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# Bahrain

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

The **Kingdom of Bahrain** (in Arabic: **مملكة البحرين**, *Mamlakat al-Baḥrayn*, literally **Kingdom of the Two Seas**) is an island country in the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia lies to the west and is connected to Bahrain by the King Fahd Causeway (officially opened on November 25, 1986). Qatar is to the south across the Gulf of Bahrain. The planned Qatar–Bahrain Friendship Bridge will link Bahrain to Qatar as the longest fixed link in the world.

## History

Bahrain is Arabic for "two seas", referring to the sweet water springs that can be found within the salty sea surrounding it Bahrain's strategic location in the Persian Gulf has brought rule and influence from the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and finally the Arabs, under whom the island became Muslim. Bahrain suggested to be associate with *Dilmun* which is mentioned by Mesopotamian civilizations.. During its history it was called by different names such as *Awal*, then Mishmahig, when it was a part of the Persian Empire.

From the 6th to 3rd century B.C. Bahrain was included in Persian Empire by Achaemenians, an Iranian dynasty. From the third century B.C. to arrival of Islam in the seventh A.D., Bahrain was controlled by two other Iranian dynasties of Parthians and Sassanids. By about 250 B.C., Parthian dynasty brought the Persian Gulf under their control and extended their influence as far as Oman. Because they needed to control the Persian Gulf trade route, the Parthians established garrisons in the southern coast of Persian Gulf.

<b>مملكة البحرين</b> <i>Mamlakat al-Baḥrayn</i> <b>Kingdom of Bahrain</b>	
	
Flag	Coat of Arms
<b>Anthem:</b> بحریننا <i>Bahrainona</i> <i>Our Bahrain</i>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Manama
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Bahraini
<b>Government</b> - King	Constitutional Monarchy Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifah



Asia in 600 CE, showing the Sassanid Empire before the Arab conquest.

In the third century A.D., the Sasanids succeeded the Parthians and held area until the rise of Islam four centuries later. Ardashir, the first ruler of Iranian Sassanians dynasty marched forward Oman and Bahrain and defeat Sanatruq (or Satiran), probably the Parthian governor of Bahrain. At this time, Bahrain incorporated in the southern Sassanid province covering over the Persian Gulfs southern shore plus the archipelago of Bahrain. The southern province of Sasanids was subdivided into three districts of Haggar (now al-Hafuf province, Saudi Arabia), Batan Ardashir (now al-Qatif province, Saudi Arabia), and Msihmahig (In Middle-Persian/Pahlavi means "ewe-fish").

Until Bahrain adopted Islam in 629 AD, it was a centre of Nestorian Christianity. Early Islamic sources describe it as being inhabited by members of the Abdul Qays, Tamim, and Bakr tribes, worshiping the idol "Awal". In 899, a millenarian Ismaili sect, the Qarmatians, seized the country and sought to create a utopian society based on reason and the distribution of all property evenly among the initiates. The Qarmatians caused disruption throughout the Islamic world; they collected tribute from the caliph in Baghdad, and in 930 sacked Mecca and Medina, bringing the sacred Black Stone back to Bahrain where it was held to ransom. They were defeated in 976 by the Abbasids. The final end of the Qarmatians came at the hand of the Arab Uyunid dynasty of al-Hasa, who took over the entire Bahrain region in 1076. They controlled the Bahrain islands until 1235, when the islands were briefly occupied by the ruler of Fars. In 1253, the bedouin Usfurids brought down the Uyunid dynasty and gained control over eastern Arabia, including the islands of Bahrain. In 1330, the islands became tributary to the rulers of Hormuz, though locally the islands were controlled by the Shi'ite Jarwanid dynasty of Qatif.

Until the late Middle Ages, "Bahrain" referred to the larger historical region of Bahrain that included Ahsa, Qatif (both now within the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia) and the Awal (now the Bahrain) Islands. The region stretched from Basrah to the Strait of Hormuz in Oman. This was Iqlīm al-Bahrayn "Bahrayn Province." The exact date at which the term "Bahrain" began to refer solely to the Awal archipelago is unknown.

