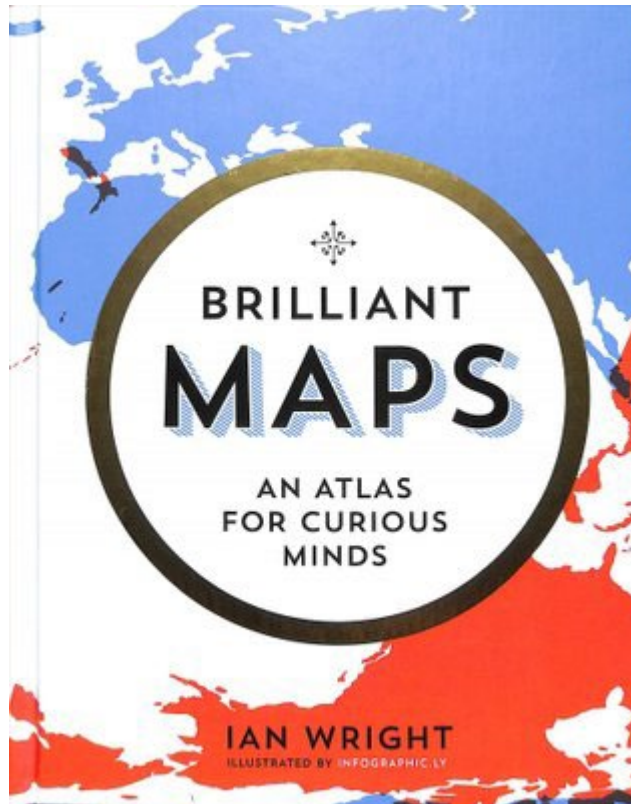# Popular Maps, Professional Lessons: Bridging The Gap

10 Lessons From 10 Brilliant Maps

Who am I?

- I'm not the famous footballer
- I'm also not a cartographer or geographer
- I studied history and politics at university
- And have spent most of my career in search marketing
- But the reason I'm here is I'm the founder of Brilliant Maps

What is Brilliant Maps? (Part 1)

- The idea came out of my project to walk London's Tube Map
- To start it was just a Twitter account sharing interesting maps I found online
- I then built a website to write more about the maps I was sharing
- Eventually Granta helped turn the whole thing into a book

What is Brilliant Maps? (Part 2)

- After publishing the Book I stopped working on the website for several years

- But last year I decided to refocus on it

- Now includes a website, a 3x weekly newsletter, and whole host of social media accounts from Twitter to Facebook to Youtube
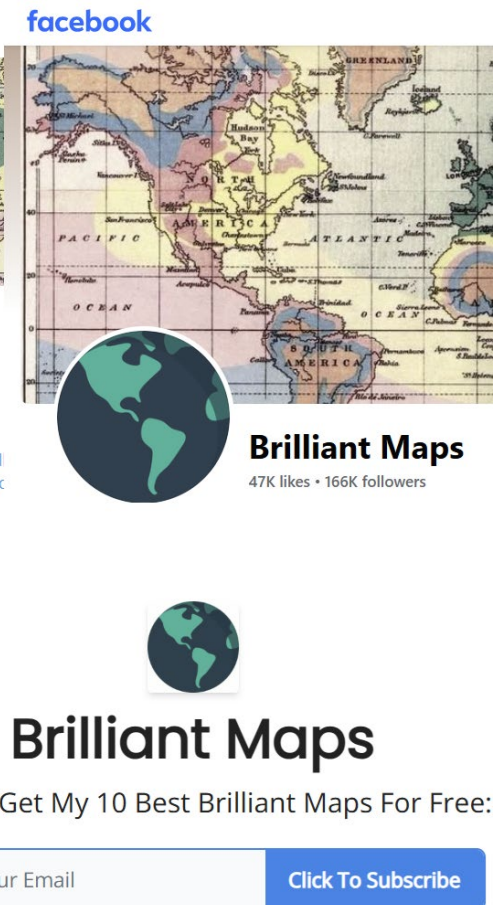
Enough about me let's get to the maps!

10 Lessons From 10 Brilliant Maps

10. Make A Map That's Topical

US Balance of Trade In Goods By Country

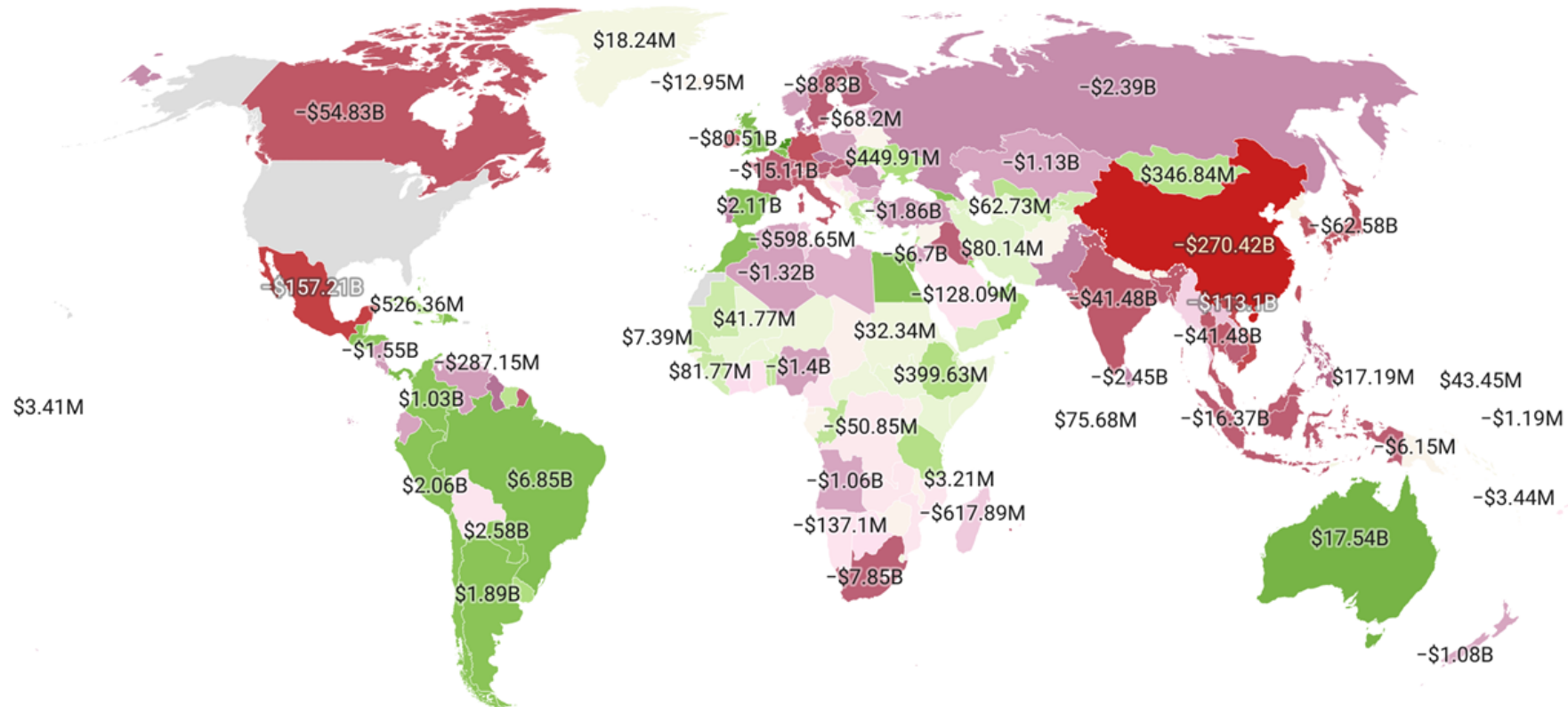Red means a trade deficit in goods and green means a trade surplus.

