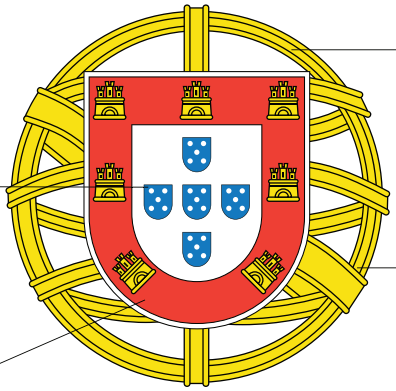
Green represents a Portuguese explorer; King Henry the Navigator

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



This armillary sphere and shields appear in the center of the Portuguese coat of arms

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

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.

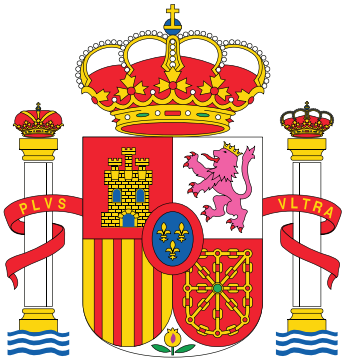
In 1785 the King of Spain adopted red and yellow, a combination of colors then used by no other country, to distinguish Spanish ships. The present pattern was finally established in 1927.

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



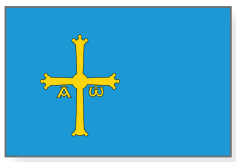
The arms show the regions of Spain. The shield is supported by the Pillars of Hercules and has the Spanish royal crown above.

Regional flags

Although most of the flags were adopted recently, all are based on older models, or traditional arms, displaying continuity with the past.

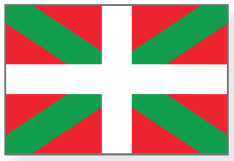
ANDALUSIA

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)

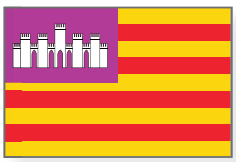
This flag was first adopted in 1931 and re-adopted in 1979. It is based on the Union Jack. Red recalls bloodshed, white the Catholic faith, and green the Oak of Guérnica.

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.

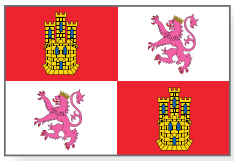
CANARY ISLANDS (ISLAS CANARIAS)

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

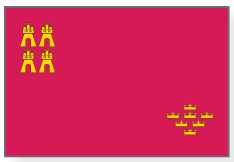
This flag has been used by Castilla y León since 1248. It depicts the union of Castilla (castle) and León (lion). It was adopted for the region in 1989.

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.

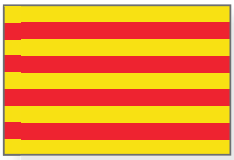


MURCIA

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.

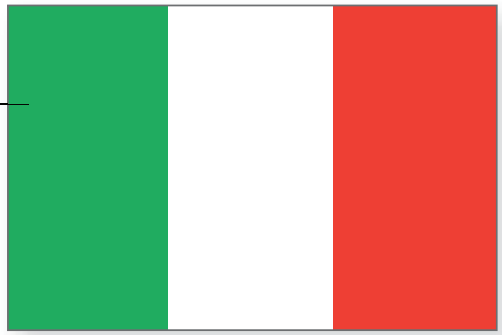
NAVARRE

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.

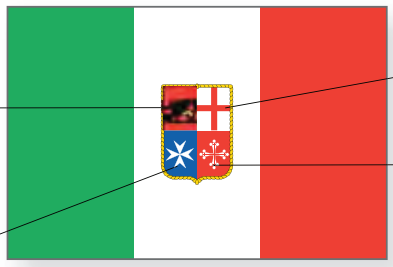
ITALIAN CIVIL ENSIGN

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



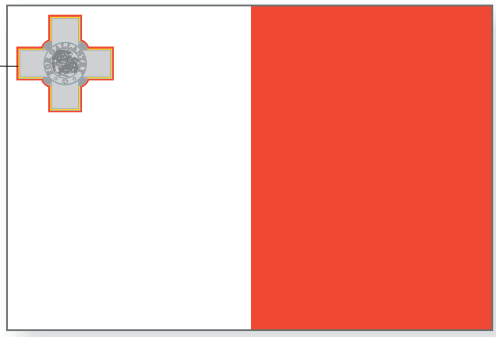
The Cross of St. George represents Genoa

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.

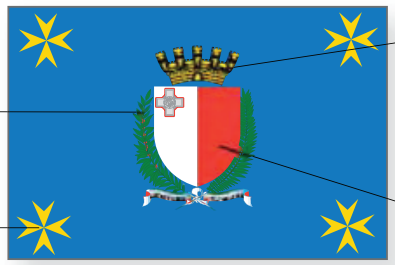
A key stronghold during the Crusades, much of the heraldry of Malta is influenced by the colors and devices of the Knights of Malta. Their badge was the characteristic Maltese cross and their arms was a white cross on a red field. From these colors came the red and white shield that was used during the 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 Valetta

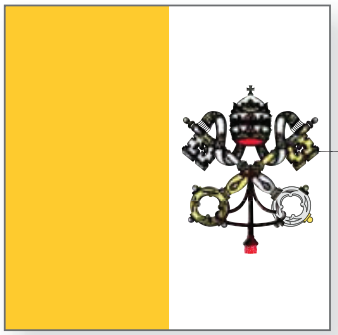
The Shield of Malta

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

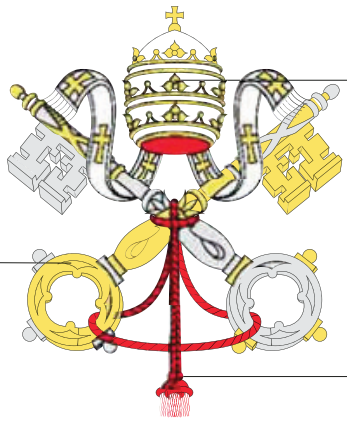
Europe

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*

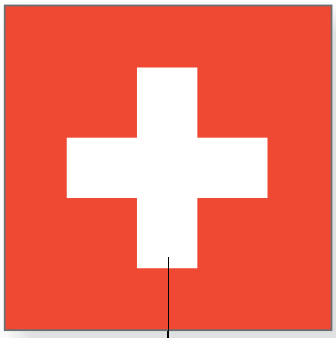
A wreath of oak

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



A white couped cross

The Swiss and Vatican flags are the only square national flags

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 couped 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 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-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.

