

SYRIA (الجمهورية العربية السورية)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 22.5 Million

Area: Roughly the size of Florida

Capital: Damascus

Languages: Arabic (Official), Kurdish, Armenian, and Others

EDUCATION

While there are private secular and religious schools, most Syrian children attend public school. Students attend six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. In the past many children dropped out of school early. Currently the first nine years of school are required by law. After completing the school system many young Syrians receive vocational training, work in small business, or attend University. While Arabic is the official national language, English and French are also taught in Syrian schools. Sports can be an important part of young Syrians' lives. Soccer has a large following, but games such as basketball and volleyball are rising in popularity.

Syria has a rich cultural history stretching back thousands of years. The cities of Aleppo and Damascus are two of the world's oldest continually inhabited urban areas. The territory that makes up Syria has been an important part of several ancient empires and trade networks including the Akkadians, Amorites, Hittites and Assyrians. It was conquered by Alexander the Great in 33 BC and later incorporated into the Roman Empire in 64 BC. After the Arab Muslim conquest of the region in 634, the city of Damascus served as the capital of the Umayyads, the first Islamic Empire, until 750 AD. For several centuries the area was made up of many different states, including a Crusader Kingdom, until being conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1516. It remained a part of the Empire until the end of WWI.

RELIGION

Officially, Syria is a secular state. In spite of this, many of its policies are influenced by Islamic ideals and principles. Close to 74% of Syrians are Sunni Muslim. Other important Islamic groups include: Shi'i, Druze, and Alawites. Alawites, a group derived from Shi'i Islam, have a strong influence on the government through the Assad family. Christian groups make up 10% of the Syrian population and include: Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, and Maronite. Islam follows a lunar calendar; there are many online sources which can list the current dates for these holidays. Some important Muslim holidays include: Ramadan (Holy Month of Fasting), Eid-al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice). Shi'i Muslims also observe 'Ashura (commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein).

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Family is very important to a Syrian's life. One person's accomplishments often reflect upon the family as a whole. Many social gatherings are organized around family relationships. Syrians stay close to their parents through their lives, and both the father and mother are important role models for their children. It is considered dishonorable for a person to treat their parents poorly. The extended family is also very important in Syria. With urbanization nuclear families have become more common, but some households still have more than two generations living together. Celebrating life stages is very important in the lives of Syrians. Important events such as births, coming of age, marriages, and deaths are honored by both Muslim and Christian families.





CONTEMPORARY SYRIA

Until the end of WWI the area of modern Syria was controlled by the Ottoman Empire. After the war the region was governed under mandate by the French. While sovereignty was achieved in 1945, Syria's first decade as a nation included a great deal of economic and political unrest. In 1958 Syria entered a brief union with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic. The Republic lasted for only a few short years before the two countries split in 1961. In 1970 Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite and member of the Ba'th party, took power in a bloodless coup. Asaad's firm control brought stability to the country. Martial law was strictly enforced to dispel local dissent. In 1982 a fundamentalist rebellion was crushed by the military and thousands died. In 2000 Hafez al-Assad died and his son, Bashar, was elected by referendum. He was the only candidate on the ballot.

Syria has been involved in several regional conflicts. It fought wars with Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973. Disagreement continues between the two nations over Israeli control of the Golan Heights, an area lost by Syria to Israel during the 1967 war. Syria also entered into the Lebanese civil war in 1976. Syrian troops remained in Lebanon for the next 29 years until withdrawing due to large street protests in Lebanon and strong international pressures.

Domestic pressures in Syria have increased recent years. In early 2011 protests broke out against the harsh rule of Syrian government. Protests were met by strong government reaction, and dozens were killed. The conflict between the protest movement and the government escalated into more extreme acts of violence; thousands have died since 2011. In 2012 the conflict was declared a civil war by the Red Cross. Millions of Syrians are believed to be displaced internally, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled into neighboring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.



ETHNICITY

While the majority of Syrians are Arabs (90%), important Arab religious kinship groups include Alawite and Druze. Other important ethnic minorities include Kurds and Armenians. Small groups of Turks, Circassians, and Assyrians are also found in Syria. Due to war time population displacement, some Palestinian refugees and a large number of Iraqi refugees now also live in the country.



The flag was adopted in 1980. The colors represents oppression (black), overcome through struggle (red), replaced by a bright



Wooden Mosaic from Syria

LANGUAGE AND NAMES

Arabic is a Semitic language related to Amharic, and Hebrew. While there are regional dialects of Arabic spoken in Syria, Modern Standard Arabic is used for most formal and mass media communication. Arabic is a highly gendered language, due to this different forms are used when speaking to men or women (see Arabic word list). Kurdish is the second most common language in Syria. While Kurdish uses the Arabic alphabet, it is an Indo-European language more related to Persian (or English) than Arabic. Other languages include Armenian, and Aramaic. Many first names in Syria originate from Islam. Many names derived either from important figures or key words of the faith.

ARABIC WORDS

Hi	Salaam
Bye	Ma'a salama
Good morning	Sabah al khayr
Yes	Na'am
No	Laa
Please.....	Min fadlik
Thank you (very much).....	Shukran (jalilan)
You're welcome.....	Al'afwan
How are you?.....(Boy)	Kaifa halok?
	(Girl) Kaifa haloki?
I do not understand	Anaa la afham
Do you understand?..(Boy)	Hal tafham?
	(Girl) Hal tafhamiin?
What is your name?... (Boy)	Ma Ismouk?
	(Girl) Ma Ismouki?
My name is	Ismee
Where are you from? (Boy)	Min ayna anta?
	(Girl) Min ayna anti?

USEFUL LINKS

[The World Factbook: Syria](#)
[BBC Syria Profile](#)
[National Geographic Guide: Syria](#)
[Syria Deeply](#)