−$270.42B $0 $50.47B

$18.24M

−$12.95M   −$8.83B   −$2.39B

−$68.2M

−$80.51B

−$15.11B $449.91M   −$1.13B $346.84M

$2.11B   −$1.86B $62.73M

−$598.65M   −$6.7B $80.14M   −$270.42B   −$62.58B

−$157.21B $526.36M   −$1.32B   −$128.09M   −$41.48B   −$113.1B

−$1.55B $41.77M $32.34M   −$41.48B

−$287.15M $7.39M   −$1.4B $399.63M   −$2.45B $17.19M $43.45M

$1.03B $81.77M $75.68M   −$16.37B   −$1.19M

$3.41M   −$50.85M   −$6.15M

$2.06B $6.85B   −$1.06B $3.21M   −$3.44M

$2.58B   −$137.1M   −$617.89M $17.54B

$1.89B   −$7.85B   −$1.08B

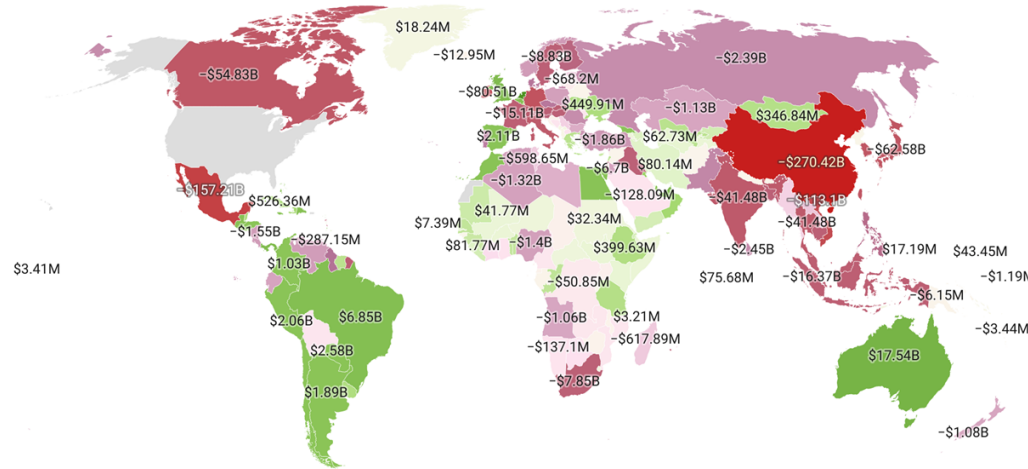Source: https://brilliantmaps.com/us-balance-of-trade/ • Created with Datawrapper

10. Make A Map That's Topical

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−$270.42B $0 $50.47B

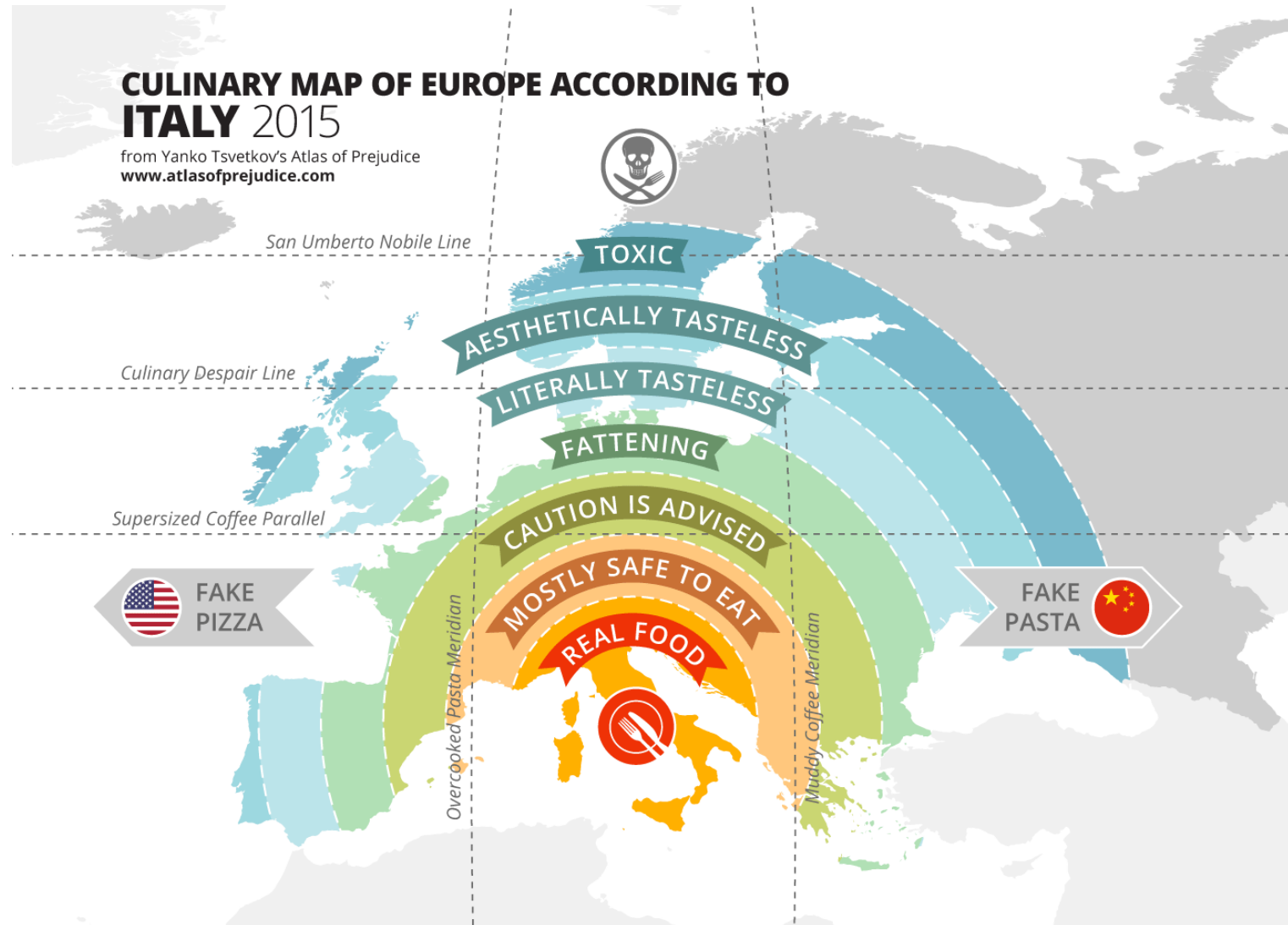Source: https://brilliantmaps.com/us-balance-of-trade/ • Created with Datawrapper