APPENZELL AUSSER-RHODEN

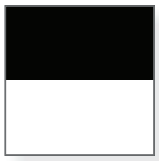
Adopted in 1597 when the canton separated from the Inner-Rhoden, the flag retained the bear, but added the initials VR (for Ussroden). The bear dates back to medieval banners. It was used from 1403 in battles against feudal landlords.

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.

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

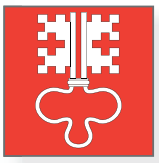
The eagle recalls the former Holy Roman Empire. The key is the Key of St. Peter, and shows Geneva as the key to western Switzerland. The flag was adopted in 1815.

GRAUBUNDEN

The flag includes symbols for the three original parts of the canton which united in the 15th century: Graubunden, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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").

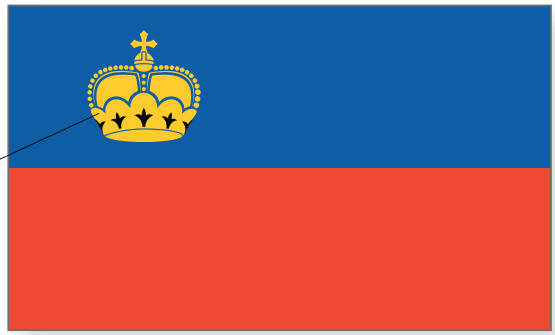
ZÜRICH

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.

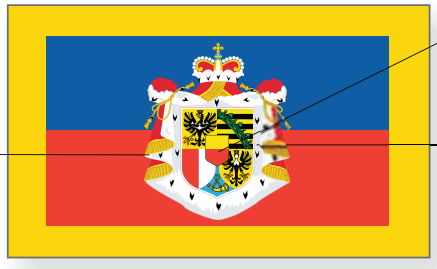
The red and blue of Liechtenstein's flag date from 1921. There was confusion at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin because the flag was very similar to that of Haiti. In 1937 the crown was introduced to the flag of Liechtenstein to establish the country's status as a principality and to distinguish it 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

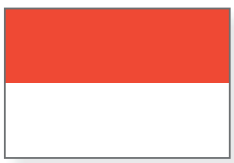
Adopted in 1954, the colors are based on the arms which contain a blue shield and five gold eagles.

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

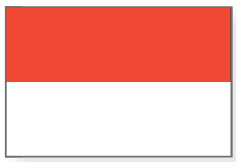
Adopted in 1946, the colors are derived from those of Austria and the yellow state shield.

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

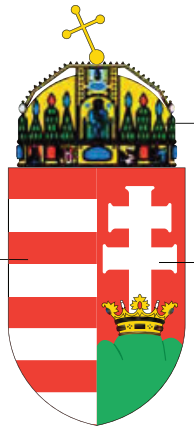
Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** October 1, 1957 **Usage:** National and Civil

Europe

Part of Austria-Hungary until 1918, **Hungary** became part of the communist bloc from 1945–1989.

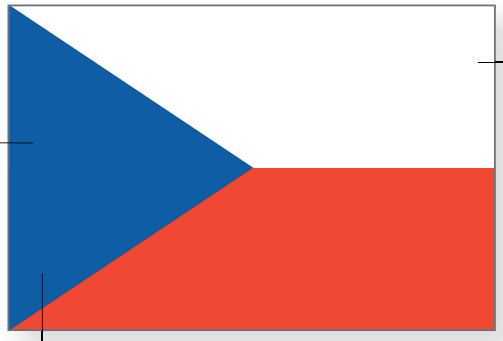
The current flag was first used in the 1848–49 uprising. Its pattern was derived from the French *Tricolore* used during the French Revolution. The colors: red, white, and green date back to the 9th century. They were first used in 1608 during the reign of King Matthias II. Until 1945, the royal crown 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



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

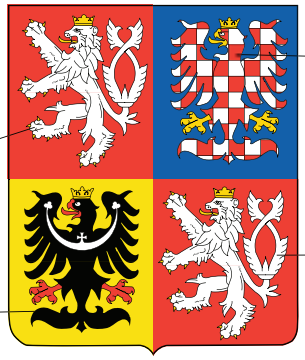
When the Czech Republic and Slovakia separated in 1993, the Czechs decided to keep their existing flag, recalling the two principal parts of the country.

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 black eagle on a yellow field is taken from the arms of Silesia



The red and white eagle on a blue field is from the arms of Moravia

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

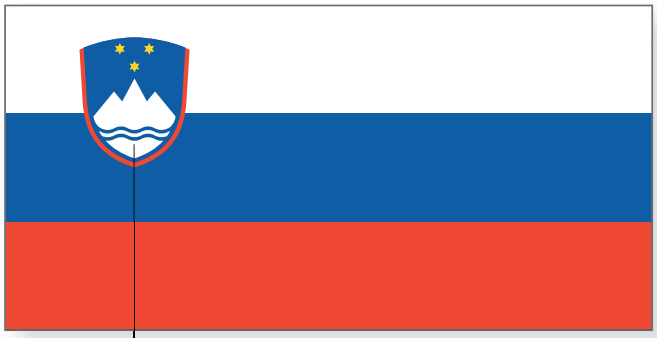
A patriarchal cross

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

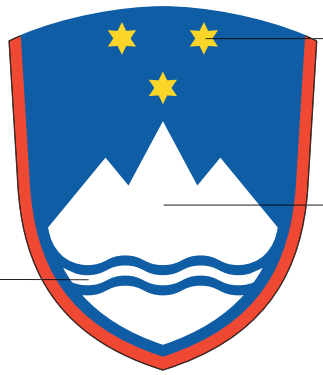
Europe

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 three stars are from the arms of the former Duchy of Selje

The three mountain peaks represent the Triglav, part of the Alps

The wavy lines symbolize Slovenia's sea coast

Croatia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** December 22, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Red, white, and blue are traditional Croatian colors

Arms of Croatia

The tricolor charged with the coat of arms was first used during World War II

For much of its existence, **Croatia** was under Austrian rule. It joined Yugoslavia in 1919, but declared independence on June 25, 1991.

