

Countries (and other places/references) that end in –stan

Some listings; some linguistics; and a map

Linguistic context

The suffix -stan is an anglicised version of the Persian for 'place of'. It is connected linguistically to the Pashto -tun and to -sthāna in Indo-Aryan languages. These derive from Proto-Indo-Iranian-European roots based on 'stā' meaning 'to stand; where one stands'. Its widespread use may be a result of commonly developing languages of various communities of nomadic people across central Asian areas over time.

The same root is also the source of the Latin 'stare' (to stand) and from there to English words such as stand, state and status. Other derivatives are the Russian word стан (stan) referring to settlements/camps of semi-nomadic people of Central Asia; some Slavic languages where stan originally meant 'settlement' but more recently has come to mean 'apartment' ; various Germanic languages where the root can be found in Stand and Stadt (German), stad (Dutch/Scandinavian), Stan (Polish) and stead (English; as in 'homestead').

The –stan suffix often simply meant 'land of the'. So Uzbekistan = land of the Uzbeki people; Afghanistan = land of the Afghani people; and so on. Pakistan does not follow this construction. The name Pakistan is not derived as the land of some (historical) 'Paki' people but means Land of the Pure. The difference is because Pakistan is a new, and invented, name to describe a politically-defined area and not a historical word for the traditional homelands of a single long-established cultural/ethnic group of people.

In a number of languages the –stan ending is also used more generally within everyday words: as in the Urdu rigistan (a place of sand ie desert), as in golestan (a place of roses ie rose garden); as in qabristan, (a place of graves ie cemetery or graveyard); and as in the Hindi/Sanskrit devasthan (place of devas ie temple).

Countries whose names end in -stan

In English we have seven 'obvious' recognised countries whose names end in –stan. These are:

Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

The same linguistic root also shows through in the names for different countries in other languages. For example Arabestan (Persian for Saudi Arabia), Armanestan (Persian for Armenia), Bulgaristan (Turkish for Bulgaria), Chinastan (Armenian for China), Ermenistan (Turkish for Armenia), Hunastan (Armenian for Greece), Hayastan (Armenia in Armenian), Gurjistan (Georgia in Persian and Turkish), Lehastan/ Lehestan (Armenian and Persian for Poland; and the older Ottoman use referring to the Polish empire ; derived from name of ancient Lech tribes), Macaristan (Hungary in Turkish), Parsqastan (Iran in Armenian), Rusastan (Armenian for Russia), Vrastan (Armenian for Greece) and Yunanistan (Turkish for Greece), Engelestan (Persian for England). Hirvatistan (the Turkish name for Croatia) and Sirbistan (the Turkish name for Serbia).

These are far from fixed names. There are older usages that have become obsolete. Language is an evolving thing and this is as true of names of places as for other changes in language usage.

Some regions are regarded as 'independent' by some groups but not by others. What counts as a country can be a complicated question. For a good summary the reader is referred to the Economist article 'In quite a state: How many countries in the world?' (www.economist.com/node/15868439). This describes how on one set of criteria a place may be included as a country on some lists yet be excluded on other lists (because not officially recognised by the owners of that list). Many of the regions whose names end in -stan are in areas that are diverse and multi-ethnic with boundaries that are the result of historical events. The boundaries, name, or existence of some -stans may therefore be matters for disagreements. Even for disputed territories, however, the linguistics can still apply: Chechenestan is the Persian and Turkish name for Chechenya. South Ossetia is another self-proclaimed state which has varying degrees of formal recognition. Iriston/Iristan (from aryi+stan) is a self-proclaimed name of Ossetia.

Regions/ towns whose names end in -stan (an extensive but probably incomplete list; including some descriptions that might be disputed by groups seeking independence of / or opposed to independence from certain historical arrangements)

Arabistan — refers to Arabian peninsular lands in Middle East; was also historically used in some reports to refer to Khuzestan

Ardestan — a town, founded in ancient Sassanian times, in Isfahan Province, Iran.

Avaristan — the Avari name for homeland in Western Dagestan (from C12th to C19th).

Baharestan - is an area in downtown Tehran where the Iranian Parliament is located.

Balawaristan — (balawar = highlander); another name for northern Pakistani Kashmir; alternative name for Gilgit- Baltistan).

Balochistan/ Baluchistan — regions in Iran, in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

Baltistan — a mountainous northern region in Kashmir Pakistan.

