

2001 State/Provincial Flag Survey

The full report of this survey was published as:

Edward B. Kaye, "Good Flag, Bad Flag, and the Great NAVA Flag Survey of 2001," *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, vol. 8 (2001), p. 11-38.

Summary:

In 2001, the North American Vexillological Association conducted a poll on its website, asking its members and the public their opinions of flag designs in the U.S. and Canada.

Responses came in from 100 NAVA members and over 300 members of the public in 20 countries. Participants rated 72 flags on their design qualities (rather than on political, historical, or geographic considerations) on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 was the best score. They were asked to rely on their personal sense of good flag design in rating the flags, which appeared on the web page. They cast well over 29,000 individual votes.

Association members favored strong, simple, distinctive flags, choosing New Mexico, Texas, and Quebec in first, second and third place, all with scores above 8. They scorned the "seal-on-a-bedsheet" design common to more than half of U.S. state flags, forcefully relegating those flags to the bottom of the heap with scores averaging less than 4

One flag drew far more attention than all others did. NAVA members and the public both gave the new Georgia flag the lowest score—2.4 points—by the largest margin of any flag. Some even asked to give it negative points. They disparaged Georgia's flag as "a scalawag", "desolating", "simply awful", "hideous", and "by far the ugliest". Its complex design violates all the principles of good flag design, incorporating a seal, lettering, and a series of miniature historic flags (in incorrect order). One person derided it as "Five Flags Under Georgia".

Canadian flags fared significantly better than U.S. flags, with an average score of 6 points versus 5. Canada's provincial flags generally avoid seals and tend towards more simple designs.

The state-seal-on-a-blue-background design of so many U.S. state flags dates back to the 19th century adoption of regimental flags to represent the states. They are relatively indistinguishable from each other at any distance, except perhaps Oregon's flag, which is the only one to have a different design on the back.

Texas briefly led the results after the Association's president mentioned the survey in a radio interview on Texas Flag Day. But the three-day flurry of responses (likely from Texans) was eventually diluted by other responses and Texas sank back into second place. Others betrayed their partisanship in their comments, such as "Long live the green flag" from a Washingtonian.

10 Best Flags:

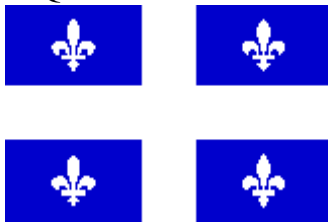
1. New Mexico



2. Texas



3. Quebec



4. Maryland



5. Alaska



10 Worst Flags:

63. New Hampshire



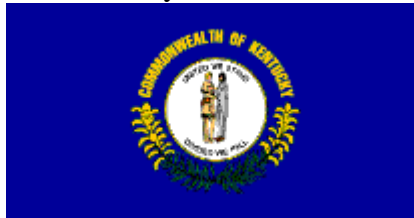
64. Idaho



65. Wisconsin



66. Kentucky



67. Minnesota



6. Arizona



68. South Dakota



7. Puerto Rico



69. Kansas



8. District of Columbia



70. Montana



9. Marshall Islands



71. Nebraska



10. South Carolina



72. Georgia



The public's overall responses paralleled those of the Association's members quite closely, with the public tending to score flags a half-point lower, on average. As might be expected, the public's scores dispersed a bit more broadly, with a slightly higher standard deviation. Their insightful comments showed a strong intuitive grasp of flag design and confirmed the Association's expert opinions on design principles. One doesn't need to be a flag expert to know a good flag design.

In a surprise result, the combined Association-public rankings handed the top flags a three-way tie, with less than 1/100th of a point separating their scores (that margin is so small that one person changing his vote could alter the first-place score).

The survey, quite possibly the first of its kind conducted entirely over the Internet, lasted three-and-a-half months, and has contributed new insights into the public perception of flags and their design. Edward B. Kaye, editor of the Association's scholarly journal, designed the survey and Richard Gideon, webmaster, designed the survey page.

Representative Survey Comments

A flag should be the simplest possible design consistent with bearing a unique, easily distinguished identity...those with complex detail in their composition defeat the purpose of a flag.

The main purpose of a flag is identification. Yet half of the [U.S.] states have flags that to the untrained eye, or from a distance, look identical.

Simple flags, clear colors, not too busy. Shields on fields are bad.

... a flag which needs to indicate its significance by spelling out the state signified...is defeating the very purpose of a flag, that is, to signal "visually" without need of written signs.

A 'good' design for a flag, in my opinion, is one that can be identified at a glance (even in a stiff breeze!) and which is easy for, e.g., school students to sketch... everyone ought to be able to draw those flags that have significance for them.

All British colonial flags (e.g. Ontario) should go.

The blue-coloured flags remind me of the former Soviet republics' flags. (comment from Sweden)

Recognition, simplicity, color, and uniqueness make, in my opinion, a pleasing design.

... the new Georgia state flag certainly is a shame to any flag designer. What a mess!

The whole purpose of flags, I thought, was to distinguish one from another.

Survey Scores[10 = high]

1	New Mexico	8.61
2	Texas	8.13
3	Quebec	8.04
4	Maryland	7.97
5	Alaska	7.96

6	Arizona	7.92
7	Puerto Rico	7.66
8	District of Columbia	7.48
9	Marshall Islands	7.19
10	South Carolina	7.16
11	Hawaii	7.15
12	Nova Scotia	7.06
13	California	7.00
14	Tennessee	6.98
15	Ohio	6.87
16	Colorado	6.83
17	Nunavut	6.72
18	New Brunswick	6.68
19	F. S. Micronesia	6.45
20	Labrador	6.45
21	Prince Edward Island	6.30
22	Mississippi	6.30
23	Wyoming	6.28
24	British Columbia	6.28
25	Newfoundland	6.24
26	Saskatchewan	6.22
27	American Samoa	6.16
28	Rhode Island	6.12
29	Alabama	6.06
30	Northwest Territories	5.89
31	Yukon	5.86
32	Indiana	5.77
33	North Carolina	5.34
34	Florida	5.17
35	Alberta	5.00
36	Louisiana	4.98
37	Virgin Islands	4.94
38	Massachusetts	4.78
39	Oklahoma	4.78
40	Guam	4.77
41	N. Mariana Islands	4.73
42	Iowa	4.72
43	Ontario	4.64

44	Manitoba	4.60
45	Arkansas	4.59
46	New Jersey	4.57
47	Washington	4.53
48	Missouri	4.50
49	Illinois	4.38
50	Connecticut	4.32
51	West Virginia	4.16
52	Delaware	4.08
53	New York	3.93
54	Virginia	3.93
55	Nevada	3.88
56	North Dakota	3.69
57	Pennsylvania	3.69
58	Utah	3.47
59	Michigan	3.46
60	Maine	3.39
61	Vermont	3.37
62	Oregon	3.30
63	New Hampshire	3.18
64	Idaho	3.17
65	Wisconsin	3.16
66	Kentucky	3.16
67	Minnesota	3.13
68	South Dakota	3.12
69	Kansas	3.01
70	Montana	3.00
71	Nebraska	2.98
72	Georgia	2.36

Countries Represented

- Argentina
- Austria
- Belgium
- Canada
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Finland
- France

- Germany
- Hungary
- Israel
- Italy
- Latvia
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Portugal
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- United States

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