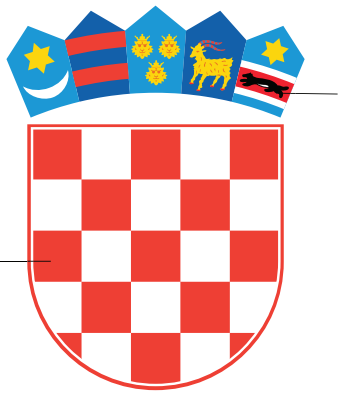
While part of Yugoslavia, Croatia's flag was designed in the pan-Slavic colors, red, white, and blue. These are also traditional Croatian colors used in the 19th century.

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.

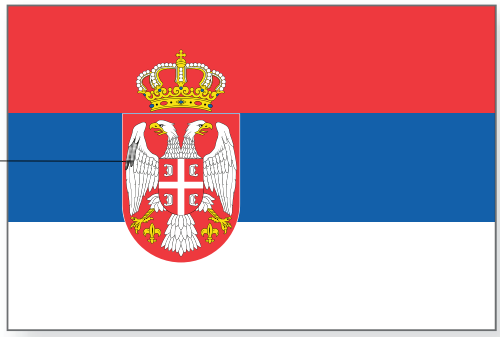
FLAG ACCEPTED AS THE NATIONAL FLAG IN 1914

POST-COMMUNIST FLAG

Serbia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 5, 2006 **Usage:** National and Civil

Coat of arms appears on the state flag



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

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

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

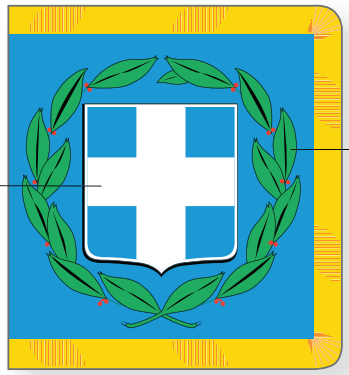
Once part of the Ottoman Empire, **Greece** has seen periodic unrest since World War II. In 1974 it became a multiparty democracy.

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

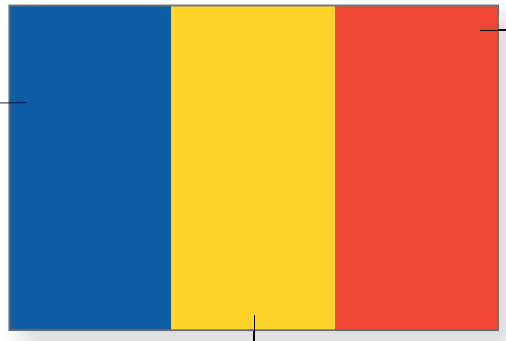
The original white cross on a blue field is retained in the President's flag and the national arms



The Cross Flag is surrounded by a wreath of laurels

Romania

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** December 27, 1989 **Usage:** National and Civil



Blue formed part of the province of Moldavia's flag

Red was featured in the flags of both Moldavia and Wallachia and is the color of Romanian unity

Yellow formed part of the province of Wallachia's flag

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 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.

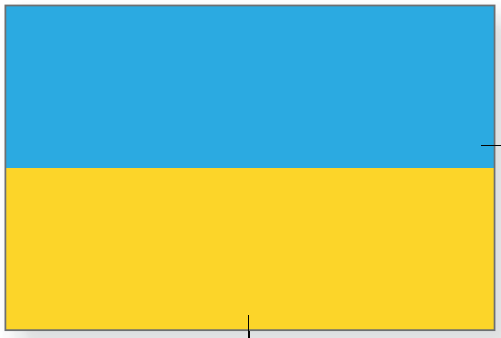
ARMS OF BELARUS

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

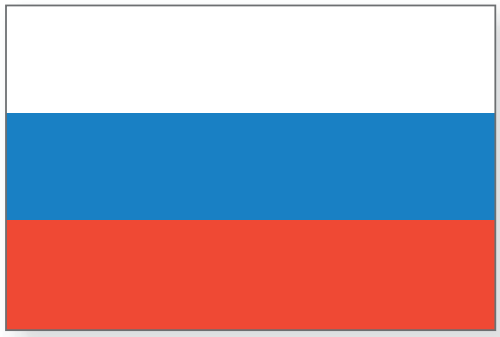
The trident of St. Volodimir

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 orginally 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

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.

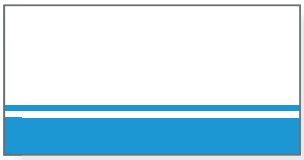
When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the former flags of Russia, including the white, blue, and red tricolor were restored.

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

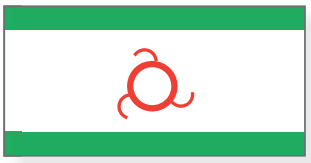
Green is for Islam. Red is for the blood shed for freedom. White is the road leading to the future and the gold is the national ornament.

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.

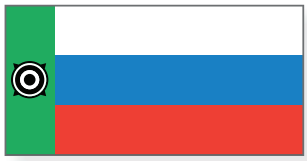
Russian Federation: Republic flags

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.

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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

KOMI

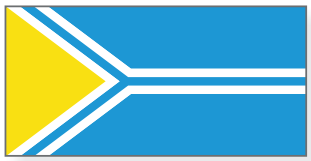
The three colors of the flag recall the republic's northerly location in blue, its forests in green, and its snows in white. They are also symbolic of virtues such as cleanliness, unity, and purity.

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.

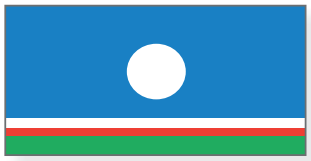
NORTH OSSETIA

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.

