1998

International Dateline - How Many Countries Are There in the World?

Jeffrey M. Wilhite
University of Oklahoma

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3018

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
International Dateline — How Many Countries Are There in the World?

by Jeffrey M. Wilhite (Asst. Prof. of Bibliography and Government Documents, Reference Librarian, U. of Oklahoma) <Jeffrey M. Wilhite@styx.services.ou.edu>

Opening

"How many countries are there in the world?" This is a question much more easily asked than answered. On first thought, it would be assumed a reliable reference source would be able to answer the question immediately and directly. This is not true. The question must first be broken down into its three most possible variations. Then comparison of organizational country lists and private source guides is necessary. After consulting the United Nations Member States list, the United States Department of State Independent States in the World list, The World of Learning, and the Statesman's Year-Book, one can find an accurate answer to this seemingly simple question and its variations.

Defining the Question

The question must first be defined to determine what information is being requested. The first step in this process is to define a country and differentiate it from a principality. The term country is often used synonymously with nation or independent state although these definitions will sometimes differ slightly. A country is defined in a number of ways: for example, as a tract of land or region, lacking precisely defined boundaries, viewed geographically or aesthetically; as the territory of a nation; as the native land of an individual person; and as a rural area as opposed to an urban area. A nation is defined as the largest social unit of people united by common culture and consciousness, generally linked by common descent, historical, ethnic, and possibly linguistic ties, having common interests of place and land, usually recognized as a separate, political entity. An independent state, according to the United States of America Department of State, refers to a people politically organized into a sovereign state with a definite territory recognized as independent by the USA. Whereas the terms country, nation, and independent state can be used interchangeably, the term principality is not. A principality, also known as a dependent area, encompasses a broad category of political entities that fall in some way within the jurisdiction of a nation. Although principalities sometimes appear to fall under the definition of a country, they are not. Some prime examples of principalities, with controlling nations in parentheses, are: Guam (USA), Hong Kong (China), Scotland (U.K.), Northern Ireland (U.K.) and Greenland (Denmark).

The second step in defining the question of how many countries there are in the world involves deciding what information the questioner is actually desiring. The important difference to note is whether the questioner is wanting the exact number of defined countries in the world, the number of defined countries and major principalities, or the number of defined countries and all of the principalities in the world. Each of these questions asks a different question and has a specifically different answer. The goal of this article will be to answer all three questions.

Factors

Once the concepts of a country/nation/independent state and principality are defined, the next step is to review the factors which stand in the way of finding a concise and contemporary list of all the current countries and principalities of the world. The two main factors to be considered in this area are new countries/principalities and countries/principalities with recently-changed names. Newly recognized countries/principalities are not limited to only those areas which have recently been created but also to areas which have recently been officially recognized by the USA or the United Nations (UN). Some of the most currently recognized countries are: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992), Croatia (1992), Slovenia (1992), and Palau (1994). The second factor to consider is countries/principalities which have recently changed their names because of wars, unions, or for political reasons. Prime examples of this include: Burma changing to Myanmar (1989) and Zaire changing to The Democratic Republic of the Congo (1997). These two factors must be taken into consideration before a compilation of all the countries and principalities of the world is attempted.

Sources

The most important point to remember in checking sources for this question is how current are the resources. The sources must be current to keep up with the changing number of countries and principalities in the world. For the following article, the sources used were: the United Nations Member States list, January, 1998, the United States Department of State Independent States in the World list, March, 1998, and 1998 World of Learning, and 1997-1998 Statesman’s Year-Book.

The four sources fall into two categories: organizational lists and private source lists. The USA, as one of the largest political powers in the world, and the UN, as the largest political organization in the world, publish lists of the countries that they recognize in an official capacity. The lists are not identical, as the agendas of the two organizations are different. The list published by the USA is specific to the USA's political vision, just as the UN’s list is. The private resources list as many countries and principalities as they can locate. World of Learning and Statesman’s Year-Book are both exemplary sources of international information. World of Learning began in 1948 and centers on education in the world. In the process of presenting educational directory information, World of Learning also paints a complete picture of the world, its countries, and its principalities. Statesman’s Year-Book began in 1864 and is one of the most long-standing resources for political and international research.