- Prime Minister	Khalifah ibn Sulman Al Khalifah
<b>Independence</b>	from United Kingdom
- Date	16 December 1971
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	665 km <sup>2</sup> ( 189th) 253 sq mi
- Water (%)	0
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	1,046,814 <sup>1</sup> ( 155th)
- Density	1454/km <sup>2</sup> ( 7th) 2,556/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	estimate
- Total	\$19.75 billion ( 118th)
- Per capita	\$23,604 ( 32nd)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.866 (high) ( 41st)
<b>Currency</b>	Bahraini dinar ( BHD)
<b>Time zone</b>	( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.bh
<b>Calling code</b>	+973
<small><sup>1</sup> Includes 517,368 non-nationals (September 2007 estimate).</small>	

In the mid-15th century, the islands came under the rule of the Jabrids, a bedouin dynasty that was also based in al-Ahsa and ruled most of eastern Arabia. The Portuguese invaded Bahrain in 1521 in alliance with Hormuz, seizing it from the Jabrid ruler Migrin ibn Zamil, who was killed in battle. Portuguese rule lasted for nearly 80 years, during which they depended mostly on Sunni Persian governors.

The Portuguese were expelled from the islands in 1602 by Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty of Iran, who instituted Shi'ism as the official religion in Bahrain. The Iranian rulers retained sovereignty over the islands, with some interruptions, for nearly two centuries. For most of that period, they resorted to governing Bahrain indirectly, either through Hormuz or through local Sunni Arab clans, such as the Huwala. During this period, the islands suffered two serious invasions by the Ibadhis of Oman in 1717 and 1738. In 1753, the Huwala clan of Al Madhkur invaded Bahrain on behalf of the Iranians, restoring direct Iranian rule.

In 1783, an alliance of Sunni Arab clans from the Arabian coast, led by the Al Khalifa, invaded and took control of Bahrain from the Persians and their Huwala allies, establishing an independent emirate. The Al Khalifa, however, had to weather a series of Omani invasions between 1799 and 1828. It was under the Al Khalifa's rule, in 1845, that a section of the Dawasir tribe from southern Nejd settled in Bahrain. The Al Khalifa at times extended their authority to the northern shores of Qatar and the fort of Dammam on the Arabian coast.

After the Saudis conquered al-Hasa and Qatif in 1796, the Al Khalifa briefly became their tributaries. When the Saudis re-established their power in the region in the 19th century, they attempted again to bring the emirate of Bahrain under their control, resulting in many battles and skirmishes between the two dynasties. This, however, was opposed by the British, who by that time had become highly influential in the Persian Gulf, viewing it as essential to their control of India. Britain's policy in the Persian Gulf at this time stipulated "uncompromising opposition" to the Saudis in Bahrain. In 1859, a British naval squadron was sent to protect the islands, and the British resident in the Persian Gulf notified the Saudi ruler Faisal ibn Turki Al Saud that it viewed Bahrain as an "independent emirate." In 1861, the British imposed a protection treaty on the emir of Bahrain, ending Saudi efforts to bring the islands under their sphere of influence. The treaty was the culmination of a series of treaties with the British, beginning in 1820. The country remained a British protectorate until 1971. The population of the island at the time was estimated to be around 70,000 persons. In the early 1920s the islands were rocked by disturbances between the Dawasir and the Shi'ite Baharna of **Bahrain**. As a result, most of the Dawasir were compelled to leave Bahrain and settle on the Arabian mainland as subjects of Ibn Saud.

Oil was discovered in 1932 and brought rapid modernization to Bahrain. Bahrain was the first place in the region to find oil.

This discovery made relations with the United Kingdom closer, as evidenced by the British establishing more bases there. British influence would continue to grow as the country developed, culminating with the appointment of Charles Belgrave as an advisor; Belgrave established modern education systems in Bahrain.