Bantustan — used to refer to Apartheid-era South African black 'homeland' areas.

Bargustan/Borgustan — an area to the north of modern Kislovodsk, Russia.

Bashkortostan (Bashkiria) — a constituent republic of Russia.

Baloristan (Gilgit-Chitral) - the name of a region of Pakistani Kashmir.

Cholistan Desert — a desert region in Punjab, Pakistan.

Dagestan —(literally "place of mountains") an ethnically-diverse, North Caucasian, constituent republic of the Russian Federation.

Dardistan — 'area inhabited by the Dards'; is a region spreading over northern Pakistan, Indian Punjab and North Eastern Afghanistan.

Dashtestan — a region in Bushehr Province, Iran.

East Pakistan (or Bangalistan / Bangistan - refers to the historic name for pre-independence Bangladesh).

Frangistan/ Frengistan/ Frankistan - a central Asian term used to refer to Western Europe in general (Based on Europeans being known as Franks).

Gulistan/Golestan - a province in northern Iran and a city in Uzbekistan.

Hazarastan/ Hazaristan - the homeland of the Hazara people in central highlands of Afghanistan.

Hindustan — (land of the Indus/ Hindus). Coined by the ancient Persians. Also used by the British ruling in the former British India when generally talking about South Asia. Now primarily refers Republic of India.

Hunistan — 'kingdom of the Huns'; in Semnon Province, Iran.

Kabulistan — ('The Kabul land'). An old term used in many historical books and old Persian literature books for an area around Kabul, larger region than today's Kabul Province.

Kafiristan — ('land of the infidels'). An historic region in Afghanistan until 1896, now known as Nuristan. A similarly named region exists in north Pakistan.

Karakalpakstan — an autonomous republic of Uzbekistan.

Khuzestan — a province of south-western Iran.

Kohistan — there are several districts with this name in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Tajikistan and in Iran.

Kurdistan — a Kurdish region spanning Eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq, North western Iran and Northern Syria.

Lazistan — a name for a region in the Caucasus; home of the Lazuri speaking people. Has been part of a series of occupations and empires. In 1922 the area was split between the then Soviet Union and Turkey.

Lorestan/ Luristan/ Larestan — a province of Iran.

Moghulistan (Mughalistan) — an historical geographic unit in Central Asia that included parts of modern-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Xinjiang.

Nuristan Province — Afghanistan; formerly was an area that was known as Kafiristan (land of the infidels) but changed its name to Nuristan (land of light) when area converted to Islam.

Pashtunistan or Pakhtunistan or Pathanistan — what many Pashtun nationalists call the Pashtun-dominated areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Registan - (meaning "place of sand") a UNESCO World Heritage Site in central Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This large open space was a public gathering area between three madrassas.

Sakastan — historically, a region of Afghanistan/ Pakistan where the Scythians or Sakas lived in the 2nd century BC.

Sarvestan — a town in Fars Province, Iran.

Seistan or Sistan — a border province between North Eastern Iran and South Western Afghanistan.

Tabaristan — an historical region along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea.

Takestan/ Takistan — a town in Qazvin Province, Iran.

Talyshistan — an ethnolinguistic region in the SE Caucasus and NW Iran.

Tangestan — a region in Bushehr Province, Iran.

Tatarstan — a constituent republic in the Volga District of the Russian Federation.

Tocharistan, Tukharistan or Tokharistan, also known as Balkh or Bactria — the ancient name of a historical region in Central Asia, located between the range of the Hindu Kush and the Amu Darya (Oxus).

Turkistan/Turkestan — an ethnolinguistic region encompassing Central Asia, northwest China, parts of the Caucasus and Asia Minor; Russian Turkestan refers to that portion of Turkestan that was in the Russian Empire, later becoming Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. There are also Afghan Turkistan and Chinese Turkistan (Xinjiang area). The city of Turkestan is in present-day Kazakhstan.

Waziristan (North and South) —semi-autonomous regions of northwest Pakistan.

Zabulistan — an historical region in the border area of today's Iran and Afghanistan, around the city Zabol.

Zanjistan, or Zenjistan — a term used in medieval texts to refer to the homeland of the Zanj, ie black slaves of East African origin, ie area around Zanzibar.