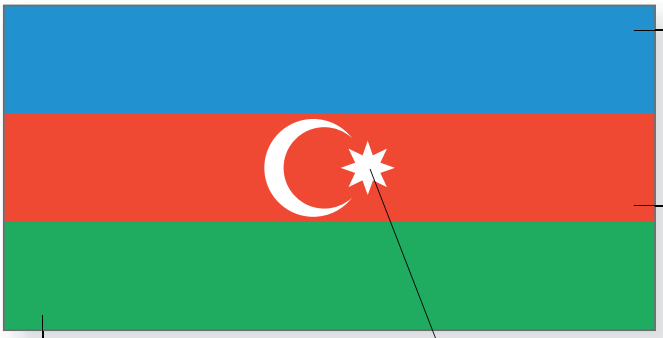
UDMURTIA

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"



Blue is often associated with the Turkic people

Red recalls European influence

Green is the traditional color of Islam

Each point of the star represents a Turkic people

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

The flame at the star's center symbolizes a new era

The shield is in the color of the national flag; blue, red, and green

The star has eight points, each representing one of the eight Turkic peoples

The golden ear of corn reflects Azerbaijan's agriculture

Armenia

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** August 24, 1990 **Usage:** National and Civil

Blue is for hope and the Armenian skies

Red recalls Armenian blood spilled during the struggle for independence

Orange represents the blessings of hard work

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

Four quarters of the shield represent former Armenian royal dynasties

Below the shield lie a broken leaf, a sheaf of wheat, a pen and a sword

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.

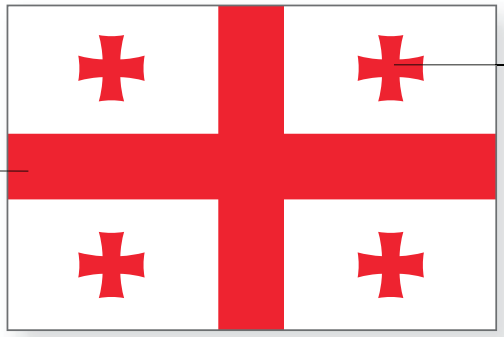
A PAN-ISLAMIC SYMBOL

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.

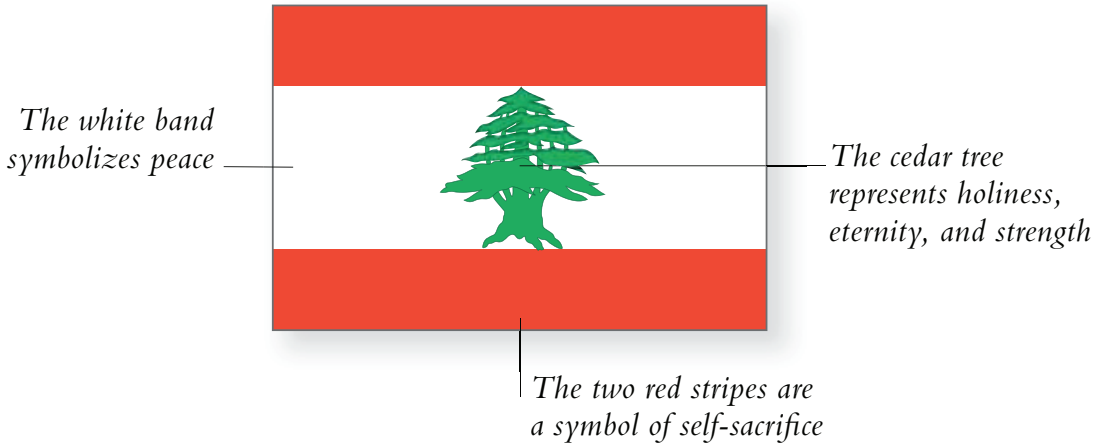
THE SOVIET ERA

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.

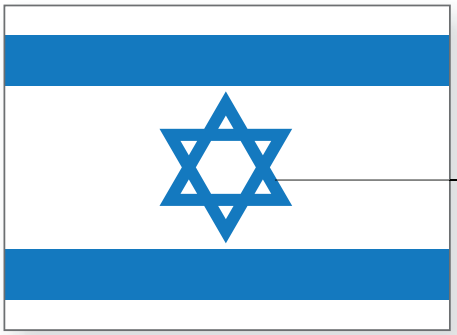
THE NATIONAL EMBLEM

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.

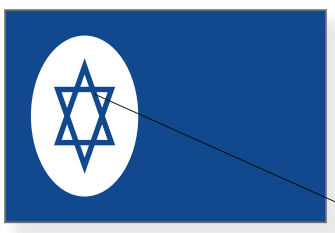
The flag was designed for the Zionist movement by David Wolfsohn in 1891, over 50 years before the state of Israel was officially declared.

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



The Shield of David is slightly elongated

Like other variant Israeli flags, civil and naval ensigns are a darker shade of blue than the national flag

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

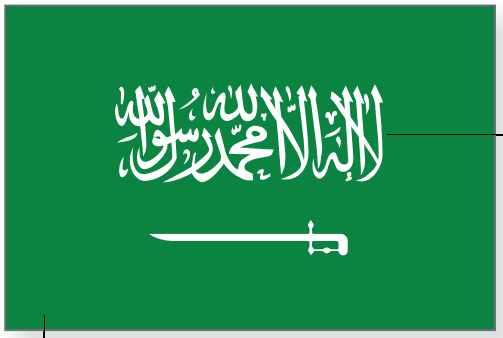
The black eagle symbolizes the banner of the Messenger of God

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.

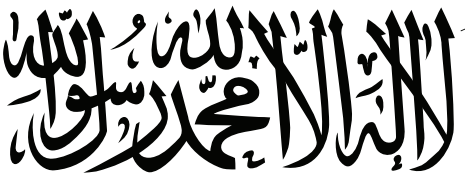
The flag of Saudi Arabia symbolizes the Arab peoples of the desert. Used in various forms since the late 19th century, the green is favored by the Wahabi sect and is believed to be the favorite color of the prophet Muhammad.

