Flags of the cards

Flag origins are rewritten from Wikipedia articles (CC BY-SA 4.0). Source articles: https://mikeron-games.com/en/games/flag_museum/credits/
※ = not a card in the game (appears in a lineage or a column)

1. Cross flags — Christian countries

The cross is the sign of Christianity. Denmark's red flag with a white cross is said to have fallen from the sky during a battle in 1219, and it is thought to be the oldest national flag still in use. The cross with its upright bar moved toward the pole spread from Denmark to the other Nordic countries. Only Greenland voted against a cross design and chose a sun flag instead. England's red cross and Scotland's white diagonal cross are the signs of each country's patron saint. They were combined, and Ireland's red diagonal cross was added later, to make today's British flag. Switzerland's white cross began as a mark that soldiers wore on their clothes. Jamaica's gold diagonal cross is called "St Andrew's cross": a diagonal cross is also a kind of cross.



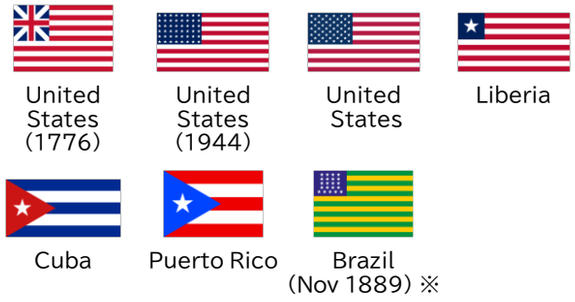
2. British flag in the corner — ex-colonies

British colonies used flags with the British flag in the top left and their own badge on the right. India, then a colony, placed the "Star of India" medal in the center of the British flag. Australia and New Zealand, also former colonies, kept this layout after independence and show the Southern Cross, seen in the southern sky. In 2016 New Zealand voted on changing its flag; 57% chose to keep it. Papua New Guinea also shows the Southern Cross; the design was by a 15-year-old girl. Canada replaced its flag in 1965 with the maple leaf, which belongs to neither Britain nor France.



3. Children of the Stars and Stripes

The first United States flag (1776) had the British flag in the top left of 13 stripes. In 1777 stars replaced it, and a star was added for each new state, now 50. "Stripes, plus one star per state" became a model for new countries. Liberia was founded by an American society that settled freed Black people in Africa; its name comes from "liberty", its capital Monrovia from President Monroe, and its flag copies the US flag. The 11 stripes stand for the 11 signers of its declaration of independence. Cuba's flag was made in the US in 1849; its one star means independence. Puerto Rico's flag copies Cuba's: in 1895, independence fighters swapped the colors of the stripes and the triangle to show solidarity with Cuba, then at war with Spain. Brazil also made a green-and-yellow flag modeled on the US flag in 1889, but withdrew it after 4 days as "too much like another country's flag".



4. Crescent and star — Islamic countries

The white crescent and star on red were adopted by the Ottoman Empire (the old Turkey) and passed on to Turkey. Tunisia and Libya, once part of the empire, also chose the crescent and star, and Pakistan and Malaysia, never part of it, took them as "a symbol of Islam". The white band on Pakistan's flag stands for non-Muslims, a promise to protect the rights of minorities. Green is also an Islamic color: the Mughal Empire, Saudi Arabia, Libya under Gaddafi, the East Turkestan Republic and Safavid Persia are green. The East Turkestan Republic was founded in western China by Uyghurs and other Muslims and was absorbed by China in 1949. Iran, which continues from Safavid Persia, lies next to Iraq but is not an Arab country: it is the country of the Persians, who speak Persian.



5. Middle East — Arab colors, Qatar, Israel

The countries of the Arabs, who speak Arabic, were ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries and then divided among Britain, France and others, which is why they are separate countries today. The wish for "one Arab nation" remains strong: the Arab League, founded in 1945, now has 22 members, and their flags look alike. The black, white, green and red of Jordan, Palestine, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are called "the Arab colors". They combine the colors of old Arab dynasties and come from the flag of the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in 1916. The other family is the red, white and black of Egypt's revolution of 1952; Iraq, Sudan and Syria tell themselves apart by emblems or stars. Qatar's flag is the only national flag more than twice as wide as it is tall. Israel is the country of the Jews. For a long time the Jews had no land of their own and lived around the world. After World War II, in 1948, Israel was founded in Palestine, the Jewish homeland. But many Arabs who had long lived in Palestine lost their land, and the conflict between Arabs and Jews continues today. Its flag, with the stripes of the Jewish prayer shawl and the "Star of David", looks nothing like the Arab flags.



Column: Red Cross, Crescent and Crystal

Helping the wounded of both sides in war began with Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman shocked by a battlefield; the Red Cross was founded in Geneva in 1863. Today about 190 countries have a Red Cross or Red Crescent society, joined in one international federation. The red cross emblem reverses the colors of Dunant's Switzerland and was fixed in 1864. In its war with Russia from 1877, the Ottoman Empire used a red crescent instead, saying a cross did not suit Muslim soldiers; it is still the emblem in Islamic countries. Israel's society, with a red Star of David, was long refused, until a fourth emblem with no religious meaning, the "red crystal", was created in 2005 and the society joined the federation the next year.