Pros

- Lots of interest
- How the map looks is less important

Cons

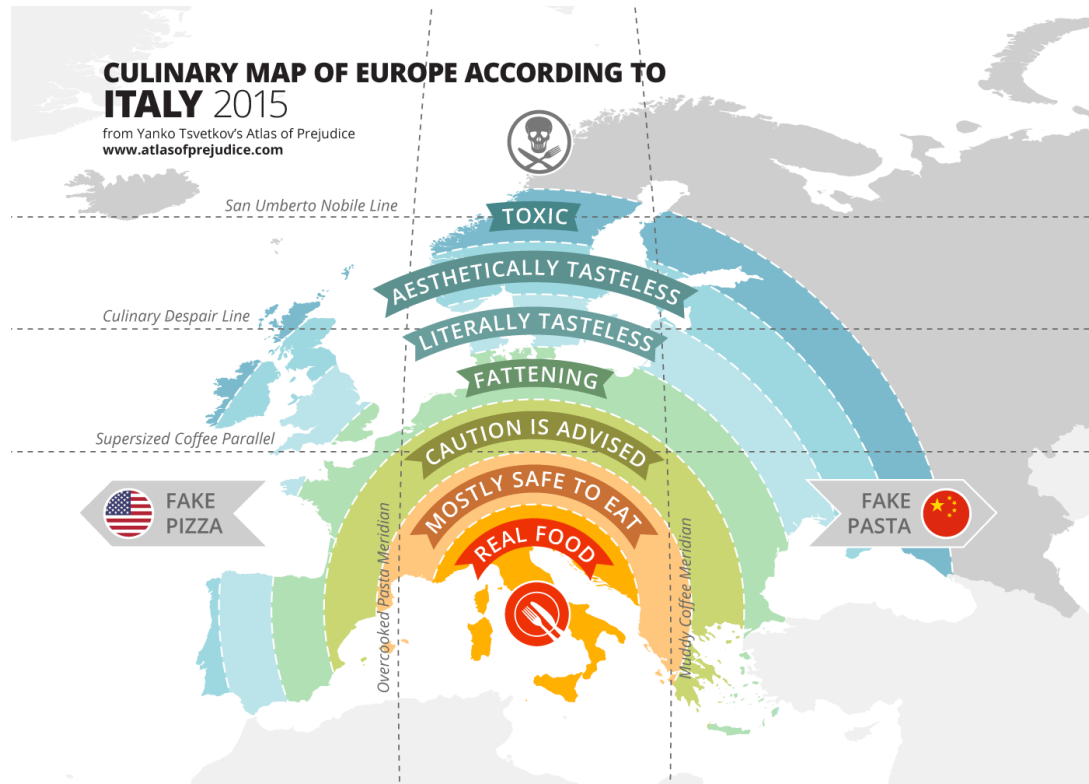- Interest is often short lived
- Or you need to keep updating the map

9. Make a Map That's Funny

9. Make a Map That's Funny

CULINARY MAP OF EUROPE ACCORDING TO
ITALY 2015
from Yanko Tsvetkov's Atlas of Prejudice
www.atlasofprejudice.com

San Umberto Nobile Line
TOXIC
AESTHETICALLY TASTELESS
Culinary Despair Line
LITERALLY TASTELESS
FATTENING
Supersized Coffee Parallel
CAUTION IS ADVISED
MOSTLY SAFE TO EAT
FAKE PIZZA
FAKE PASTA
REAL FOOD
Overcooked Pasta Meridian
Muddy Coffee Meridian

Pros

- When done right these maps have the highest virality

- Don't require any unique data

Cons

- Can be tough to create something funny

- Risk of offending people

- Might not align with your brand

8. Make a Map Related To Pop Culture

8. Make a Map Related To Pop Culture

Pros

- Inbuilt audience
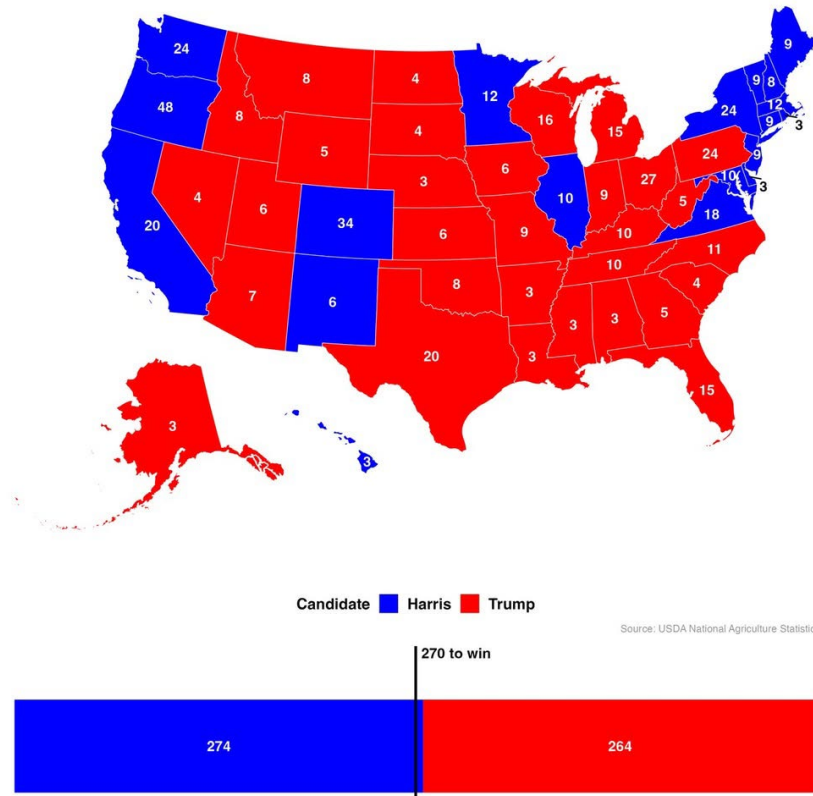- Allows greater creativity
- Can be quick and fun to make

Cons

- Copyright issues
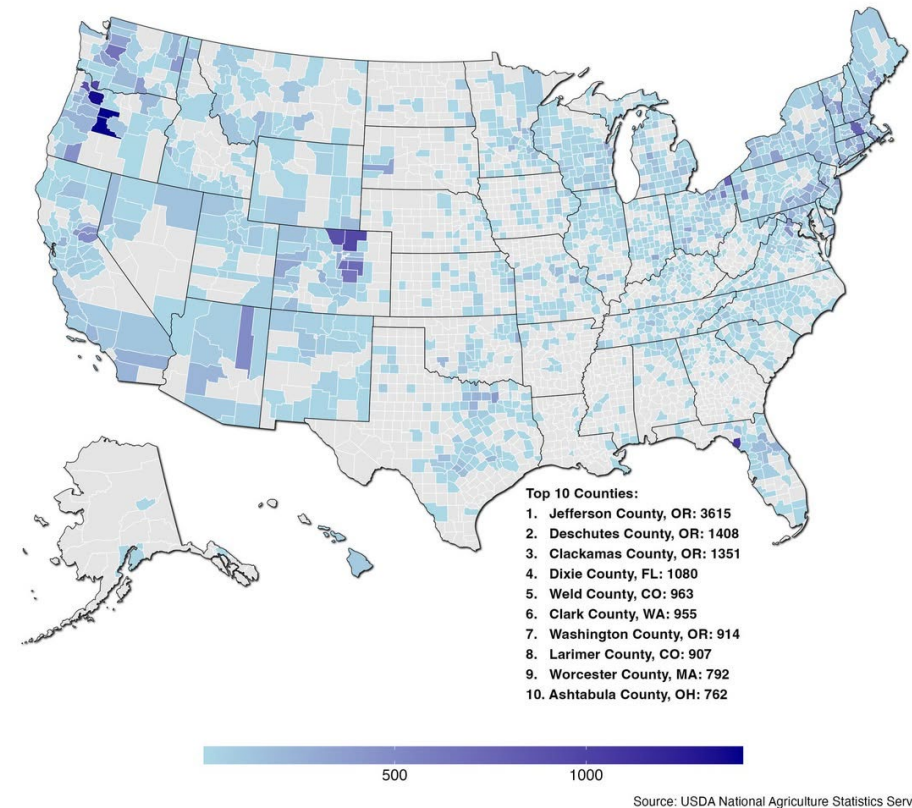- Loss of interest overtime

