

(measured top to bottom at the hoist) to the length of the flag (the distance from the hoist to the fly). Most of the flags of Russia's federal subjects use one of two proportions—1:2 or 2:3. Nearly a quarter use the ratio of 1:2, the proportions of the old Soviet flag. However, over the years a number of federal subjects have changed their flags to 2:3, the proportions of the current Russian tricolor, so that today the majority of Russia's subnational flags match the proportions of the national flag. Two of the federal subjects use unique proportions: the Republic of Chuvashia (5:8) and Penza Oblast (1:1.6).

Colors Used in the Flags

No study of flags would be complete without a discussion of the colors used. Color is so significant that many flags use color alone for their symbolism. Determining which colors to count was not as easy as it might sound. One possible technique would have been to count only "field" colors, but this presented some issues. For example, consider a flag with a triangle at the hoist and two stripes at the fly—is the triangle a symbol or would that color count? What about the color of a large cross that extends to all four sides of the flag? A number of the flags include scalloped or wavy stripes representing water. Are these stripes symbols or are they part of the field? In some cases (such as that of Leningrad Oblast) it is clear that the wavy stripes are more than symbols; they are intended to present the image of a striped field. And what about fimbriation colors—should they be counted? The federal subjects tend to assign meaning to all the colors used, demonstrating that they are considered important to the design. So, rather than approaching the question strictly as a vexillologist, it was posed from the perspective of residents of the federal subject—if asked about the colors of their flag, what would they say? Using this point of view, all of the principal colors used in the fields of the flags were counted—those used in solid backgrounds, all stripes in the field, hoist triangles, crosses, and scalloped/wavy lines. Colors used in arms, symbols, and disks (since they are part of the symbols) were not counted. For example, the rainbow on the flag of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast was considered to be a symbol, rather than seven stripes, based on the consistency across various descriptions where the flag was described as white with a rainbow and color meanings were not assigned to the individual rainbow colors.

The flags of the federal subjects demonstrate variety in the number of colors used. 17 flags (21%) have only one color in their fields. Bicolored flags total 22, or 27% of all the flags. The influence of the national flag might well explain the number of flags which use three colors—35, or 43%. Finally, 7 flags (9%) use four or more colors.

Colors Used	Flags	Percentage
One	17	21%
Two	22	27%
Three	35	43%
Four or more	7	9%

Figure 4. Number of colors used.

Color choice in flags is influenced by a variety of factors. In every culture certain colors have specific significance and symbolism. This is true in ethnic Russian culture as well as in the cultures of Russia's many minority groups. Historical influences can also affect the color choice. The colors used in many flags of the federal subjects have been influenced by past flags of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and by the current national flag of the Russian Federation. Each region of Russia has chosen its own flag colors, and each has assigned specific meanings or significance to those colors. While there is a great variety of meaning assigned to each color, and some meanings are assigned to more than one color, a number of trends emerged when the color symbolism was examined.

Color	Flags	Percentage
Red	55	69%
Blue	48	59%
White	45	56%
Green	25	31%
Yellow	16	20%
Black	3	4%
Silver	3	4%

Figure 5. Color usage in flags of the Federal Subjects.

Not surprisingly, red is used in the most flags—55 flags, or 69% of flag designs. For centuries, red has been an important color in ethnic Russian culture and has become the color most frequently used to represent the Russian people. In the Russian language the word for red is *krasnyi*, which originally meant “fair” or “beautiful”. In modern Russian it now shares a root with the words *krasota* and *krasivyi* which mean “beauty” and “beautiful”. For this reason, red has long been associated with beauty. Some flags also use red to represent love, feelings, mercy, and magnanimity. In some cases, red symbolizes labor, industry, economic devel-

opment, and progress. For other flags it might stand for democracy and authority, or even antiquity and continuity. Red can also be used to symbolize creation, the sun, fire, warmth, energy, life, health, maturity, and vitality. Probably the most significant meaning of red in the flags is its association with defense of the homeland. On many flags red represents the blood spilled in specific battles fought on the territory, heroism of the veterans, and defense preparedness. Red is historically tied to traits such as strength, masculinity, courage, bravery, fearlessness, boldness, selflessness, steadfastness, loyalty, and military valor. The importance of red has been a consistent force in Russian symbolism throughout history. It was an important color in the symbols of Muscovy, it was used during the height of Russian Empire, it was the dominant color in the symbolism of the Soviet Union, and it is still used heavily today.⁹