6. Africa — green, yellow and red

Ethiopia was one of the few African countries to keep its independence, defeating an Italian invasion in the late 19th century. Its green, yellow and red, adopted in 1897, became the colors that African countries seeking independence looked up to. Ghana, independent in 1957, was the first to take them; its black star means "freedom from colonial rule". Mozambique's flag is the only national flag with a gun, and whether to remove it is still debated. South Africa's flag of 1994 has 6 colors; the green Y means "divided peoples joining on one road". The earlier South African flag used as its background the orange, white and blue (the first Dutch tricolor) said to have been raised by the Dutch when they settled the Cape in 1652, and in 1928 the British flag and the flags of two Dutch-descended republics were placed on it.



7. Horizontal tricolors — Dutch origins

The Dutch tricolor was born in the 1570s from the colors of William of Orange, who led the war of independence from Spain. "Orange" was originally the name of a small territory in southern France. The flag began as orange, white and blue, but during the 17th century orange was replaced by red (red is said to be easier to see at sea). Orange is still the national color of the Netherlands. It is the oldest tricolor still in use. The flag spread east. Russia's Tsar Peter saw a ship he had ordered in the Netherlands arrive under the Dutch flag, changed the order of the colors and made it his ships' flag, so the story goes. This white, blue and red was banned after the Russian Revolution and returned in 1991, after the years of the Soviet red flag. In 1848 a congress of Slavic peoples declared Russia's white, blue and red "the Slavic colors", and Croatia, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia followed. Serbia, it is said, asked to use the same flag as Russia, was refused, and replied "then upside down", becoming red, blue and white. Bulgaria's white, green and red is said to be Russia's flag with blue changed to green, under Russian influence after Russia helped it win independence from the Ottomans.



8. Germany and Austria — from the Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire (centered on today's Germany) flew a black eagle on gold. When Napoleon dissolved it, the imperial Habsburg family named their own lands the Austrian Empire and kept black and gold as a black-and-yellow flag. Austria's red-white-red has another origin: a legend of a white tunic soaked in blood in battle, white only under the belt. In divided Germany, black, red and gold spread from the volunteers who fought Napoleon (black coats, red trim, gold buttons), and became the colors of "unity and freedom" in the 1848 revolution. But Germany was actually united by the military state of Prussia, and the German Empire used black, white and red: Prussia's black and white plus the red and white of the northern ports. After losing World War I, the Weimar Republic made black, red and gold the national flag. Nazi Germany dropped it as the symbol of the republic, went back to black, white and red, and in 1935 made the swastika flag the only national flag. After World War II, West Germany restored black, red and gold; East Germany added its emblem to look different.


Holy Roman Empire (1520)


Austrian Empire (1820)


Austria-Hungary (1910)


Austria


Prussia (1786)


German Empire (1913)


Weimar Republic (1928)


Nazi Germany (1938)


West Germany (1980)


East Germany (1980)


Germany

9. Vertical tricolors — the French Revolution

In the French Revolution of 1789, the colors of Paris (blue and red) were joined with the white of the royal family in a three-color badge, which became the French flag. As "the flag of revolution and freedom", replacing the royal lily flag, many countries such as Belgium and Italy adopted tricolors. When Italy became a kingdom, it put the royal arms in the center. In World War II, Mussolini, abandoned by the king, founded the Italian Social Republic in northern Italy; it removed the royal arms and drew the black eagle of ancient Rome instead. After the lost war, distrust of the king who had allowed the dictatorship led to a vote that ended the monarchy, and Italy returned to a plain tricolor. Ireland's flag: green for Catholics, orange for Protestants, white for "peace between them". Romania also followed France in 1848 and placed the colors of its two principalities side by side. Haiti's flag is said to be the French tricolor with "the white, standing for white people, pulled out".


France (1700)


French Empire (1812)


France


Belgium


Italy (1940)


Italian Social Republic (1944)


Italy


Ireland


Romania


Haiti

10. Two-color flags of Eastern Europe

Poland-Lithuania was formed in the 16th century when two countries joined and was one of the largest countries in Europe. Its flag shows Poland's white eagle beside Lithuania's knight. Later its neighbors divided its land, and Poland returned as a country only in 1918. Poland's white and red are the colors of its arms (a white eagle on red). Ukraine's blue and yellow were first raised in 1848 and returned in 1992. Belarus's white-red-white was its flag at independence in 1918; a 1995 vote restored the Soviet-era red and green, but the banned flag is still used in protests, as in 2020–21.