7. Make a Map That's Unexpected

2024 Presidential Election if Electoral Votes Were Distributed Based on Alpacas
Created by: @haydendking

Candidate ▮ Harris ▮ Trump
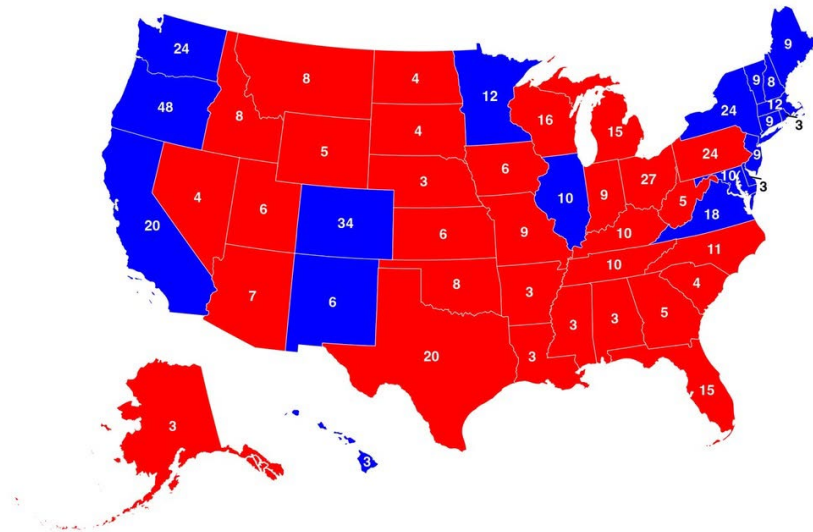
Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service

270 to win

| 274 | 264 |

Alpacas by County (2022)
Created by: @haydendking

Top 10 Counties:
1. Jefferson County, OR: 3615
2. Deschutes County, OR: 1408
3. Clackamas County, OR: 1351
4. Dixie County, FL: 1080
5. Weld County, CO: 963
6. Clark County, WA: 955
7. Washington County, OR: 914
8. Larimer County, CO: 907
9. Worcester County, MA: 792
10. Ashtabula County, OH: 762

500   1000

Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service

7. Make a Map That's Unexpected

2024 Presidential Election if Electoral Votes Were Distributed Based on Alpacas
Created by: @haydendking

Candidate ■ Harris ■ Trump

Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service

270 to win

274   264
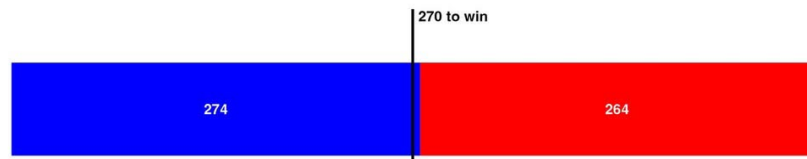
Pros

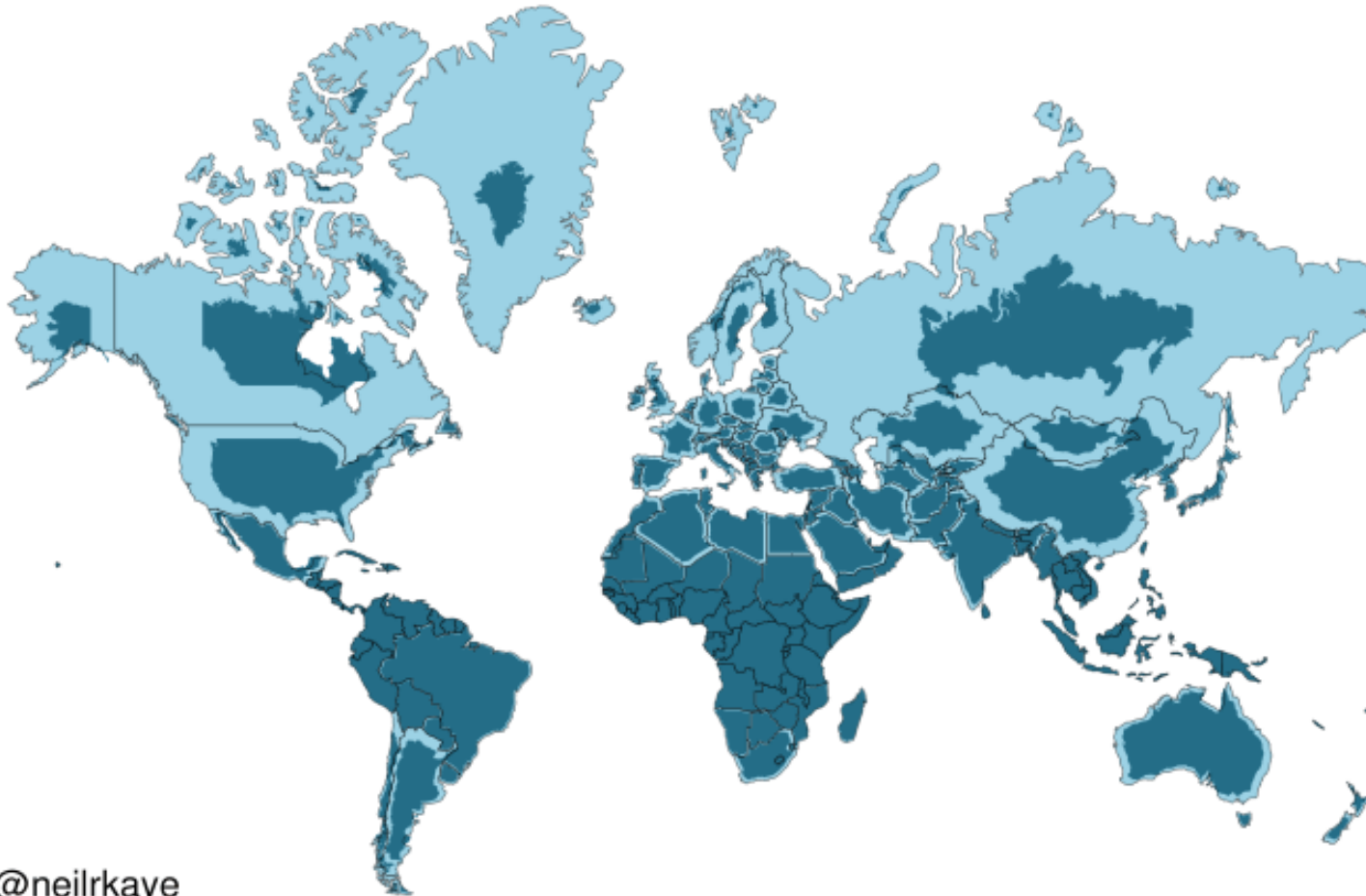- Can be attention grabbing
- They can be a lot of fun to make