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

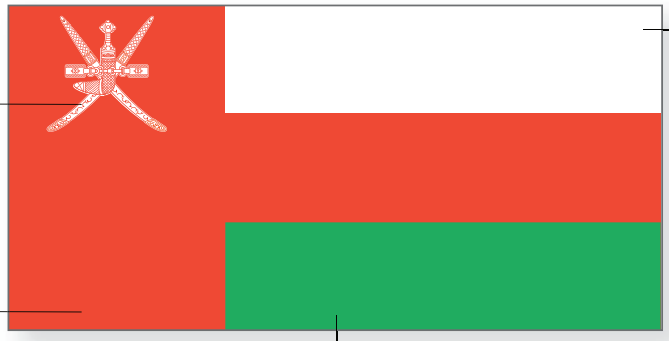
The flag of the Yemen Arab Republic, formally the Kingdom of Yemen, was also modeled on the Egyptian flag. It was a red, white, and black tricolor, but it was simply charged with a single, five-pointed green star in a central white band, representing Arab unity.

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

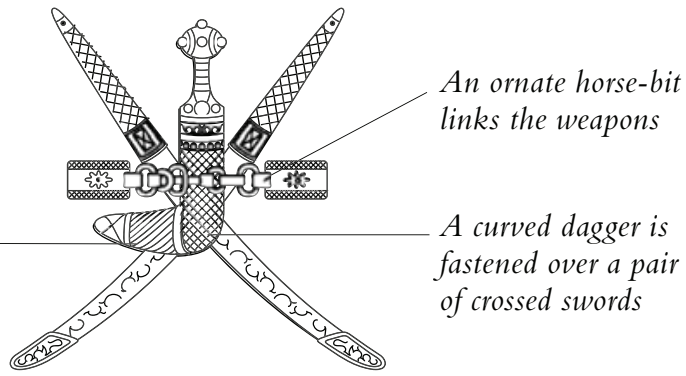
From the mid-19th century, **Oman** was a British protectorate. In 1970, it achieved independence as the Sultanate of Oman.

Until 1970, Oman used the plain red banner of the indigenous people, the Kharijite 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

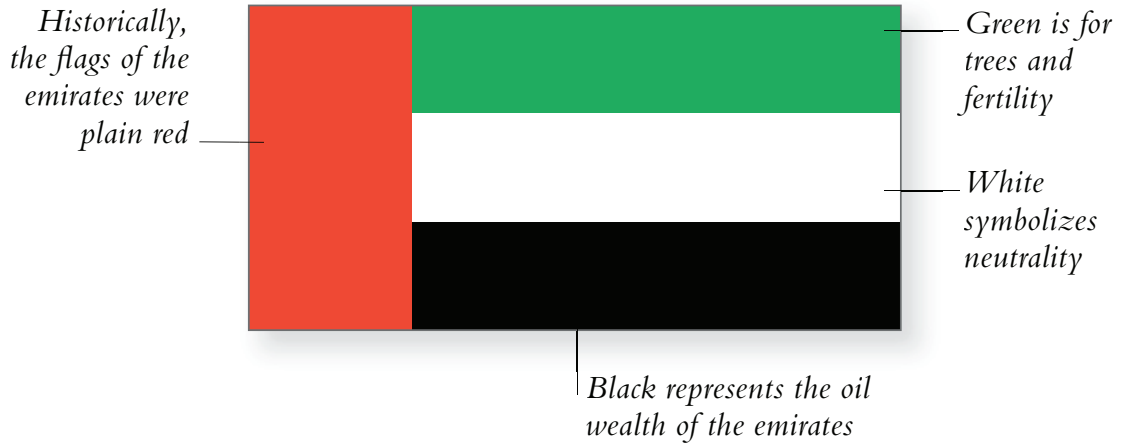
White has been associated historically with the Imam, the religious leader of Oman and at times the political rival to the ruling Sultan. It also symbolizes peace. Green is traditionally associated with the *Jebel al Akhdar* or "Green Mountains," which lie toward the north of the country. Red is a common color in Gulf state flags.

THE NATIONAL EMBLEM



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.

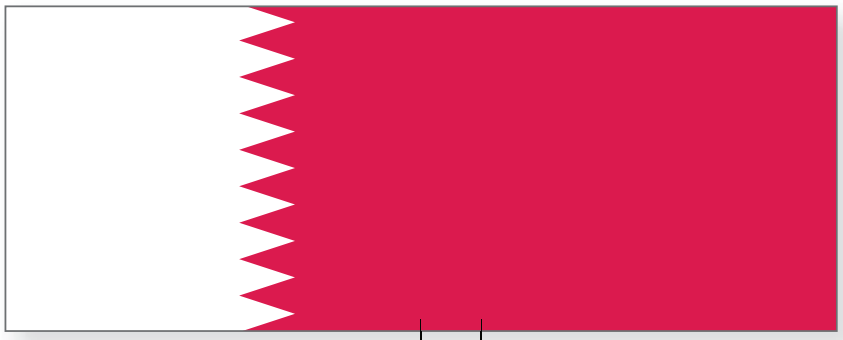
THE PAN-ARAB COLORS

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

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 Kharijite 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.

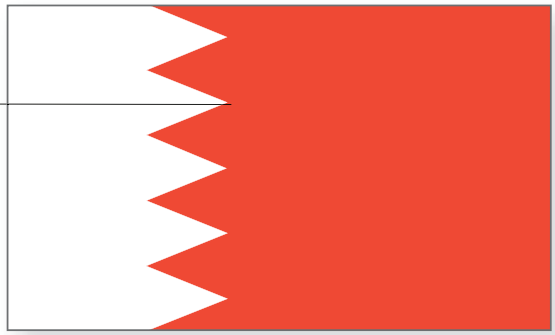
THE EMBLEM OF QATAR

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

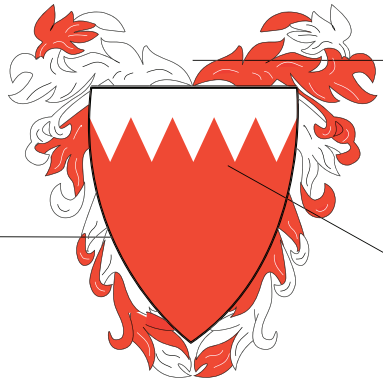
Despite Iran's claims of sovereignty, **Bahrain**, an archipelago in the Gulf, has retained its independence gained from Great Britain in 1971.