Poland-Lithuania (1620)


Poland


Ukrainian People's Rep. (1918)


Ukraine


Belarusian People's Rep. (1918)


Belarus

11. Other European flags

Venice, a city built on the sea, grew rich on trade and lasted more than a thousand years as a republic, until Napoleon ended it. The winged lion on its flag is the sign of St Mark. Vatican City's yellow and white are the gold and silver keys of St Peter; like Switzerland's, its flag is square. Catalonia's red and yellow stripes come from a medieval royal arms and are among the oldest flags in Europe. The red jagged diagonal cross (the Burgundy cross) was the flag of Spain's viceroyalties and armies. Today's Spanish red and yellow come from a naval flag chosen in 1785 by King Charles III as "easy to tell apart at sea". Portugal changed to the republican green (hope) and red (blood) in the revolution of 1910. Monaco's red and white are the colors of its ruling Grimaldi family, the same two colors as Indonesia's flag. Cyprus was founded by Greeks and Turks together, so it chose "neither Greek blue nor Turkish red, neither cross nor crescent", and shows the island and olive branches for peace. The island is copper-colored: Cyprus has mined copper since ancient times. The 12 stars of the European Union's flag are not the number of members: 12 stands for completeness, like the 12 months of a year, and the circle for unity.


Venice (1600)


Vatican City


Catalonia


Spain (1580)


Spain


Portugal (1800)


Portugal


Monaco


Cyprus


European Union (EU)

12. Sun disc and taegukgi — disc flags

Japan's red sun disc is an old sign, but Japan had no national flag in the Edo period; the disc was chosen in 1854 as a ship's mark to tell Japanese ships from foreign ones. In Korea, flag-making began after an awkward moment in talks with Japan in 1876, when Korea had no flag to show; the result was the taegukgi. It became the flag of the Korean Empire, and today's South Korea keeps it. Bangladesh's flag comes from its independence war of 1971; it deliberately avoided Pakistan's crescent and star and put a red disc on green, also an Islamic color. Palau's golden disc is not the sun but the full moon.


Japan (Edo shogunate) (1700)


Empire of Japan (1942)


Japan

Korean Empire (1900)

South Korea

Bangladesh

Palau

13. China's changing flags

Ming China had no national flag (the picture is a modern guess). The first national flag was made in the Qing period: a dragon on yellow, the emperor's color, the "Yellow Dragon Flag". The five-color flag of the Republic of China (1912) stood for five peoples—red for the Han, yellow for the Manchus, blue for the Mongols, white for Muslims (Uyghurs and others), black for Tibetans—with the wish that "five peoples become one nation". Manchukuo's flag was a rework of it. From 1928 the Republic of China used the flag of "blue sky, white sun, red earth"; after moving to Taiwan in 1949, Taiwan has kept this flag. The five-star red flag of China, born the same year, is in the next group, "Red flags and stars".

Ming (1600)

Qing (1790)

Republic of China (1912)

Manchukuo (1940)

Republic of China (1928)※

Taiwan

Tibet (1930)

Hong Kong

14. Red flag and star — socialist countries

Red flags were raised by workers in 19th-century Europe demanding equality and became the sign of socialism. The Soviet Union put a sickle, a hammer and a star on its red flag, and like-minded countries followed with red flags and stars. On China's flag the big star is the Communist Party, the four small stars the people. Vietnam's star has five points: intellectuals, farmers, workers, traders and soldiers. North Korea chose a red-star flag in 1948 instead of the taegukgi. Mongolia gave up socialism in 1992 and removed its star.

Soviet Union (1962)

China

Vietnam

North Korea

Mongolia

15. Other Asian flags

India's flag began with a design Gandhi asked for: red (Hindus) and green (Muslims) with a spinning wheel; noticing that other faiths were left out, white for peace was added. Sri Lanka's flag at independence showed only the lion; stripes for the Tamil minority (orange) and Muslims (green) were added later. Indonesia's red and white go back to a 13th-century kingdom and match Monaco's two colors. Nearly 90% of Indonesians are Muslim, but there is no state religion and the constitution treats several religions as equal; more than 300 ethnic groups live under the motto "Unity in Diversity". Rescue societies in Muslim-majority countries usually use the red crescent; Indonesia is one of the few that keeps the red cross. Singapore's crescent means "a young country on the rise" and its stars democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality, with no link to Islam. Nepal's is the only national flag that is not a rectangle. Thailand changed from an elephant flag to a tricolor in 1917 after the king saw the elephant flag hung upside down, the story goes.

India

Sri Lanka

Indonesia

Singapore

Nepal

Thailand

Myanmar

Cambodia

Philippines

South Vietnam (1970)

16. Flags of independence in Latin America

The yellow, blue and red of Gran Colombia come from a tricolor raised by the independence leader Miranda in 1806; Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, which split from it, keep them. Light blue and white come from a flag made by an Argentine general in 1812 and spread across South America. The Central American Federation, helped by Argentine independence forces, took the colors, and the five countries born from its breakup still use them. Uruguay, once united with Argentina, inherited the light blue and white and the "Sun of May". Paraguay's flag has different arms on its two sides. Brazil's green and yellow are the colors of the emperor's and empress's families; the blue circle is the sky on the morning the republic was born, with a star for each state. Panama and Chile, helped by the US at independence, have flags said to echo the Stars and Stripes. Mexico's green, white and red are not from the French tricolor but the colors of its independence army.

Gran Colombia (1823)

Colombia

Venezuela

Argentina

Central American Federation (1830)

Uruguay

Paraguay

Empire of Brazil (1880)

Brazil

Panama

Chile

Mexico

Peru