Blue is also popular in Russian subnational flags, used in 48 flags (59%). Like red, blue has long-standing status in the national symbolism of Russia. It was used in flags of Russia during the imperial period and in the flag of the Russian SFSR during the Soviet period. Unlike most languages, Russian has two distinctive words for “blue”—*sinii*, meaning dark blue; and *goluboi*, meaning light blue. In the flag descriptions, most federal subjects distinguish between the two blues, using either one or the other. Of the 48 flags that use blue, 30 use *sinii*, 14 use *goluboi*, and 4 designate their shade of blue as *lazurnyi* (meaning “azure”). Some, however, list multiple blues in their descriptions indicating that the exact shade can vary. To complicate matters, one flag’s *sinii* can resemble another flag’s *goluboi*, resulting in a wide variety of blues.¹⁰ There are a number of meanings assigned to the color blue in the flag symbolism of the federal subjects. One of the most common is to use blue to represent parts of the natural environment such as the sky or bodies of water—rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans. Blue is also used to represent concepts such as beauty, love, happiness, well-being, peace, harmony, calmness, gentleness, hope, and freedom. In addition, blue is used to symbolize purity,

9. Alexander and Barbara Pronin, *Russian Folk Arts* (South Brunswick, N.J.: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1975) p. 153; N. M. Shanskii, *Russian Word Formation* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968), p. 39; Catherine A. Wolkonsky and Marianna A. Poltoratzky, *Handbook of Russian Roots* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 161-163; Virve Sarapik, “Red: the Colour and the Word”, *Folklore* v. 3 (1997), <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol3/red.htm>, p. [13], accessed 17 July 2008; Olga Dmitrieva, “Color Associations”, *Color Matters*, <http://www.colormatters.com/research/ColorAssociations.pdf>, accessed 17 July 2008.

10. Another complication is the usage of *goluboi* in post-Soviet Russian slang to mean “homosexual”. Perhaps the official descriptions have avoided this connotation by stating the color is *sinii*, while still using a light-blue color in their flags.

cleanliness, chastity, lofty aspirations, honor, virtue, honesty, sincerity, fairness, faithfulness, loyalty, and respect.¹¹

White (*belyi*) is the third most popular color used in the flags of the federal subjects. It often represents cleanliness or purity, either of the natural environment or of the thoughts and intentions of the people. Other concepts symbolized by white are peace, love, happiness, tranquility, modesty, morality, innocence, truth, frankness, perfection, wisdom, nobility, honor, honesty, or well-being. In the Buddhist regions, it is often used to represent the milk or dairy products central to cultural practices and purification ceremonies. Concepts such as heaven, spirituality, and good are also associated with white. In many flags across the Russian Federation white is used to represent aspects of the natural environment such as light, the fragility of the land, snowy open spaces, the long, harsh Russian winters, and the northern regions in general.

Red, blue, and white are the national colors of Russia. The three colors are said to come from the arms of Moscow—red is the field color of the shield in the arms, St. George's horse is white, and his cape is blue. Using these established colors, Peter I (the Great) designed the first Russian white/blue/red tricolors as naval flags in the late 1690s. The Russian tricolor gained official status as the national flag in 1705. In Russian, this flag is sometimes referred to as *BESIK*, an acronym for the order of the colors in Russian (*belyi*, *sinii*, and *krasnyi*). Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the tricolor was officially adopted as the flag of the Russian Federation. In vexillology white, blue, and red have become known as the “Pan-Slavic colors” because the Russian tricolor influenced the flags of many other Slavic countries. Just as Peter's tricolored flag influenced other Slavic flags, its influence can also be seen on a number of the federal subjects' flags. Most notable are those of Leningrad Oblast and Ulyanovsk Oblast which both use modified Russian tricolors as the fields of their flags, with the lower stripes scalloped to rep-

11. Jonathan Winawer, Nathan Witthoft, Michael C. Frank, Lisa Wu, Alex R. Wade, and Lera Boroditsky, “Russian Blues Reveal Effects of Language on Color Discrimination”, *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, v. 104 #19 (May 8, 2007), p. 7780-7785, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0701644104>, accessed 17 July 2008; Greville Corbett and Gerry Morgan, “Colour Terms in Russian: Reflections of Typological Constraints in a Single Language”, *Journal of Linguistics*, v. 24 (1988), p. 31-64; Galina V. Paramei, “Singing the Russian Blues: An Argument for Culturally Basic Color Terms”, *Cross-Cultural Research*, v. 39 (2005), p. 10-38, <http://ccr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstracts/39/1/10>, accessed 17 July 2008; Brian James Baer, “Engendering Suspicion: Homosexual Panic in the Post-Soviet Detektiv”, *Slavic Review*, v. 64 #1 (Spring 2005), p. 24-42.