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

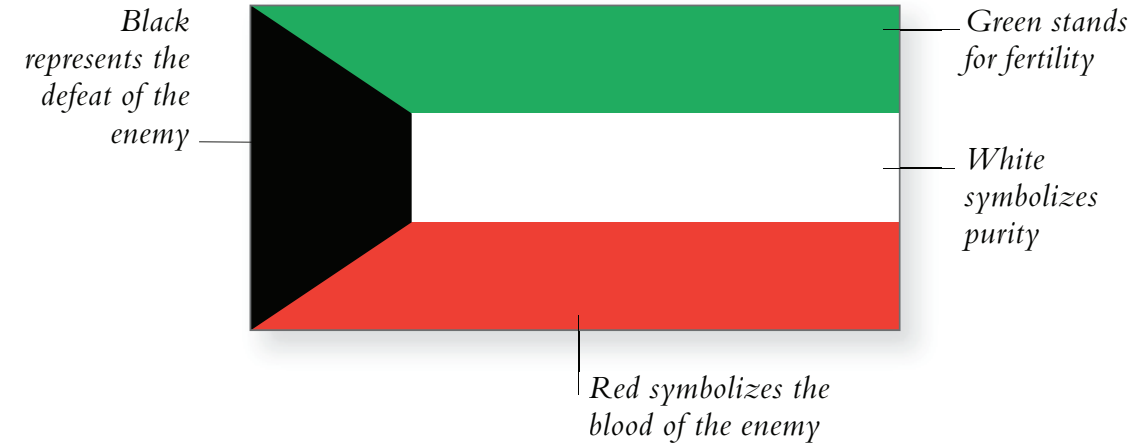


Until independence in 1971, there was an oriental crown above the shield

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

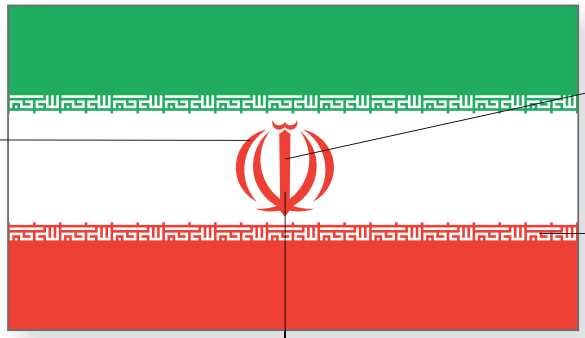
The Islamic verse was added to the flag in 1991 and modified in 2004 and 2008

الله اكبر

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

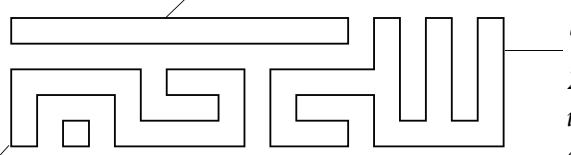
Iran was a monarchy until 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini deposed the Shah. An Islamic republic was formed in 1980.

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)



A stylized version of Kufic script, used for the Qur'an

Along the edges of the green and red stripes appears the phrase "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great")

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

The wreath of olive leaves is identical to those on the United Nations flag, and was added in 1997

Each star represents one of the five Turkmen regions

The ornamentation represents the five traditional carpet designs

Green is a color revered in Turkmenistan

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

The five guls *from the national flag*

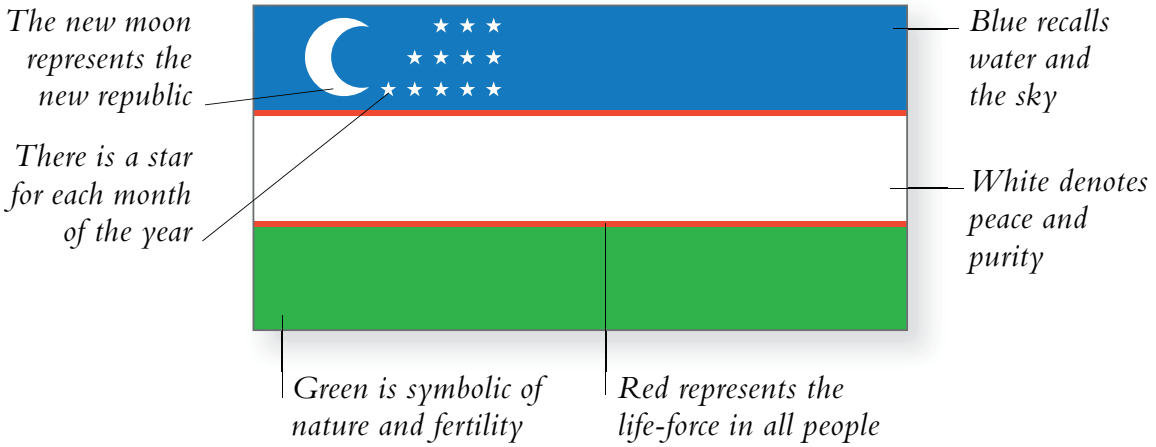
An akheltikin *horse, famed in Turkmenistan*

Cotton and wheat both featured on the emblem of the former Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan

Cotton represents the country's most important agricultural product

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

Kazakhstan

Ratio: 1:2 **Adopted:** June 4, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil

The sky-blue field symbolizes the skies stretching over the many Kazakh people

A berkut, *or steppe eagle, beneath a shining sun*

The traditional "national ornamentation" is placed close to the hoist

Asia

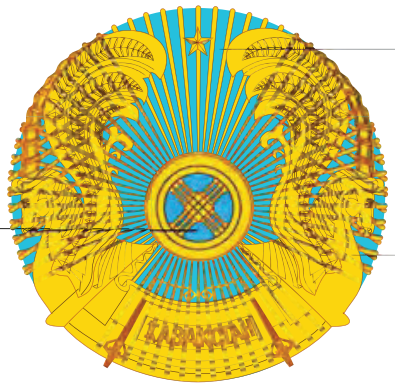
Part of Central Asia conquered by Russia in the 18th century, **Kazakhstan** was the largest republic to secede from the USSR.