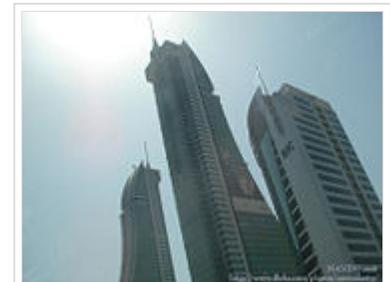
After World War II, increasing anti-British sentiment spread throughout the Arab World and led to riots in Bahrain. The riots focused on the Jewish community, which counted among its members distinguished writers and singers, accountants, engineers and middle managers working for the Oil Company, textile



World Trade Centre (Manama)



Sunset at King Fahd Causeway



Bahrain Financial Harbour

merchants with business all over the peninsula [Jews were not allowed to settle permanently in Saudi Arabia], and free professionals. Following the events of 1947, most members of Bahrain's Jewish community abandoned their properties and evacuated to Bombay, later settling in Palestine (later Israel - Tel Aviv's Pardes Chana neighbourhood) and the United Kingdom. As of 2007, 36 Jews remained in the country. The issue of compensation was never settled.

In 1960, the United Kingdom put Bahrain's future to international arbitration and requested that the United Nations Secretary-General take on this responsibility. In 1970, Iran laid claim to Bahrain and the other Persian Gulf islands. However, in an agreement with the United Kingdom it agreed to "not pursue" its claims on Bahrain if its other claims were realized. The following plebiscite saw Bahrainis confirm their Arab identity and independence from Britain. Bahrain to this day remains a member of the Arab League and Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

The British withdrew from Bahrain on December 16, 1971, making Bahrain an independent emirate. The oil boom of the 1970s greatly benefited Bahrain, but its downturn hurt. However, the country had already begun to diversify its economy, and had benefited from the Lebanese civil war that began in the 1970s; Bahrain replaced Beirut as the Middle East's financial hub as Lebanon's large banking sector was driven out of the country by the war.

After the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Bahraini Shī'a fundamentalists in 1981 orchestrated a failed coup attempt under the auspices of a front organization, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. The coup would have installed a Shī'a cleric exiled in Iran, Hujjatu l-Islām Hādī al-Mudarrisī, as supreme leader heading a theocratic government.

In 1994, a wave of rioting by disaffected Shī'a Islamists was sparked by women's participation in a sporting event. During the mid-1990s, the Kingdom was badly affected by sporadic violence between the government and the cleric-led opposition in which over forty people were killed..

In March 1999, King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifah succeeded his father as head of state and instituted elections for parliament, gave women the right to vote, and released all political prisoners. These moves were described by Amnesty International as representing an "historic period of human rights." The country was declared a kingdom in 2002. It formerly was considered a State and officially called a "Kingdom."

## Politics

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa; the head of government is the Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa, who presides over a cabinet of twenty-three members . Bahrain has a bicameral legislature with a lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, elected by universal suffrage and an upper house, the Shura Council, appointed by the king. Both houses have forty members. The inaugural elections were held in 2002, with parliamentarians serving four year terms; the first round of voting in the 2006 parliamentary election took place on 25 November 2006, and second round run-offs were decided on 2 December 2006. The opening up of politics has seen big gains for both Shī'a and Sunnī Islamists in elections, which have given them a parliamentary platform to pursue their policies. This has meant that what are termed "morality issues" have moved further up the political agenda with parties launching campaigns to impose bans on female mannequins displaying lingerie in shop windows, sorcery, and the hanging of



**Bahrain** Royal Flight Boeing 747SP



Manama, the capital of Bahrain

underwear on washing lines, as well as change the building by laws to fit one-way glass to houses to prevent residents being able to see out. Analysts of democratization in the Middle East cite the Islamists' references to respect for human rights in their justification for these programmes as evidence that these groups can serve as a progressive force in the region.

Islamist parties have been particularly critical of the government's readiness to sign international treaties such as the United Nation's International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. At a parliamentary session in June 2006 to discuss ratification of the Convention, Sheikh Adel Mouwda, the former leader of salafist party, Asalah, explained the party's objections: "The convention has been tailored by our enemies, God kill them all, to serve their needs and protect their interests rather than ours. This why we have eyes from the American Embassy watching us during our sessions, to ensure things are swinging their way" .

