

“NationStates” - You Try and Be President By: Hung Dao

When you Google the phrase “Nation States,” you may be surprised to see the first link is a web game. “NationStates” is a simulation game where the player creates a country and plays as that country’s leader. The game was created by author Max Barry in the early 2000’s to promote one of his books, but it has grown to be a thriving community beyond the book.

Should you decide that you want to play, your first order of business will be to create a new country in whatever mold you desire. You could decide to lead a capitalist nation, a socialist nation or even an anarchic nation. You will also answer some questions about whether corporations are good for the country, whether democracy is meaningful, and what is your nation’s history. Then, you name your country, and the game assigns you one of 27 government types. The government types range from “Tyranny by Majority” to “New York Times Democracy” to “Left-Leaning College State.” As you might have noticed, the game is supposed to be humorous.

Once you have created your country, the bulk of the gameplay is your state receiving periodical issues, and you, as leader, will have to address them. Most of the issues are written by players themselves, and the issues run the gamut of serious all the way to the absurd. You might receive an issue about whether your nation should stockpile nuclear weapons for self-defense. You might also get notified that your Minister of Energy, Don Lamancha, was fighting windmills because he thought for a moment that they were giants—references are everywhere in “NationStates,” rewarding those who could appear on a game show. In all scenarios, however, there will always be a few reasonable decisions you could make and a few decisions that are outrageous. Whichever resolution you choose, some of your national trends will be updated.

Trends are the way that all aspects of your nation are measured. If you want to know how authoritarian your nation is, you would check your trend for authoritarianism, which is of course measured in MilliStalins. Maybe one of your decisions reduced government size, so you could check that trend to see what your Bureaucratic Comprehensiveness Rating Scale Index score is. A part of the fun of trends is that you are able to see your ranking globally for each specific trend

and see which nation has the highest cheese exports industry (surprisingly, not Wisconsin) or any other trends.

The players of “NationStates” make the game more than just glorified bureaucracy. Different nations can come together in a region, which is a small subset of players with some shared sense of what they want their “NationStates” experience to be and steer their interactions in that direction. Some join a region for history-writing, bookkeeping, and general lore. Other regions might focus on roleplaying a military campaign. Another part of the multiplayer experience is the World Assembly, where nations come together and impose laws that everybody has to follow. It is the game’s version of the United Nations, and it has been effective at fostering interplayer cooperation.

“NationStates” is a charming web game that has been there for some of the most ridiculous moments in real life, ready to satirize it in a way that is both disarming and comforting. This might just be a recommendation.

Sources: Max Berry, NationStates