Cons

- Can be challenging to come up with good ideas
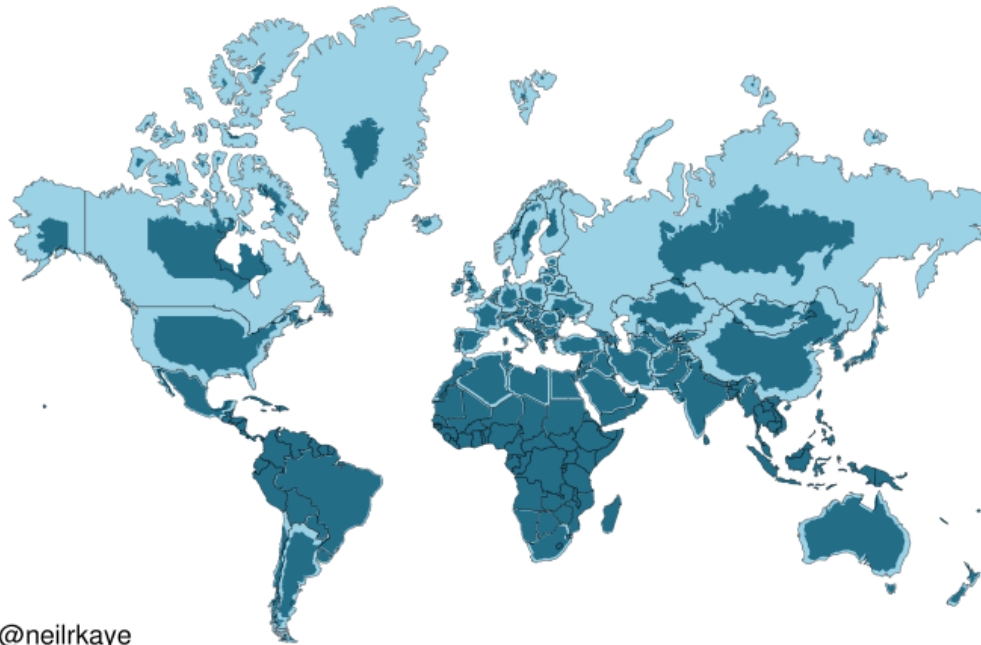- Often hit or miss

6. Make a Map That's Educational

World Mercator projection with true country size added

@neilrkaye

6. Make a Map That's Educational

World Mercator projection with true country size added

@neilrkaye

Pros

- Can go viral if done well
- Evergreen
- Genuinely useful

Cons

- A lot of competition
- Quality bar is high and getting higher

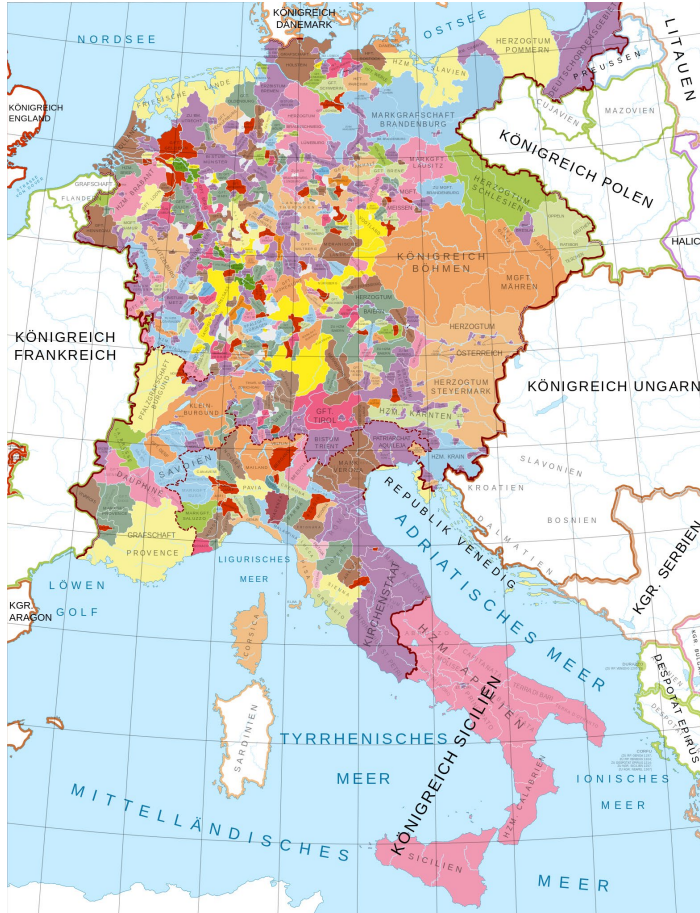# 5. Make a Map That Looks Beautiful

Map created by Wikimedia user *Alphathon*
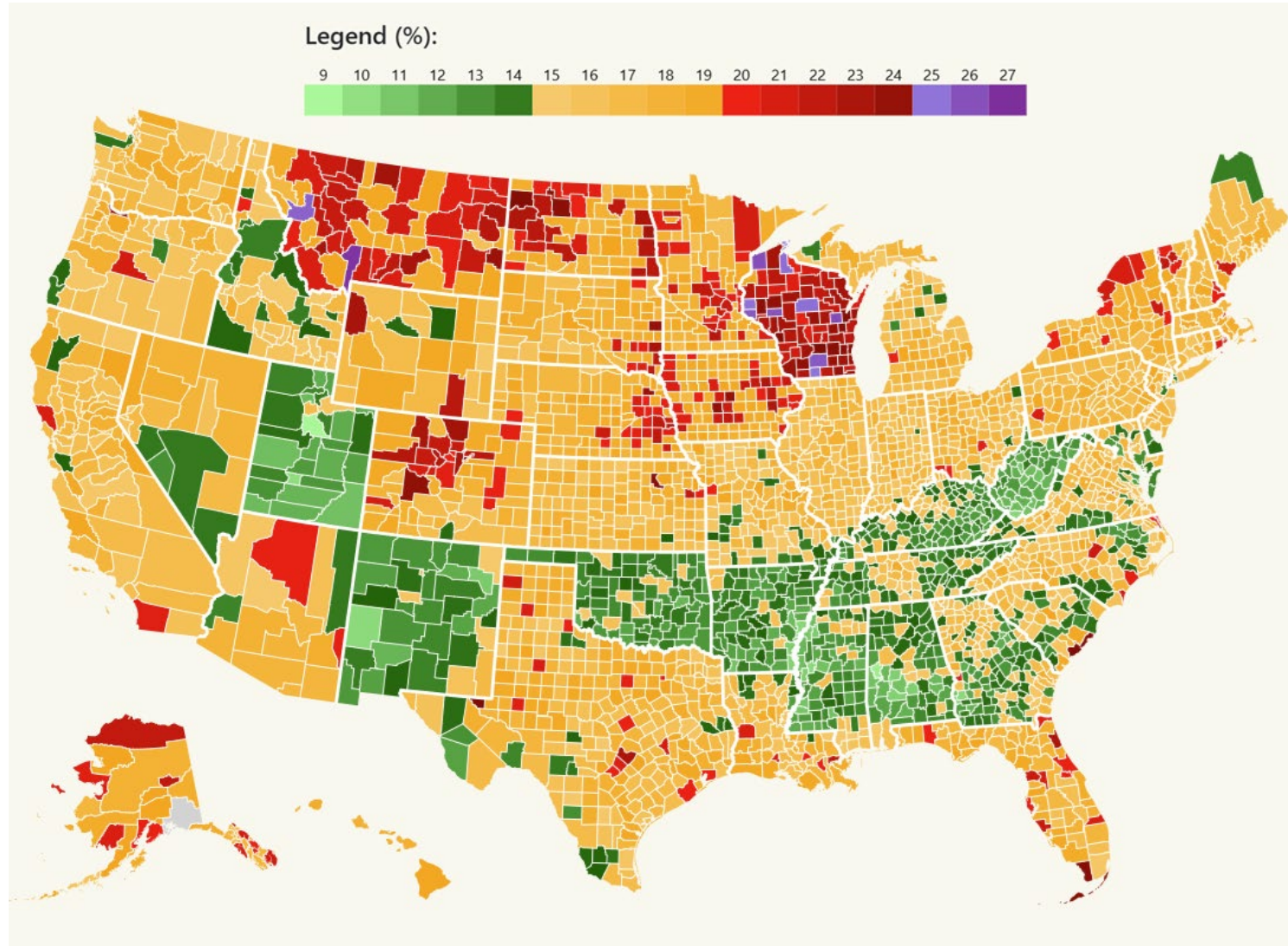
5. Make a Map That Looks Beautiful