Both Sunnī and Shī'a Islamists suffered a setback in March 2006 when 20 municipal councillors, most of whom represented religious parties, went missing in Bangkok on an unscheduled stopover when returning from a conference in Malaysia. After the missing councillors eventually arrived in Bahrain they defended their stay at the Radisson Hotel in Bangkok, telling journalists it was a "fact-finding mission", and explaining: "We benefited a lot from the trip to Thailand because we saw how they managed their transport, landscaping and roads."

Bahraini liberals have responded to the growing power of religious parties by organizing themselves to campaign through civil society in order to defend basic personal freedoms from being legislated away. In November 2005, al Muntada, a grouping of liberal academics, launched " We Have A Right", a campaign to explain to the public why personal freedoms matter and why they need to be defended.

Women's political rights in Bahrain saw an important step forward when women were granted the right to vote and stand in national elections for the first time in the 2002 election. However, no women were elected to office in that year's polls and instead Shī'a and Sunnī Islamists dominated the election, collectively winning a majority of seats. In response to the failure of women candidates, six were appointed to the Shura Council, which also includes representatives of the Kingdom's indigenous Jewish and Christian communities. The country's first female cabinet minister was appointed in 2004 when Dr. Nada Haffadh became Minister of Health, while the quasi-governmental women's group, the Supreme Council for Women, trained female candidates to take part in the 2006 general election. When Bahrain was elected to head the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 it appointed lawyer and women's rights activist Haya bint Rashid Al Khalifa as the President of the United Nations General Assembly , only the third woman in history to head the world body.

The king recently created the Supreme Judicial Council to regulate the country's courts and institutionalize the separation of the administrative and judicial branches of government; the leader of this court is Mohammed Humaidan.

On 11–12 November 2005, Bahrain hosted the Forum for the Future bringing together leaders from the Middle East and G8 countries to discuss political and economic reform in the region.

The near total dominance of religious parties in elections has given a new prominence to clerics within the political system, with the most senior Shia religious leader, Sheikh Isa Qassim, playing what's regarded as an extremely important role; according to one academic paper, "In fact, it seems that few decisions can be arrived at in Al Wefaq – and in the whole country, for that matter – without prior consultation with Isa Qassim, ranging from questions with regard to the planned codification of the personal status law to participation in elections."

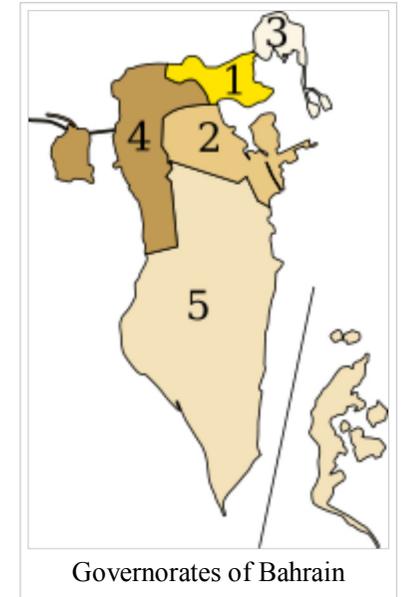
In 2007, Al Wefaq-backed parliamentary investigations are credited with forcing the government to remove ministers who had frequently clashed with MPs: the Minister of Health, Dr Nada Haffadh (who was also Bahrain's first ever female cabinet minister) and the Minister of Information, Dr Mohammed Abdul Gaffar.

## Governorates

Bahrain is split into five governorates. Until July 3, 2002, it was divided into twelve municipalities; see Municipalities of Bahrain. The governorates are:

1. Capital
2. Central
3. Muharraq
4. Northern
5. Southern

For further information, see Decree-Law establishing governorates PDF (732 KiB) from the Bahrain official website.