resent waves. In all, the three national colors are the basis for 11 flags (14%), and have been combined with at least one additional color in 6 flags (7%).¹²

In addition, some federal subjects have shown their unity with Russia by using the color combinations of two other historic Russian flags which use just two of the three colors. The first of these is the flag of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, which was red with a blue stripe at the hoist. Three current flags—those of Altai Krai, Kemerovo Oblast, and Vladimir Oblast—use the Russian SFSR flag as the basis of their designs. Two federal subjects (Kostroma Oblast and Voronezh Oblast) originally had flags of this type, but have since redesigned their flags. In all, the red/blue color combination is used in 15 flags (19%), often in combination with other colors. The second historical influence is the *Andreevskii* flag (white with a blue St. Andrew's cross)—the historic and current naval flag. Blue and white are combined (often with other colors) in 13 flags or 16% of the federal subjects. Many of these regions specifically cite this combination as representing their unity with the Russian Federation. The most notable examples of blue/white flags are those of the Altai Republic (which consists simply of blue and white stripes), and Arkhangelsk Oblast (which is based on the *Andreevskii* flag). In all, 45 of the 81 flags (56%) appear to have derived colors from the current and historic flags of Russia.¹³

After the national colors, the next most popular color is green (*zelënyi*). A number of flags use green almost certainly because of its status as the traditional color of Islam. While it is difficult to get an exact count of practicing Muslims in Russia, in eight republics Islam is either the religion of the majority or there is a significant Muslim population—Bashkortostan and Tatarstan in the Volga-Urals region and Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia in the Northern Caucasus region. The flags of all these republics include green. In other parts of Russia, green is used to represent the natural world—life, flora, the steppe, the taiga, meadows, fields, and forests. It is the color of spring and summer, so important after the long Russian winter.

12. Evghennii Vladimirovich Pchelov, "Gosudarstvennyi flag", in *Gosudarstvennye simvoly Rossii: gerb, flag, gimn* (Moskva: Russkoe slovo, 2004) p. 81-102; "Flag Rossiiskoi iperii", *Vexillographia: Flagi Rossii*, <http://www.vexillographia.ru/russia/index.htm>, accessed 16 July 2008; Viktor Nikolaevich Saprykov, *Gosudarstvennaia simvolika regionov Rossii* (Moskva: Parad, 2006) p. 4-7; "Russia", *FOTW Flags of the World*, <http://www.crwflags.com/FOTW/flags/ru.htm>, accessed 16 July 2008.

13. *Ibid.*

Green also represents concepts such as life, hope, plenty, freedom, peace, revival, renewal, friendship, brotherhood, joy, health, fertility, prosperity, stability, youth, vitality, wisdom, and eternal life.¹⁴

Another color with some religious significance is yellow (*zhěltyi*). Like Islam in the Muslim republics, Buddhism has also played a role in color choices for the republics where that religion is practiced by the majority of the population. Most Buddhists in Russia practice Tibetan Buddhism, in which yellow has great religious significance. All three of the Buddhist republics—Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva—have yellow in their flags. In other parts of the Russian Federation, yellow and gold are often considered synonymous in the descriptions of the flags. A number of meanings have been assigned to yellow/gold—peace, prosperity, spirituality, faith, happiness, health, well-being, wisdom, and knowledge. Because of its association with the color of ripe grain and the precious metal gold, yellow is frequently used to represent a rich harvest, abundance, prosperity, fertility, wealth, mineral resources, and good fortune. It is also used to symbolize greatness, power, durability, and constancy.¹⁵

Two other colors have been used in the flags of the federal subjects—black (*chěrnyi*) and silver (*serebrianyi*). Black represents stability, the land, and underground mineral wealth. It also symbolizes *chernozēm*—the rich black topsoil of central European Russia. In the portrayal of the flags, silver is often considered synonymous with white. It represents the concepts of light and purity of thoughts.

The colors used in the flags of the federal subjects reflect the diversity of the many regions of Russia, but they also link many of the regional flags to the country's history. In all, the array of subnational flags is both colorful and distinctive. The meanings assigned to these colors are equally diverse.

14. Galina M. Yemelianova, "Russia", in *Muslim Cultures Today* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006) pp. 147-148; U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2007", <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90196.htm> (14 September 2007), accessed 21 July 2008.

15. "Republic of Bashkortostan", p. 175-179; "Republic of Kalykiya", p. 148-150; "Republic of Tyva", p. 244-246. in *The Territories of the Russian Federation 2007*.