Pros

- Can done for almost any map
- Very effective if you make something ugly look beautiful

Cons

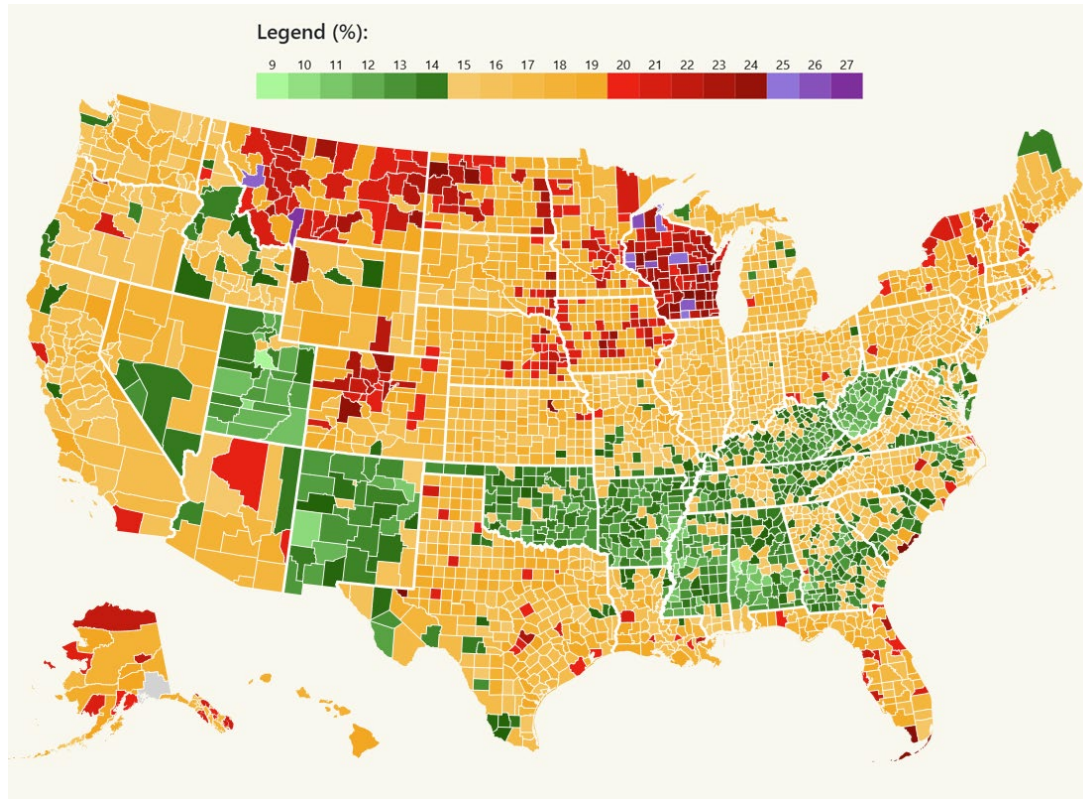- It takes artistic skill
- Beauty is often in the eye of the beholder

4. Make a Map That's Data Driven

Map created by IntoxiStates.com
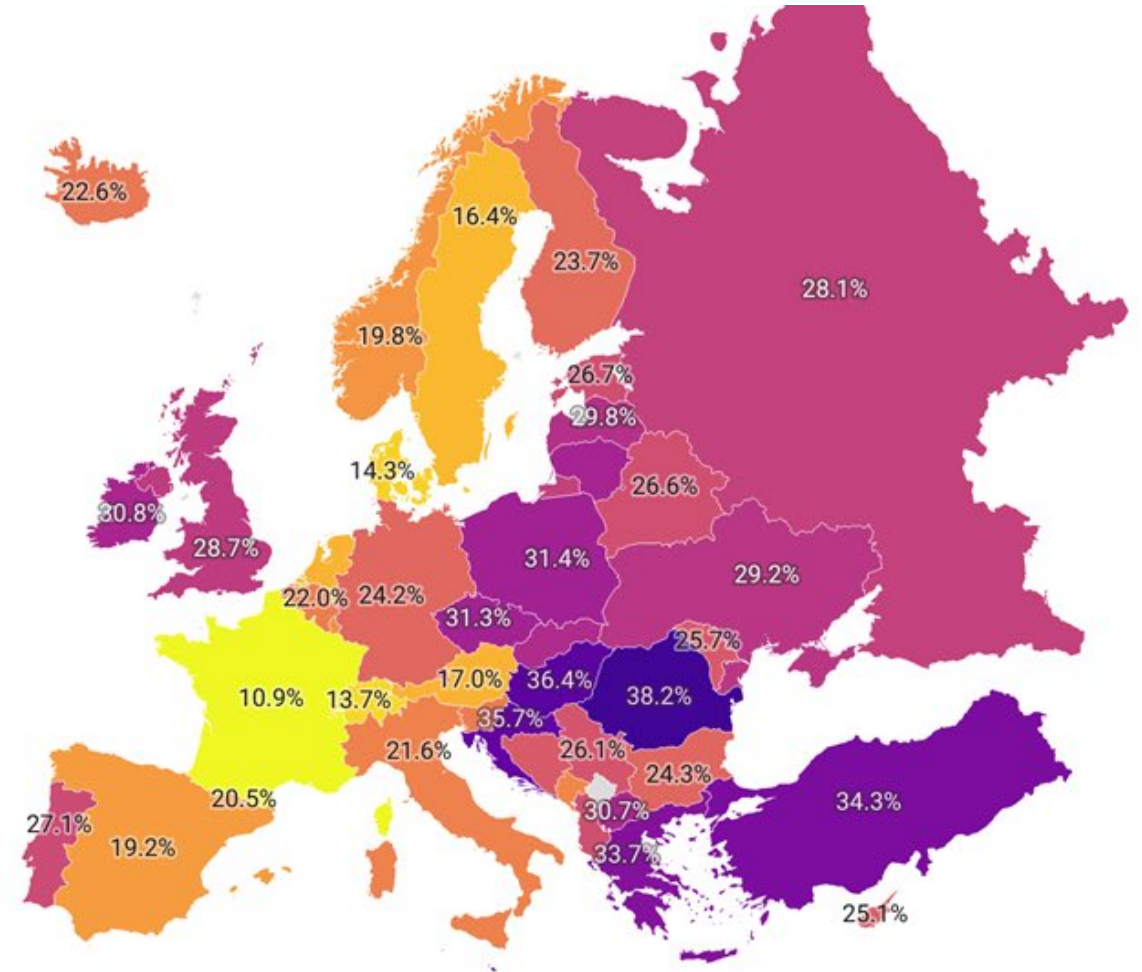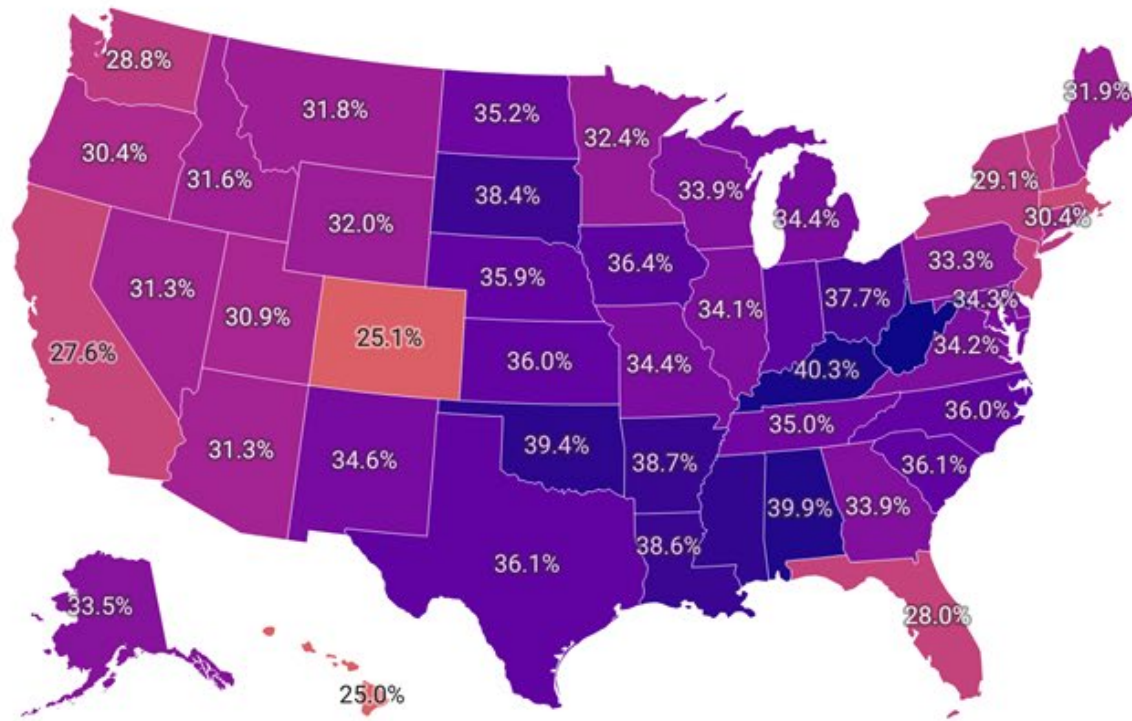
4. Make a Map That's Data Driven