## Cities, towns and villages

Among Bahrain's cities and towns are:

- |                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| ■ Al Manama              | ■ Riffa   |
| ■ Al Muharraq            | ■ Jidhafs |
| ■ Hamad Town             | ■ Sitrah  |
| ■ Madinat Isa / Isa Town | ■ Al-Hidd |

Bahrain's many small towns and villages include:

- |             |         |             |           |            |
|-------------|---------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| ■ A'ali     | ■ Arad  | ■ Galali    | ■ Jurdab  | ■ Salmabad |
| ■ Abu Saiba | ■ Askar | ■ Janabiyah | ■ Karrana | ■ Samaheej |

- Al Daih
- Al Dair
- Al Duraz
- Al Muqsha
- Awali
- Bani Jamrah
- Budaiya
- Busaiteen
- Jannusan
- Jaw
- Jeblat Hibshi
- Jid Alhaj
- Jid Ali
- Ma'ameer
- Malkiya
- Maqaba
- Nabih Saleh
- Sar
- Sanad
- Tubli
- Zallaq

## Economy

In a region experiencing an oil boom, Bahrain has the fastest growing economy in the Arab world, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia found in January 2006. Bahrain also has the freest economy in the Middle East according to the 2006 Index of Economic Freedom published by the Heritage Foundation/Wall Street Journal, and is twenty-fifth freest overall in the world. In 2008, Bahrain was named the world's fastest growing financial centre by the City of London's Global Financial Centres Index.

In Bahrain, petroleum production and processing account for about 60% of export receipts, 60% of government revenues, and 30% of GDP. Economic conditions have fluctuated with the changing fortunes of oil since 1985, for example, during and following the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. With its highly developed communication and transport facilities, Bahrain is home to multinational firms. A large share of exports consists of petroleum products made from imported crude oil. Construction proceeds on several major industrial projects. Unemployment, especially among the young, and the depletion of both oil and underground water resources are major long-term economic problems.

In 2004, Bahrain signed the US-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement, which will reduce certain barriers to trade between the two nations.

Bahrain in 2007 became the first Arab country to institute unemployment benefits as part of a series of labour reforms instigated under Minister of Labour, Dr. Majeed Al Alawi

## Geography

Bahrain is a generally flat and arid archipelago, consisting of a low desert plain rising gently to a low central escarpment, in the Persian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia. The highest point is the 122 m Jabal ad Dukhan.

Bahrain has a total area of 665 km<sup>2</sup> (266 mi<sup>2</sup>), which is slightly larger than the Isle of Man, though it is smaller than the nearby King Fahd International Airport near Dammam, Saudi Arabia (780 km<sup>2</sup> or 301 mi<sup>2</sup>). As an archipelago of thirty-three islands, Bahrain does not share a land boundary with another country but does have a 161-kilometre (100 mi) coastline and claims a further twelve nautical miles (22 km) of territorial sea and a twenty-four nautical mile (44 km) contiguous zone. Bahrain's largest islands are Bahrain Island, Muharraq, Umm an Nasan, and Sitrah. Bahrain has mild winters and very hot, humid summers.

Bahrain's natural resources include large quantities of oil and natural gas as well as fish stocks. Arable land constitutes only 2.82% of the total area. Desert constitutes 92% of Bahrain and periodic droughts and dust storms are the main natural hazards for Bahrainis.

Environmental issues facing Bahrain include desertification resulting from the degradation of limited arable land, coastal degradation (damage to coastlines, coral reefs, and sea vegetation) resulting from oil spills and other discharges from large tankers, oil refineries, and distribution stations, and illegal land reclamation at places such as Tubli Bay. The agricultural and domestic sectors' over-utilization of the Dammam Aquifer, the principal aquifer in Bahrain, has led to its salinization by adjacent brackish and saline water bodies.

## Demographics

### *Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Groups of Bahrain*

The official religion of Bahrain is Islam, which the majority of the population practices. However, due to an influx of immigrants and guest workers from non-Muslim countries, such as India, Philippines and Sri Lanka, the overall percentage of Muslims in the country has declined in recent years. According to the 2001 census, 80% of Bahrain's population was Muslim, 10% were Christian, and 10% practiced other religions.

There are no official figures for the proportion of Shia and Sunni among the Muslims of Bahrain. Unofficial sources, such as the Library of Congress Country Studies, BBC, and the New York Times, estimate it to be approximately 45% Sunni and 55% Shia. The last official census to include sectarian identification (in 1941) reported 53% as Shia.

Bahrain has transformed into a cosmopolitan society with mixed communities; two thirds of Bahrain's population consists of Arabs. A large contingent of people of Iranian descent as well as immigrants and guest workers from South Asia and Southeast Asia are present. A Financial Times published on 31 May 1983 found that "Bahrain is a polyglot state, both religiously and racially. Leaving aside the temporary immigrants of the past ten years, there are at least eight or nine communities on the island."