There will be many others, of varying sizes

Proposed/disputed names ending in –stan (These names are far less accepted/formalised than the ones in the list above – so may be even more contentious; and, again, is a far from complete list)

Uyghurstan/East Turkestan — a region dominated by the Turkic Uyghur people, located in the north-west of the People's Republic Of China.
Proposed ethnic name for Xinjiang, People's Republic of China

Nuristan – a proposed name for North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

Khalistan or Sikhistan - a proposed country created from areas within India with a Sikh majority. A secession movement seeking to create a separate Sikh state (including land in Punjabi speaking India and in Pakistan) unsuccessfully declared independence in 1986

Maronistan - a proposed name for Maronite state in Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War.

Saraikistan — a proposed region in southern Punjab province of Pakistan

Zazaistan – a proposed independent area where Zaza is the language of groups of people who regard themselves neither as Kurds nor as Turks – their ethnolinguistic roots being closer to Persian/Iranian/Parsi.

Uyghuristan/ Uighurstan) proposed ethnic name for Xinjiang, People's Republic of China (also referred to as East Turkestan)

Fictional/cultural references to places ending in -stan

Adjikistan – a fictional central Asian country in the videogame 'SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Combined Assault'.

Aldestan – a fictional central Asian/ Soviet country (based on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), from 'Command & Conquer: Generals'.

Ardistan – from the novel 'Ardistan and Dschinnistan' by Karl May.

Avgatiganistan – a pun of 'Afghanistan', it means 'Fried eggs' ('Avgatiganista') in Greek. Fictional country by author Eugene Trivizas.

Azadistan – from the anime series 'Mobile Suit Gundam 00'.

Bazrakhistan – a fictional former Soviet republic in the 1998 movie 'Act of War'.

Belgistan – a fictional Middle Eastern country in the anime 'Gasaraki'.

Berzerkistan – a fictional republic run by genocidal terrorist godhead and President for Life Trff Bmzklfrpz, in the comic strip Doonesbury.

Bradistan — seen in graffiti on a sign for the city of Bradford, England, in the film 'East Is East'.

Carjackistan – used occasionally in the comic strip Tank McNamara.

Derkaderkastan – a fictional Middle Eastern country in the 2004 film 'Team America: World Police'.

Dondestan, an album by Robert Wyatt. Sounds like ¿Dónde están? (Where are they?) in Spanish.

Donundestan — a fictional country in the Middle East in 'A Prairie Home Companion'.

Doofistan — mentioned in Ziggy in an April 2002 panel: Ziggy stares at his television and says "Doofistan? Now I know they're making this stuff up."

Douchebagistan —a fictional member of the U.N. mentioned by the Gregory Brothers in 'Autotune the News'.

Durkadurkistan —a fictional Middle Eastern country in 'Team America: World Police'. Also used (derogatorily) in various online boards to describe all of the middle eastern countries.

Franistan – a fictional country referred to in the television show 'I Love Lucy'.

Gupistan/Guppistan - a fictional place in Pakistani comic literature where everything is hearsay.

Helmajistan – a fictional area from the anime 'Full Metal Panic!'

Hotdogestan — a fictional country in the Middle East in 'A Prairie Home Companion'.

Howduyustan – a fictional country from Uncle Scrooge comic book stories.

Iranistan – an oriental region of Hyborea (In the Conan the Barbarian stories).

Istan – a fictional island state in the online role-playing game 'Guild Wars Nightfall'.

Kamistan (Islamic Republic of) – a fictional Middle Eastern country featured in the television series '24'.

Karjistan - a fictional country mentioned in the 2006 film 'The Sentinel'.

Kehjistan – the state of the eastern jungles in the game 'Diablo II'.

Kerakhstan – a fictional Middle Eastern country featured in the table-top wargame 'Battlefield Evolution'.

Kreplachistan – a fictional country in the movie 'Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery'. ("Kreplach" — Eastern European Jewish dish consisting of meat-filled dumplings.)

Lojbanistan - the fictional country of the lojbanists ; where Lojban is the national language.

Londonistan – a book warning of the cultural shifts resulting from high concentrations of recent arrivals from certain countries

Nukhavastan – a fictional country that has nuclear weapons, in 'The Onion'

Paristan or Pari-estan - (Pari meaning fairy in Urdu/Persian) a fairyland in the folklore of Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia

Pianostan – a fictional country mentioned in an episode of Inspector Gadget.

Pokolistan - a fictional country in DC Comics

Richistan – A book by Robert Frank describing the lifestyle impacts of rich sections of the US population.