Pros

- Almost unlimited topics to choose from
- Relatively easy to create

Cons

- Not every piece of data is interesting
- The maps aesthetics make a huge difference in results

3. Make A Map That Compares Things
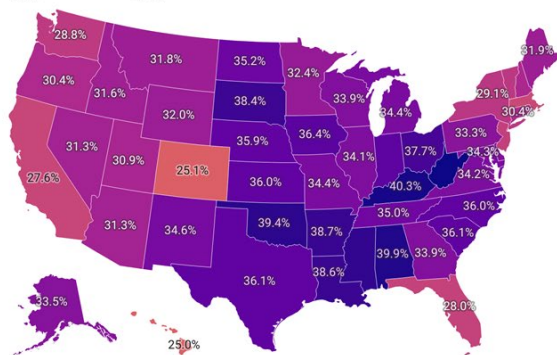

US Obesity Rate By State In 2024
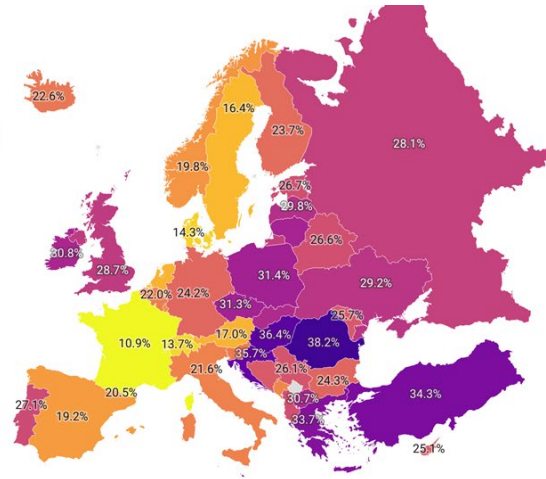
10.9% 40.6%

Map: Brilliant Maps • Source: https://brilliantmaps.com/obesity-rates-usa-v-europe/ • Created with Datawrapper

3. Make A Map That Compares Things

US Obesity Rate By State In 2024

Map: Brilliant Maps • Source: https://brilliantmaps.com/obesity-rates-usa-v-europe/ • Created with Datawrapper

Pros

- High user engagement
- Can offer genuine insights

Cons

- Getting good data is more difficult
- Can be controversial and devolve into political debates

2. Make a Map That Tells A Story

2. Make a Map That Tells A Story

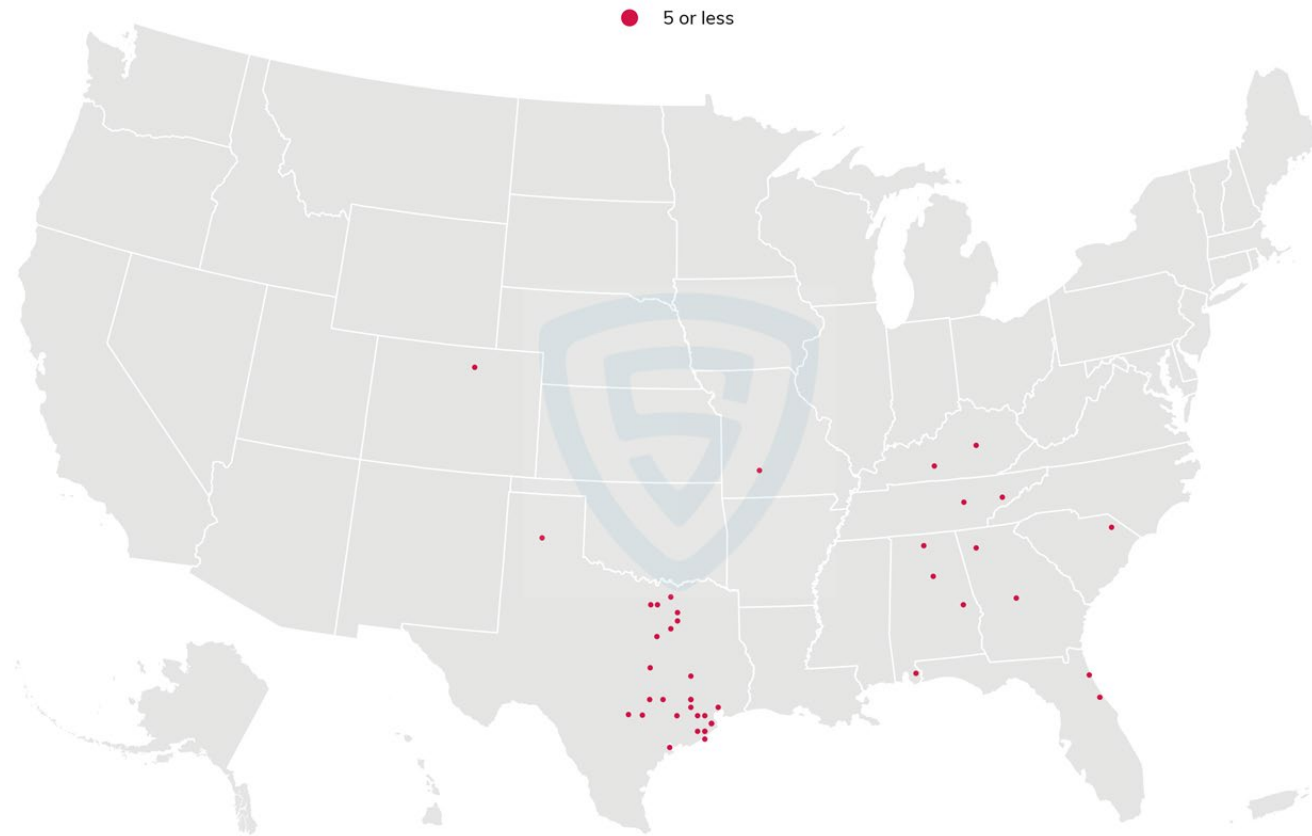Scotland's Watershed Is So Wild That Only 6 People Have Managed To Complete The Whole Route