Map of Bahrain.



Bahrain from space

The present communities may be classified as:

- **Tribals** - Sunni Arab bedouin tribes allied to the Al-Khalifa including the Utoob tribes, Dawasir, Al Nuaim, Al Mannai etc.
- **Baharna** - Shia Arabs divided between those indigenous to the islands, and the *Hassawis* hailing from the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia
- **Howala** - descendants of Sunni Arabs who migrated to Persia and returned later on, although some of them are originally Persians.
- **Ajam** - ethnic Persians from Shia and Sunni faith.
- **Najdis** (also called *Hadhar*), non-tribal urban Sunni Arabs from Najd in central Arabia. These are families whose ancestors were pearl divers, traders, etc. An example is the Al Gosaibi family.
- **Banyan** - Indians who traded with Bahrain and settled before the age of oil (formerly known as the Hunood or Banyan, Arabic: **اليونيان**) -- see also Bania (caste);
- **Afro-Arabs** - Descendants of black African slaves from East Africa
- **Bahraini Jews** - a tiny Jewish community; and a miscellaneous grouping.

## Culture

Bahrain is sometimes described as the "Middle East lite" because it combines modern infrastructure with a Gulf identity and, unlike other countries in the region, its prosperity is not solely a reflection of the size of its oil wealth, but is also related to the creation of an indigenous middle class. This unique socioeconomic development in the Persian Gulf has meant that Bahrain is generally more liberal than its neighbours. While Islam is the main religion, Bahrainis have been known for their tolerance, and churches, a Hindu temple, a Sikh Gurdwara and a Jewish synagogue can be found alongside mosques. The country is home to several communities that have faced persecution elsewhere.

It is too early to say whether political liberalisation under King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has augmented or undermined Bahrain's traditional pluralism. The new political space for Shia and Sunni Islamists has meant that they are now more able to pursue programmes that often seek to directly confront this pluralism, yet political reforms have encouraged an opposite trend for society to become more self critical with more willingness to examine previous social taboos. It is now common to find public seminars on once unheard of subjects such as marital problems and sex and child abuse. Another facet of the new openness is Bahrain's status as the most prolific book publisher in the Arab world, with 132 books published in 2005 for a population of 700,000. In comparison, the average for the entire Arab world is seven books published per one million people in 2005, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

Ali Bahar is the most famous singer in Bahrain. He performs his music with his Band Al-Ekhwa (The Brothers).

On October 20, 2005, it was reported that Michael Jackson intended to leave the United States permanently in order to seek a new life in Bahrain. Jackson has reportedly told friends that he feels "increasingly Bahraini" after buying a former PM's mansion in Sanad, and is now seeking another property by the seashore. Jackson reportedly moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2006. Other celebrities associated with the Kingdom include singer Shakira and Grand Prix driver Jenson Button, who owns property there.

In Manama lies the new district of Juffair, predominantly built on reclaimed land. This is the location of the U.S. Naval Support Activity. The concentration of restaurants, bars and nightlife make this area a magnet for U.S. service members and Saudi weekend visitors.

## Language

Arabic is the official language of Bahrain, though English is widely used. Another language spoken by some of the local inhabitants of Bahrain is a dialect of Persian which has been heavily influenced by Arabic. Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and Tagalog are widely spoken amongst the domestic workers, housemaids and construction workers.

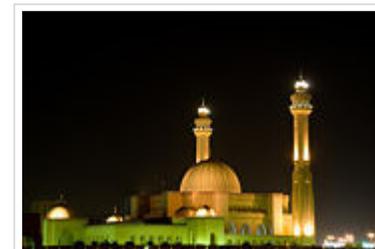
## Formula One and other motorsports events

Bahrain has a Formula One race-track, hosting the Gulf Air Grand Prix on 4 April 2004, the first for an Arab country. The race was won by Michael Schumacher of Scuderia Ferrari. This was followed by the Bahrain Grand Prix in 2005. Bahrain has successfully hosted the opening Grand Prix of the 2006 season on 12 March. Both the above races were won by Fernando Alonso of Renault. The 2007 event took place on April 13th, 14th and 15th resulting in victory of Ferrari's Felipe Massa. On Sunday, April 6th, 2008, Ferrari's Felipe Massa once again took the Bahrain Grand Prix victory, with BMW Sauber's Robert Kubica being the first Polish driver on pole position, and BMW's first pole as well.

