

The North American Vexillological Association Has An Ethics Problem

The North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) is one of fifty-or-so member organisations of the Fédération Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques (FIAV), also known in English-speaking countries as the International Federation of Vexillological Associations. In mid-October of 2024, the bogus announcement below was sent to the e-mail addresses of nearly all of the FIAV member organisations, as well as to several prominent individuals in the vexillological community.

ANNOUNCING THE 2025
NAVA Country Flags Survey

Beginning in mid-December 2024 and continuing through the end of January 2025, members of the North American Vexillological Association will be invited to rate the designs of the flags of more than 240 countries. Participation in this historic survey will be limited to current and selected former members of NAVA*, so if you are not already a member of NAVA, join soon!

Following the precedents that were set by all of the former NAVA flag design rating surveys, participants will rate the designs of each of the country flags on a scale of zero-to-ten, based on their personal aesthetic preferences, although it is recommended that they refer to the universal flag design principles in *“Good Flag, Bad Flag”* to help them to make their decisions. Participants will be able to change their ratings until the survey closes on January 31, 2025.

After compiling the results of the survey, NAVA officials will publish them in a press release and post them to the NAVA website on February 14. In this way the survey results will also be a Valentine's Day gift to all of the countries whose flags are included in the survey, a way of affectionately apprising them of how the designs of their various flags might be improved.

To avoid the possibility of favoritism, the flag of the USA will not be included in the survey.

* So as to prevent any biases that might otherwise be factored in to the ratings of the flags.

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The World's Largest Organization of Flag Enthusiasts and Scholars

Given that the announcement fairly dripped with irony and sarcasm, one might assume that it was immediately recognised to be a satire by all of its recipients, but apparently it was a satire that proved too subtle for many of them to twig. For example, everyone at NAVA should have been keenly aware that the announcement was simply a hoax, yet curiously, NAVA secretary Ted Kaye immediately replied to it with a polite request for ‘contact information for the organisers’. About a week later, a notice was posted at the top of the homepage of the NAVA website that read: *“NAVA has learned of a recent effort to survey the designs of national flags. While the anonymous organisers purport to represent NAVA, the survey is NOT authorised by NAVA. We encourage anyone contacted about the survey to understand that NAVA has no part in it and to ignore it.”* One does not know for certain that Kaye was the author of the notice, but if not, someone else at NAVA must have been incapable of reasoning that a nonexistent survey effort *has* no ‘organisers’. On the other hand the notice may have actually been canny, since it certainly did not condemn the *idea* of a country flags survey. Stating that the survey was ‘not authorised by NAVA’, instead of simply declaring it fake, might have been a way of lending credence to the idea of an *actual* NAVA country flags survey in future, something that Kaye would probably dearly love to see take place.

The fact that many of the individuals and FIAV member organisations to whom the announcement was distributed did not recognise it to be a satirical hoax, or at least not until NAVA had posted its oddly-worded notice on its website homepage, was itself worthy of being satirised, which should

explain why the 'followup' bogus announcement below was also widely distributed, on 31st October.

**CANCELLATION NOTICE FOR THE 2025
NAVA Country Flags Survey**

The North American Vexillological Association has canceled their 2025 Country Flags Survey. The cancellation was not due to negative feedback from NAVA members, even from those living outside of America. After all, NAVA members are uniquely qualified to judge the flags of all countries, because more so than any other group of individuals they are versed in the flag design principles of *"Good Flag, Bad Flag"*, the universality of those principles being such that they allow any flag to be judged, with no knowledge of the flag's history, symbolism, or usage.

The cancellation was also not the result of backlash from vexillological organizations outside of North America. Notification of the Country Flags Survey was provided to nearly all of the 52 member organizations of the Fédération Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques (FIAV), none of whom expressed any doubts regarding the legitimacy of the survey. Indeed, their collective response to its announcement would be better exemplified by that tendered by FIAV President Emeritus Michel Lupant, who sent his *"Congratulations for the Flag Survey"*. FIAV members other than NAVA have never conducted flag rating surveys, but that does not mean they find them unethical or unsuitable, even if the flags being rated might be their own.

The survey was simply canceled due to logistics. Given all of the positive feedback that they received from its announcement, NAVA officers confirm that it will be held at some later time.

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The irony and sarcasm of this 'second dose' of satire should have been far more obvious, but its wording still seemed to fall on several wilfully deaf ears. NAVA not only continued to display their laughably oblivious website notice, but even managed to compound the absurdity of their original response by sending out an innuendo-laden, pearl-clutching questionnaire, authored by Ted Kaye: *"I'm reaching out regarding an individual who has been fraudulently impersonating NAVA and sending messages about a supposed "2025 Country Flags Survey". They claim to have engaged with our international partners and even gotten an endorsement from FIAV's president. Could you please let me know if your organisation has also received these fraudulent messages? Your input would be very helpful in assessing the impact and reach of this impersonation. Given this individual's history of bad-faith behaviour and technical proficiency, we're concerned this might be a prelude to a phishing attempt. Thanks!"*. Obviously the followup bogus announcement was the *conclusion* of the hoax, being in no way a 'prelude' to anything else, but all of its recipients are nevertheless invited to e-mail their complete banking details to phishing.attempt@tedisagit.com.