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*

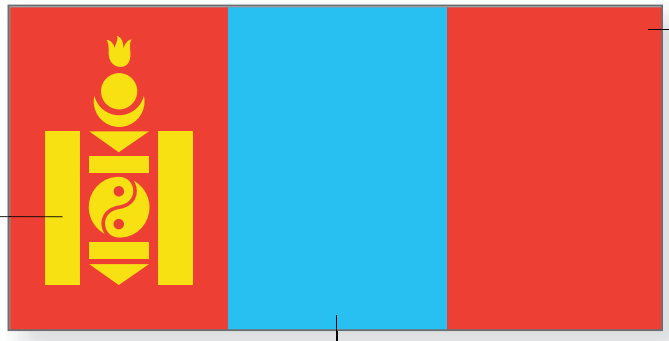


The sun's rays spread out like a yurt's *supporting structure*

Winged and horned horses represent historical traditions and beliefs

Mongolia

Ratio: 2:1 **Adopted:** 1992 **Usage:** Civil and State

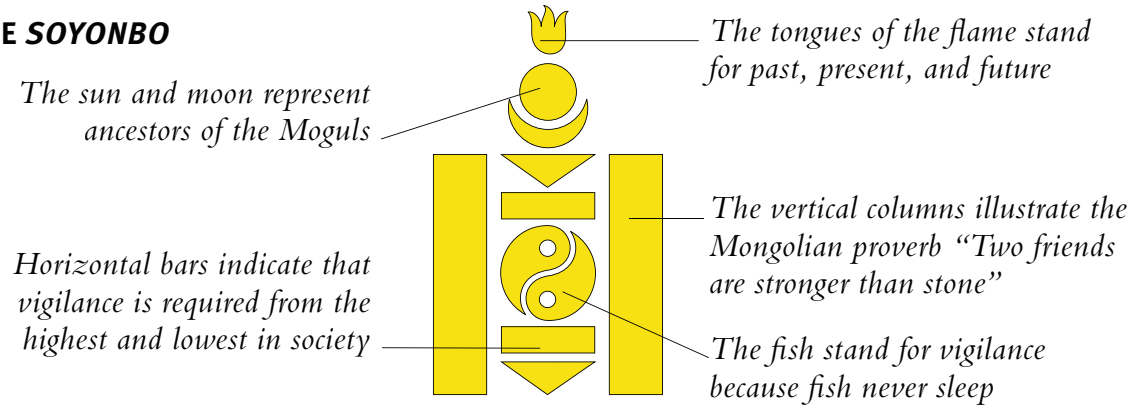


Asia

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*



Kyrgyzstan

Ratio: 3:5 **Adopted:** March 3, 1992 **Usage:** National and Civil

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

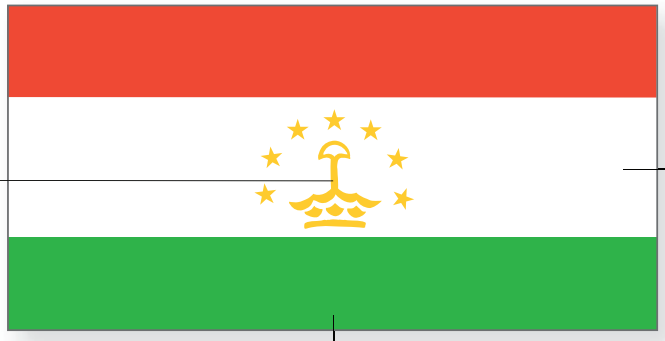
At the sun's center is a stylized bird's-eye view of the roof, or *tunduk*, of a Kyrgyz *yurt*, the traditional tent used by the nomadic people of the steppe. It symbolizes the unity of time and space, the origin of life, hearth and home, and the history of the nomads.

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"

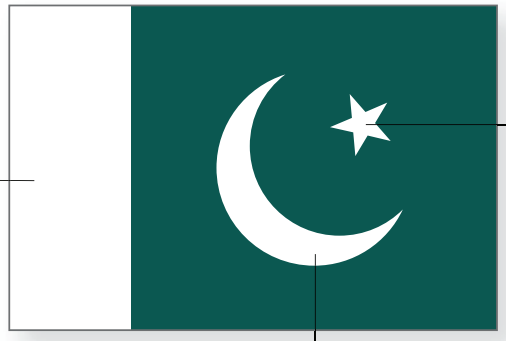
The Arabic inscription reads: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah"

The date 1298 in the Muslim calendar (AD 1919), is the date Afghanistan was internationally recognized as independent.

The name of Afghanistan in Arabic script

Pakistan

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** August 14, 1947 **Usage:** National



The white strip represents non-Muslim and other minority groups in Pakistan

Star symbolizes light and knowledge

The crescent represents progress

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.

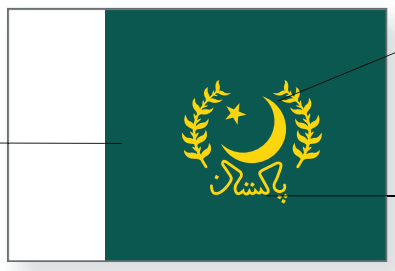
THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLORS

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

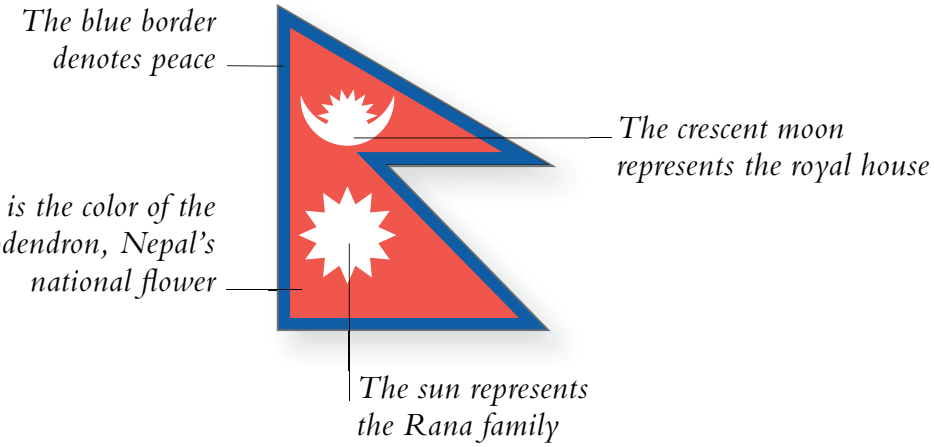


The crescent and star are symbols of Islam

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.