In 2006, Bahrain also hosted its inaugural Australian V8 Supercar event dubbed the "Desert 400". The V8s will return every November to the Sakhir circuit. The



A 123 meter-high fountain off the coast of Manama. The mechanism is contained in a barge, anchored to the seabed.



Bahrain Grand Mosque.

inaugural round was won by Ford Performance Racing's Jason Bright.

The Bahrain International Circuit also features a full length drag strip, and the Bahrain Drag Racing Club has organised invitational events featuring some of Europe's top drag racing teams to try and raise the profile of the sport in the Middle East. There has been much speculation about Bahrain hosting a round of the FIA European Drag Racing Championship, but as yet this has not come to fruition due to problems with the track gaining the necessary licence .

## Holidays

Date	English name	Local name	
January 1	New Year's Day	رأس السنة الميلادية	
May 1	Labour Day	عيد العمال	
December 16	National Day	العيد الوطني	
December 17	Accession Day	عيد الجلوس	
10th Zilhajjah	Feast of the Sacrifice (4 days)	<i>Eid ul-Adha</i>	Commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail; occurs at the 10th day of the month of hajj. i.e. the month of Dhu al-Hijjah
1st Shawal	Little Feast (3 days)	<i>Eid ul-Fitr</i>	Commemorates end of Ramadan
1st Moharram	Hijri New Year	<i>Muharram</i>	Islamic New Year
9th & 10th Moharram	Ashura Day	<i>Muharram</i>	
Last days of Ramadan	Al-Isra' wa ul-Miraj	<i>Lailat al Miraj</i>	Commemorates Muhammad's journey to the Heavens
27th Rajab	Al-Isra' wa ul-Miraj	<i>Rajab</i>	Non Salafi Sunni celebrate Mi'raj i.e. the day Muhammad is alleged to have ascended to heaven
12th Rabiul Awal	Prophet Muhammad's birthday	<i>Mawlid al-Nabi</i>	
9th-10th Moharram	Ashoura (2 days)		Commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali at the Battle of Karbala

On 1 September 2006 Bahrain changed its weekend from being Thursdays and Fridays to Fridays and Saturdays, in order to have a day of the weekend shared with the rest of the world.

## Military

The kingdom has a small but well equipped military called the Bahrain Defense Force. They have a cooperative agreement with the United States Military and have provided the United States a base in Juffair since the early 1990s. This is the home of the United States Navy Central Command ( COMUSNAVCENT) and about 1500 U.S. and coalition military .

## Education

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Quranic schools (*Kuttab*) were the only form of education in Bahrain. They were traditional schools aimed at teaching children and youth the reading of the Qur'an. After the First World War, Bahrain became open to western influences and a demand for modern educational institutions appeared.

1919 marked the beginning of modern public school system in Bahrain when Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia School for boys was opened in Muharraq. In 1926, the Education Committee opened the second public school for boys in Manama and in 1928 the first public school for girls was opened in Muharraq.

In 2004 King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa introduced a project that uses information communication technology (ICT) to support K–12 education in Bahrain. This project is named King Hamad Schools of Future. The objective of this project is to connect and link all schools within the kingdom with the internet.

In addition to British intermediate schools, the island is served by the Bahrain School (BS). The BS is a United States Department of Defense school that provides a K-12 curriculum including International Baccalaureate offerings.

There are also private schools that offer either the IB Diploma Programme or UK A-Levels. In 2007, St Christopher's School Bahrain became the first school in Bahrain to offer a choice of IB or A-Levels for students. The British School of Bahrain was listed by The Times newspaper as being one of the top 10 schools outside the United Kingdom.

Numerous international educational institutions and schools have established links to Bahrain. A few prominent institutions are DePaul University, Bentley College, and NYIT.