In a social media post that was dated 18 October 2024, Australian senator Ralph Babet offered the following opinion regarding the imminent U.S. presidential election: *"Anyone with half a brain would support Donald J. Trump for President."* One of the commentaries on the post included a dictionary definition of 'self-own'. One wonders how much time Mr. Babet may have required to understand the mockery that was invited by his post, assuming of course that he eventually did so. One also wonders if Ted Kaye would have glommed the accidental humour of the post any sooner. The Babet 'half a brain' anecdote is mentioned here to underscore the point that humour, whether it is intentional or not, tends to be stripped of much or all of its fun when it needs to be explained. In the case of the two announcements the fun has already been had, at least by their creator, and hopefully by some of their recipients as well, but for the purposes of this document their humour will require a bland explanation, one that will benefit from being preceded by a few definitions:

satire—the use of wit and humour, especially irony, sarcasm, and ridicule, to criticise behaviour
irony—tongue-in-cheek humour based on words that suggest the opposite of their literal meaning
sarcasm—remarks that mean the opposite of what they seem to say and are meant to mock or deride
ridicule—mockery that dismissively makes fun of something or of somebody in a contemptuous way

Limiting any survey of flag designs ‘to current and selected former members of NAVA’ would not ‘prevent biases’ but ensure them. Since at least the late 1990s, every NAVA member has been indoctrinated with the notion that “*only simple designs make effective flags*”, a false precept that sadly became more pervasive in 2001 with the first appearance of Ted Kaye’s *Good Flag, Bad Flag* in a digital format. Since 2006, every new NAVA member has received a printed copy of Kaye’s pamphlet, and PDF versions have been distributed from the NAVA website in several languages. The mistaken belief that good flags must have simple designs is a bias, so in their snap judgements of some 240 country flags, NAVA members would probably be the most biased persons on Earth.

Exempting the flag of the U.S.A. from any theoretical NAVA survey of country flags would not ‘avoid the possibility of favouritism’ but exemplify it. A group of NAVA members, using nothing but their ‘personal aesthetic preferences’ and GFBF’s irrational guidelines as criteria for judging flag designs, would be as likely to criticise the flag of the U.S.A. as the flags of any other countries, so it would be blatant favouritism to prevent the possibility of such criticisms from taking place.

There are no ‘universal flag design principles in *Good Flag, Bad Flag*’. Kaye’s pamphlet only lists his personal opinions, opinions that do not comprise ‘five principles of good flag design’, opinions that do not ‘distil the wisdom of many people who have written on the subject’, and opinions that have not been ‘compiled’ from anything more substantive than the echo chamber of Kaye’s mind.

It follows that a group of NAVA members, using only their aesthetic preferences and the baseless tenets of GFBF to evaluate the designs of the flags of over 240 countries, would be incapable of legitimately apprising those countries of ‘how the designs of their various flags might be improved’. It is incredible that NAVA members would ever *believe* themselves capable of doing so, even more incredible that they would think themselves *authorised* to do so, and more incredible still that so many others in the flag world have routinely *acquiesced* to such egregious arrogance, especially because ignoring any knowledge of the history, symbolism, and usages of the flags being judged would equate to sacrificing the fundamental principles of *any* authentic vexillological undertaking.

NAVA members are not ‘uniquely qualified to judge the flags of all countries’. They are not even uniquely qualified to judge the flags of U.S. states and cities, notwithstanding that they have previously done just that. No one is ‘qualified’ to arbitrarily judge a flag that they themselves are not personally represented by, on a scale of zero-to-ten or otherwise. Flags are symbols of peoples, and judging the symbols of peoples is no less unethical than judging those peoples themselves.

Every flag design survey that NAVA has ever conducted has been a biased, pretentious, insulting, and utterly non-scientific exercise that has served no purpose other than to put the owners of the flags at odds with each other over the meaningless resultant ratings, ratings that simply effect Kaye’s playbook item of ‘stirring up discontent’ with current flags, in a masterstroke of insidious social engineering that can be likened to CIA efforts to overthrow legitimate national governments.

Flag design surveys are subversive, offensive, illegitimate, and immoral endeavours for which only one FIAV member organisation has shown itself to have the requisite lack of an ethical compass. Before all of the other FIAV member organisations pat themselves on their backs, however, they should admit that for the best part of the last 25 years they have turned a collective blind eye to the nonsense and insulting stupidity of NAVA’s surveys and Ted Kaye’s rubbish pamphlet, and that through their complacent acceptance and tacit approval of such stupidity they have only made it more widespread. Instead, for all those years, every FIAV member organisation should have been condemning that stupidity by formally censuring Kaye and NAVA for *their* ‘bad-faith behaviour’. Whitney Smith fathered and formalised vexillology. Kaye and NAVA have managed to subvert and bastardise it. At this late date, the only adequate redress will be a total boycott of NAVA, the sole scenario related to flag design rating surveys that will be truly worthy of mention in a press release.