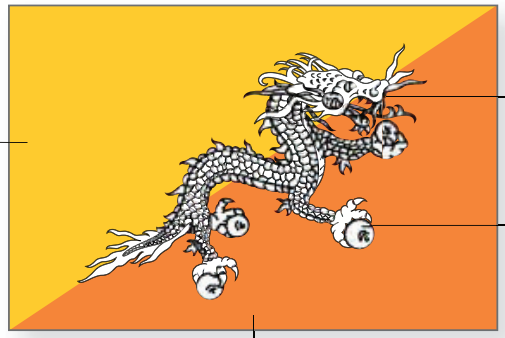
THE SUN AND THE MOON

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)

Bhutan

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** c. 1965 **Usage:** National and Civil



Asia

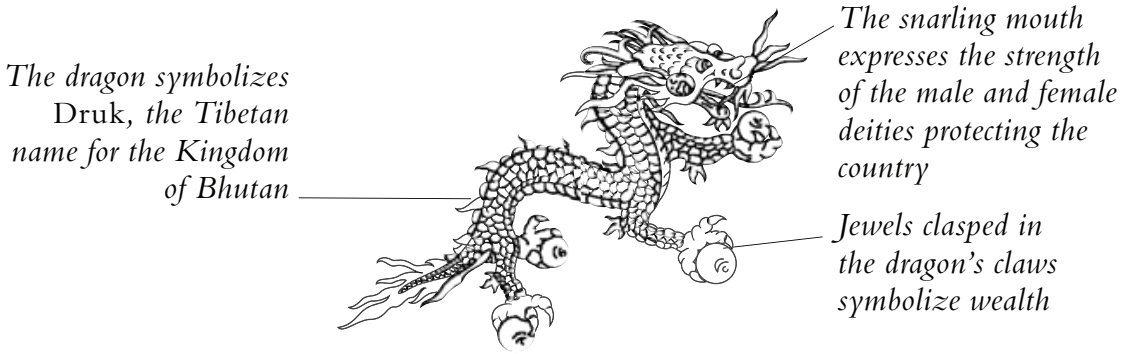
Bhutan is a Buddhist state where power is shared by the king and government. The country's name in the local dialect means "Land of the Dragon."

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

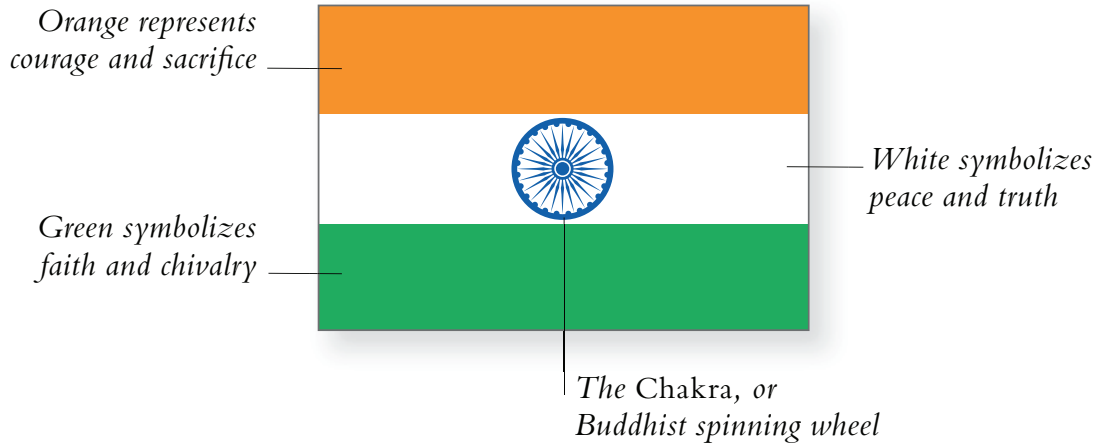
The two colors of the flag, divided diagonally, represent spiritual and temporal power within Bhutan. The orange part of the flag represents the Drukpa monasteries and Buddhist religious practice, while the saffron yellow field denotes the secular authority of the royal dynasty of the Wangchuks.

EMBLEM OF BHUTAN



India

Ratio: 2:3 **Adopted:** July 22, 1947 **Usage:** National



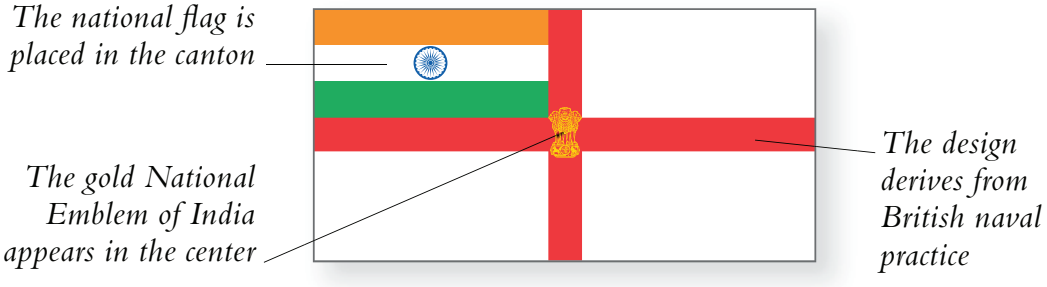
Asia

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