Pros
- The look of the map is less important than the story
- Almost unlimited number of ways this can be done

Cons
- Not all stories are interesting to a wide audience
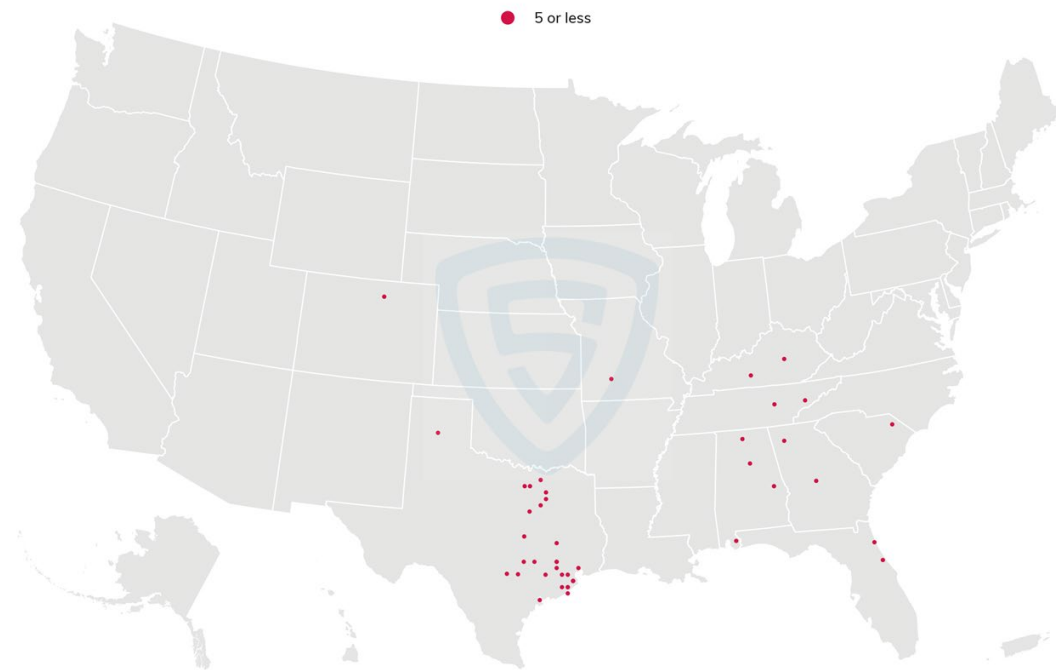- Story telling is very different skillset to map making

1. Make a Map That's Useful

● 5 or less

Buc-ee's locations in the USA
Each grid point covers 10-mile radius with at least one location
Source: ScrapeHero.com

ScrapeHero

1. Make a Map That's Useful

Buc-ee's locations in the USA
Each grid point covers 10-mile radius with at least one location
Source: ScrapeHero.com

ScrapeHero

Pros

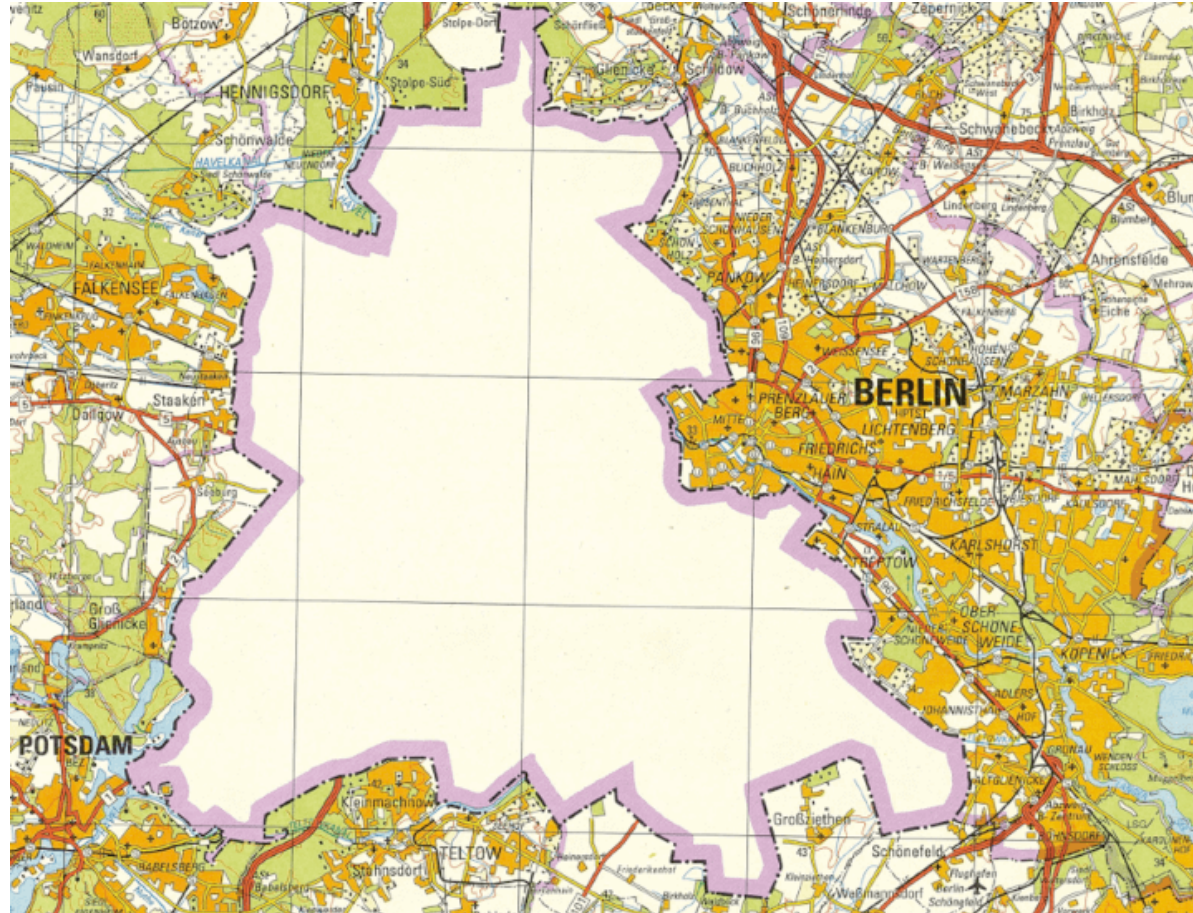- It's the main reason why maps exist
- It makes people's lives better

Cons

- Difficult to promote/market

And if all else fails...

Make a Map That's Absurd

Where To Promote Your Maps

1. Your own Website (bonus if you can capture email addresses)
2. Reddit
   - r/MapPorn/, r/dataisbeautiful/, local subreddits related to area and/or topic
3. Youtube/Tiktok for video
4. Instagram
5. Facebook
6. Threads
7. Bluesky/Twitter
8. LinkedIn (Much higher if customers are businesses)
9. Others: Pinterest, Flipboard, Tumblr, etc.

Where you can follow me

- Website: BrilliantMaps.com
- Newsletter: Brilliantmaps.beehiiv.com
- Social: @BrilliantMaps on all other social media platforms