#### Two-letter Country Codes

##### Scope

This category of usage comprises two-letter country codes as identified in ISO 3166-1.

##### Status Quo

Module 2 Section 2.2.1.3.2, String Requirements, provides in relevant part:

3.1 Applied-for gTLD strings in ASCII must be composed of three or more visually distinct characters. Two character ASCII strings are not permitted, to avoid conflicting with current and future country codes based on the ISO 3166-1 standard.

3.2 Applied-for gTLD strings in IDN scripts must be composed of two or more visually distinct characters in the script, as appropriate. Note, however, that a two-character IDN string will not be approved if:

3.2.1 It is visually similar to any one-character label (in any script); or

3.2.2 It is visually similar to any possible two-character ASCII combination.

The justification for deeming two-character ASCII ineligible is clearly stated in Section 2.2.1.3.2 as excerpted above: “to avoid conflicting with current and future country codes based on the ISO 3166-1 standard.”

##### Issues

* ISO 3166-1 is not a static reference. As new countries and territories are formed/founded and other cease to exist, the standard is amended accordingly.
* Two-letter strings in IDN scripts have already been added to the root through the New gTLD Program.

##### Potential Options

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| **Option** | **Application** | **Benefits** | **Burdens/Risks** |
| 1. All two-character strings reserved for use as ccTLD only, ineligible for use as gTLD | ASCII | Maintains status quo and continues the precedent of a level of protection for ccTLDs.  Provides a space for national identity on the internet.  New countries would have a ccTLD available to them. | Restricts potential for new gTLD registrations for what could be seen as short “premium” TLDs |
| 2. (Version 2a: Two-character strings eligible for use as gTLD if not in conflict with ISO 3166-1.)  (Version 2b: Two-character strings eligible for use as gTLD if not in conflict with [ISO 3166-1 and/or other standard/list].) | ASCII | More flexibility in the system while also allowing a level of protection for existing countries. | Risk of consumer confusion as some 2-letter TLDs will relate to gTLDs and some to ccTLDs.  Possible conflict for new countries if the countrycode they are assigned has already been registered as a gTLD – does this have legal implications for ICANN? |
| 3. Unrestricted use of two-character strings if not in conflict with an existing ccTLD or any applicable string similarity rules. | ASCII | More flexibility in the system while also allowing a level of protection for existing ccTLDs. | As above - Possible conflict for new countries if the countrycode they are assigned has already been registered as a gTLD. |
| 4. Future two-character strings reserved for use as IDN ccTLD only, ineligible for use as gTLD | IDN | Allows some flexibility in the system while also allowing a level of protection for existing ccTLDs.  Promotion of IDN’s and multi-lingual internet usage | Issues around IDNs being visually similar to existing ccTLDs.  What provisions would there be for new non-IDN ccTLD registrations?  What list provides a definitive list of acceptable IDN characters and their correlation to country codes? |
| 5. Unrestricted use of two-character strings if not in conflict with an existing TLD or any applicable string similarity rules or [other conflict conditions to be discussed, for example, visually similar to any one-character label (in any script) or visually similar to any possible two-character ASCII combination] | IDN | More flexibility in the system while also allowing a level of protection for existing TLDs. | As above - Possible conflict for new countries if the countrycode they are assigned has already been registered as a gTLD. |