The value of the organizational lists is to show the political stance of the USA and the UN in the realm of the world. I believe the value of the private source lists is to balance the two politically motivated lists. The two organizational lists will answer the question of how many exact countries there are in the world, but only a review of the two organizational lists and the two private source lists will generate a partial to full list of exact countries and principalities.

The total number of listed possibilities from all four sources is 235 countries/principalities.

The United States Department of State Independent States in the World list

The list of USA’s Independent States in the World lists 190 countries. The USA does not recognize any principalities except through the controlling country. The USA list also has a number of interesting facts: Burma is still recognized by the name of Burma and not the new name of Myanmar; Vatican City is recognized and referred to as the Holy See; The Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are both referred to as Congo; and because of diplomatic relations with China, Taiwan is not considered a country but as a part of China.

The United Nations Member States list

The United Nations Member States list cites 185 countries. The UN also does not recognize any principalities, only the controlling country. The UN list, with five less than the USA list, is missing the following non-UN members: Kiribati, Switzerland, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vatican City. Other differences between these two lists include the UN’s recognition of Burma as Myanmar and the identification of The Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Other continued on page 89
World of Learning

The 1998 World of Learning lists 197 entries. The World of Learning lists countries as well as most of the principalities. Besides listing 176 of the 190 USA listed countries, the World of Learning also lists 21 additional principalities, including Aruba, Nauru, Reunion, and Taiwan. Variations in the World of Learning list tend to follow the UN list. There are some additional variations, including China listed as The People's Republic of China and Hong Kong and Taiwan listed under China. Spelling variations may also differ, with Macao represented on the World of Learning list as Macau.

Statesman's Year-Book

The 1997-1998 Statesman's Year-Book lists 233 entries. The Statesman's Year-Book lists all of the major countries and almost all of the principalities in the world. Out of the 235 possibilities, the only entries not included in the Statesman's Year-Book are: Aland Island, Israeli-Occupied Territory and Emerging Palestine Autonomous Areas, Malta, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire is still listed). This index does contain more country and principality references than any of the other three sources. Only a few of the Statesman's Year-Book listings are given here, including some rather esoteric principalities: Anguilla, The Falkland Islands, Pitcairn Island, and Vojvodina. Name variations also continue: Gambia is referred to as The Gambia, Bosnia and Herzegovina are referred to as Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Vatican City as Vatican City State.

Final Decisions

The final decision as to how many countries there are in the world, per the four sources, is answered differently for each of the three variations of the question asked.

1. How many countries are there in the world?
   *criteria: include the country if it appears in the USA and/or the UN list.

2. How many countries and major principalities are there in the world?
   *criteria: include the country if it appears in the USA and/or the UN list — *criteria: include the principalities that appear in both World of Learning and The Statesman's Year-Book.

3. How many country and total principalities are there in the world?
   *criteria: include the country if it appears in the USA and/or the UN list — *criteria: include the principalities that appear in either World of Learning or The Statesman's Year-Book.

According to the country criteria, there are 184 countries recognized by both the USA and the UN. The two countries with recently changed names (Burma changed to Myanmar and Zaire changed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo), negate two country options. There are six other countries acknowledged by either the USA or UN:

Only Recognized by USA: Kiribati, Switzerland, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vatican City

Only Recognized by UN: Myanmar (US still recognized Burma by the name Burma)

This puts the final tally at 190 country entries. This answers the original question, without including the principalities.

There are a total of 45 principalities. According to the principality criteria, 19 of these appear in both publications: Aruba, Bermuda, Faroe Islands, French Guiana, French Polynesia, Gibraltar, Greenland, Guadeloupe, Guam, Hong Kong, Macao, Martinique, Nauru, Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Puerto Rico, Reunion, Taiwan, Virgin Islands. Twenty-six principalities appear in only one of the private source lists: Aldia Islands, Anguilla, Antarctic Territories, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Channel Islands, Falkland Islands, Isle of Man, Israeli-Occupied Territory and Emerging Palestine Autonomous Areas, Kosovo & Metohija, Mayotte, Montenegro, Montserrat, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Pitcairn Island, Saint Helena, Saint Pierre & Miquelon, Samoa (American),

continued on page 93

---

Endnotes


---

ERASMUS

Your Supplier for European Books

Please send your orders and inquiries to:

Erasmus BV
PO. Box 19140
1000 GC Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31-20-627 69 52
Fax: +31-20-620 67 99
E-mail: erasmus@erasmusbv.nl
Internet: http://www.erasmusbv.nl

For books from France:
Librairie Erasmus
28, rue Basfro.
75011 Paris, France
Tel.: +33-1-4348 03 20
Fax: +33-1-4348 14 24
E-mail: erasmus@erasmus.fr

---

Against the Grain / November 1998

<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 89
collective index processing, registry numbers are updated or corrected. In short, the CI offers access to the same full range of information that can be found in the ten six-month indexes, with updates and corrections (See CHMINF-1@listerv.indiana.edu/ChemAbstractsIndexes, June 29, 1993).

For the reasons given above the University of Akron has chosen to withdraw the indexes once the complete set of the Collective Index has arrived. In fact, if responses from the Chemical Information Discussion List are any indication, most libraries withdraw them. However, caution must be taken when removing the archive to be sure that the full set has arrived. Some libraries have mistakenly withdrawn the semi-annual pieces before the entire set arrives, leaving them short-handed.

After several attempts to find an alternative "home" for the semi-annual indexes, we now routinely discard them in the trash. Unfortunately, since we bind all volume indexes, except for the fifth year pieces, recycling them is not an option. As an alternative to discarding them, libraries may want to consider donating them to libraries in third world countries. The American Chemical Society has a service entitled Project Bookshare which is charged with collecting chemistry textbooks and journals from donors and making these materials available to libraries in selected small U.S. colleges and to university libraries in developing countries. They will accept volumes of CA, but all donations must be approved before shipment. Also, the donor must assume shipping charges. (For information about Project Bookshare, see http://www.acs.org/memgen/intlactv/prhome.htm).

continued on page 22

The American Symphony
Neil Butterworth

"This volume is a mine of information and it fills an important gap in the musician's bookshelf." — Dr. Robert Layton, editor of A Guide to the Symphony (OUP, 1995)

In the first book to focus on the American symphony, Neil Butterworth surveys the development of the symphony in the United States and discusses the influences on the symphony from the last century to the present day. Complete with a comprehensive catalogue of symphonies and an extensive discography, this book is an indispensable reference work.


For more information on The American Symphony or any Ashgate title please check out our website:

www.ashgate.com

International Dateline
from page 89

Serbia, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, Turks & Caicos Islands, Voivodina, Wallis & Futuna, and Western Sahara. This puts the final tally at 209 for countries and major principalities, and 235 for countries and all principalities.

The Answers to all the Questions
After all of the searching, the answers to the three variations of the question, "How many countries are there in the world?" can be answered in one of three ways:

1. How many countries are there in the world? 190
2. How many countries and major principalities are there in the world? 209
3. How many country and total principalities are there in the world? 235

So, that answers the original question and its three possible variations.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

33 ABC Club 11, 13 Bowker 75 Lindsay and Howe
49 Absolute Backorder Service 15, 95 Bowker 61 Majors
17 Academic Book Center 39 Carnal LIB 67 Martinus Nijhoff
27 Agents 81 Choice 96 Midwest Library Service
79 ACM 47 Community of Science 63 Oxford University Press
2 Alfred A. Knopf 37 Courts 53 Primary Source Media
61 American Chemical Society 91 Eastern Book Company 51 UMI
43 Am Institute of Physics 35 EBSCO Subscription Ser 9 UnCover
67 American Mathematical Society 69 Elsevier Science 57 Schnellehoff Foreign Books
93 Asheate 55 Emery Pratt 29 Swets
5 ATG 89 Erasmus 83 Walter de Gruyter, Inc.
91 Aux Amateurs De Livres 31 Faxon 19, 65 Wiley
3 Blackwell's Book Service 77 Institute of Physics 45 YBP
59 Book House 41, 83 Klumer Academic

Ad Manager: Edna Laughrey Internet: elahedge@msn.com phone: 734-429-1029; fax: 734-429-1711