Salvjakestan - fictional country in the 'Death Enrising' Novels

Serdaristan – fictional country in 'Battlefield: Bad Company'

Skateistan, a skateboarding/educational organization based in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Takistan – a fictional country in 'ARMA 2: Operation Arrowhead'.

Turaqistan - fictional country in the film 'War, Inc.'.

Tyrgyzstan – fictional country in the BBC television drama 'The State Within'.

Wheretheheckistan - a pun for "where the heck is...?" in Dear Dumb Diary series where a lot of poor people live and is where all charities focus on in 'Jamie's World'.

Zekistan – a fictional central Asian nation in the video game 'Full Spectrum Warrior'.

Satirical and other uses of the –stan ending

Absurdistan — a satirical book by Gary Shteyngart ; also sometimes used to satirically describe a country where everything goes wrong. Used by East European dissidents to refer to aspects of the former Soviet Union.

Bananastan — used by Pakistani media to describe a 'banana republic'.

Blogistan – alternative reference to the blogosphere

Boratistan — name used by Kazakh press secretary Roman Vasilenko to describe an image of Kazakhstan created by Sacha Baron Cohen's character, Borat.

Canuckistan/ Soviet Canuckistan — derogatory description of Canada (by Pat Buchanan)

Cavaquistão ("Cavacostan" in Portuguese) — used to describe mainly the areas of central Portugal where former Prime Minister Cavaco Silva had more votes in the decade 1985-1995.

Elladistan – self-mocking term used by Greeks to compare Greece with a third world country where there is little progress in social/political affairs and where public services are less than satisfactory.

Electistan — fictional and satirical term used with Incumbistan.

Ethniclashistan — sometimes used satirically to describe countries in which multiple ethnic groups were thrown together, who then began fighting each other, e.g. Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union. It was featured in the satirical The Onion newspaper in June, 2001 as being placed in the West Bank in the article Northern Irish, Serbs, Hutus Granted Homeland In West Bank (here spelled Ethniklashistan)

Hamastan - a concept of a Palestinian Islamic government with Sharia as law.

Incumbistan — introduced by columnist Mark Steyn to refer to the efforts of politicians of all parties to unite to enact rules seen as assuring their continued re-election.

Jafastan – a derogatory term for Auckland, New Zealand (deriving from the acronym Jafa: 'Just another f***ing Aucklander')

Pindostan (Пиндостан) - derogatory slang term used for the USA on the Russian Internet (an alternative equivalent is "Pindosya").

The three Jetlag parody travel guides contain faux ads for guides to other countries, each with a -stan reference. Molvanîa contains an ad for "Surviving Moustaschistan" (mentioning also "Carpetstan"), Phaic Tăn contains an ad for "Sherpastan", and San Sombrêro contains an ad for "Tyranistan".

Verweggistan – Dutch expression to mean 'place very far away from here'

There are numerous examples of places being referred to as -stans because of high Afghan, Pakistani or other populations. Examples are Hollandistan (used to describe the rise of Islam in the Netherlands), Fremont California (Kabulistan), Spokane Washington (Spokanistan), the Red States of USA (Redneckistan) and so on. London was nicknamed Londonistan by French counter-terrorism agents.

There would appear to be almost as many fictional/virtual –stans as there are real ones.

References – and a note of caution

The information above has been collated from a variety of sources. Most of these have been internet-based resources (the best starting point for which is wikipediaedia)

Whilst the above information seems highly plausible, some of it has simply been taken as reliable without detailed checking. It is intended to give an overall impression of the subject. Readers are advised to thoroughly delve further into any particular detail before using it in ways that are important. As an example of how the internet can contain some deliberately misleading content, the uncyclopedia site has an article on this very topic (names ending in –stan) but which on reading soon is seen as a joke article containing such elements as: In the Middle East there are 44 million countries ending in –stan , some so small and pointless that they cover only a few metres in diameter. (This, however, is not as ludicrous as first seems: If –stan means ‘the place where you stand’ then there will be a place/stan for each person in the whole Central Asian region). Or: the first –istan recorded was ruled over by king Stan, who subject paid homage to by dancing the stanlyton. In one part a new ruler emerged called Charlie – his subjects danced the Charleston. Civil war broke out between the Charlies and the Stanlies And so on. So, Reader Beware at all times....

Map of the area

