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**US news** Datablog

# Why do Americans write the month before the day?

We explore the possible reasons for this mad anomaly and hear your explanations (For help crossing the rubicon between British and American cultural norms, consult [English to English](#))





📷 Does this look like a typo to you? Image: Corbis Premium RF/Alamy/Mona Chalabi

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## Mona Chalabi

Monday 16 December 2013 03:17 EST

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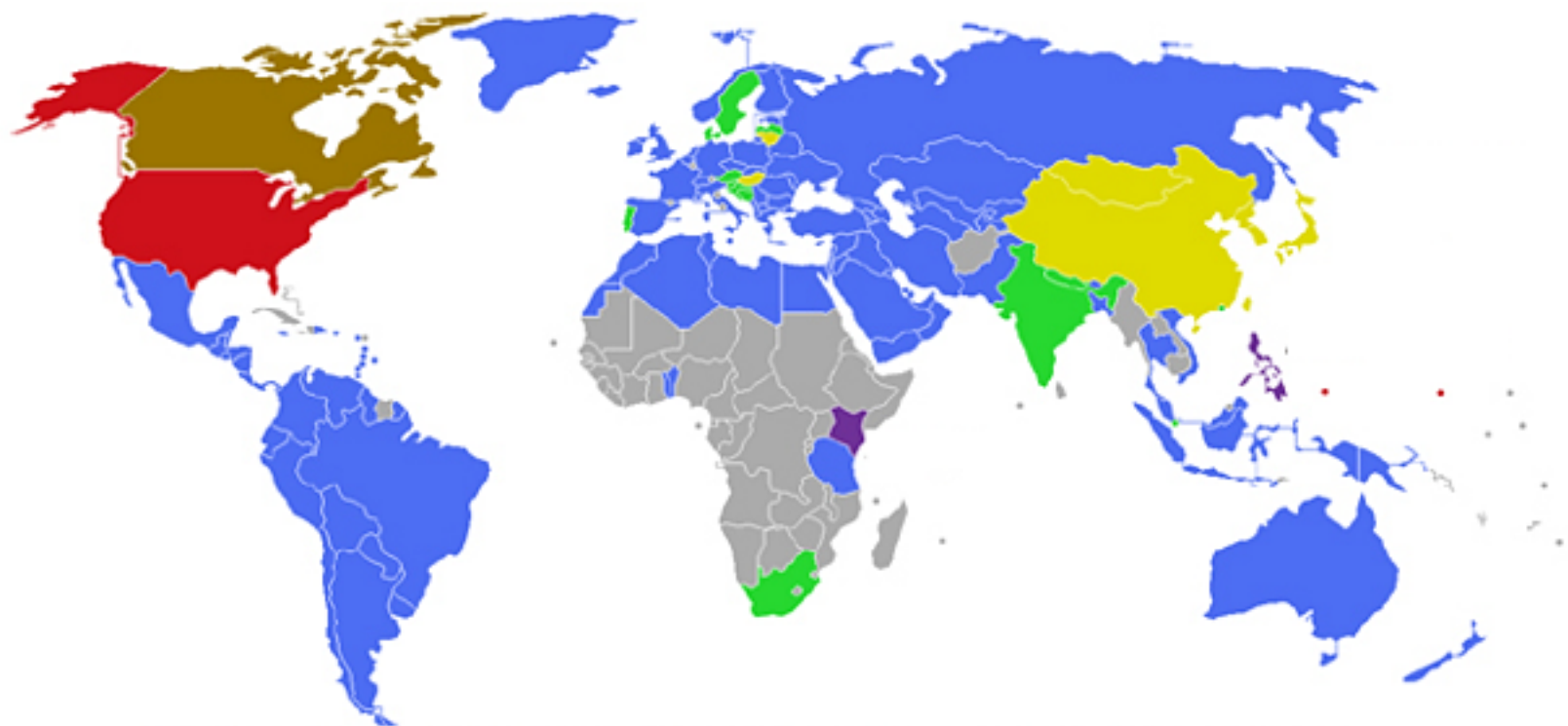
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If you ask an American about the way their dates are formatted, you may get a response as defensive as 'my jumper is *not* on back to front, it's supposed to have the v at the back!'.

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But let's face it, it's weird. Basic group behaviour shows it's weird. Despite the variety of date formats used around world, the US is the only country to insist on using mm-dd-yyyy.

## Date formats around the world



Blue	dd-mm-yyyy
Green	dd-mm-yyyy and yyyy-mm-dd
Brown	dd-mm-yyyy, mm-dd-yyyy, and yyyy-mm-dd
Yellow	yyyy-mm-dd
Red	mm-dd-yyyy
Purple	mm-dd-yyyy and dd-mm-yyyy

This condition is diagnosed as middle-endianness. Seriously. It comes from computer science where bytes are arranged according to their size. If the order has larger ones at the front, it's known as big-endian and so too are dates formatted with the years first (see the likes of China and Mongolia in the map above).

Even more bizarrely, computer scientists got their inspiration for the term 'endianness' from Jonathan Swift's 1726 epic *Gulliver's Travels*. In the fictional kingdom of Lilliput people have to open their soft-boiled eggs at the small end (it's a royal decree). While in Blefuscu, eggs are cracked from the other end. Lilliputians are small-endians while Blefuscudians are big-endians. Again, seriously.

Jonathan Swift, like the computer scientists, was basically saying that systems are needed to organise even the most irrelevant seeming of things. [As Danny Cohen](#) writes "Swift's point is that the difference between breaking the egg at the little-end and breaking it at the big-end is trivial... but we insist that everyone must do it in the same way, to avoid anarchy. Since the difference is trivial we may choose either way, but a decision must be made."

But why did Americans choose the way they did? Actually, the dozens and dozens of chat forums on the topic reveals that people don't really seem to have an answer. We don't. If you think you do, post a comment below to let

us know. Though it seems that Googlers (most of them small-endians) are far more puzzled by other American choices.



why do Americans |



- why do americans **love guns**
- why do americans **work so much**
- why do americans **call football soccer**
- why do americans **celebrate thanksgiving**
- why do americans **celebrate halloween**
- why do americans **tip**
- why do americans **love football**
- why do americans **hate soccer**
- why do americans **hate france**
- why do americans **hate obamacare**

 Image: Google