Schooling is paid for by the government. Primary and secondary attendance is high, although it is not compulsory. Bahrain also encourages institutions of higher learning, drawing on expatriate talent and the increasing pool of Bahrain Nationals returning from abroad with advanced degrees. The University of Bahrain has been established for standard undergraduate and graduate study, and the College of Health Sciences – operating under the direction of the Ministry of Health – trains physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and paramedics. The national action charter, passed in 2001, paved the way for the formation of private universities. The first private university was Ahlia University, situated in Manama. The University of London External has appointed MCG as the regional representative office

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in Bahrain for distance learning programs. MCG is one of the oldest private institutes in the country.

Institutes have also been opened which educate Asian students, such as the Pakistan Urdu School, the Indian School, Bahrain and the *New Indian School, Bahrain*.

## Tourism

Bahrain is a popular tourist destination with over eight million tourists a year. Most of the visitors are from the surrounding Arab states but there is an increasing number of tourists from outside the region thanks to a growing awareness of the kingdom's heritage and its higher profile with regards to the Bahrain Formula One Race Track.

The Lonely Planet describes Bahrain as "an excellent introduction to the Persian Gulf" because of its authentic Arab heritage and reputation as relatively liberal and modern. The kingdom combines Arab culture, Gulf glitz and the archaeological legacy of five thousand years of civilization. The island is home to castles including Qalat Al Bahrain which has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site

The Bahrain National Museum has artifacts from the country's history dating back to the island's first human inhabitation 9000 years ago.

Some of the major projects underway are Durrat Al Bahrain, Amwaj Islands, Bahrain Bay, Financial Harbour, Areen Resort and Spa, Bahrain City Center, Bahrain Bay, Salam Resort Bahrain, Reef Island, Bahrain Health Island, Diyaar Al Muharraq, Bahrain International Circuit, Riffa Views, Marina West, Al Jazir Beach, World Trade Centre and Abraj Lulu, and the new Iceberg Tower (which is a ski resort) to be opened in 2009.



Al Bander Resort in Bahrain.

### **Bahrain Official Tourist Website Bahrain Economic Development'**

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# Comoros

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Africa; African Countries

The **Comoros** (pronounced /ˈkɒməroʊs/, listen (help·listen); Arabic: جزر القمر, *Juzur al-Qumur*), officially the **Union of the Comoros** (French: *Union des Comores*, Arabic: الإتحاد القمريّ, *Al-Ittiḥād al-Qumuriyy*) is an island nation in the Indian Ocean, located off the eastern coast of Africa on the northern end of the Mozambique Channel between northern Madagascar and northeastern Mozambique. The nearest countries to the Comoros are Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, and the Seychelles. At 2,235 km<sup>2</sup> (863 sq mi) the Comoros is the third smallest African nation by area; and with a population estimated at 798,000 it is the sixth smallest African nation by population (though it has one of the highest population densities in Africa), and is the southern most member state of the Arab League. Its name derives from the Arabic word *qamar* ("moon").

The country officially consists of the four islands in the volcanic Comoros archipelago: Ngazidja (French: *Grande Comore*), Mwali (French: *Mohéli*), Nzwani (French: *Anjouan*), and Mahoré (French: *Mayotte*), as well as many smaller islands. However, the government of the Union of the Comoros (or its predecessors since independence) has never administered the island of Mayotte, which France considers an overseas community and still administers. Since Mayotte was the only island in the archipelago that voted against independence from France, and France has vetoed United Nations Security Council resolutions that would affirm Comorian sovereignty over the island, control was never passed to the Comoros.

The country is notable for its diverse culture and history, as a nation formed at the crossroads of many civilizations. It has three official languages— Comorian (*Shikomor*), Arabic, and French, and it is the only state to be a member of each of the African Union, Francophonie, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Arab League, and Indian Ocean Commission, among other international organizations. However it has had a troubled history since independence in 1975, marked by an inordinate number of *coups d'état*.

## History

### Pre-colonial inhabitation

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<p><i>Union des Comores</i>  <i>Udzima wa Komori</i>  الإتحاد القمريّ  <i>Al-Ittiḥād Al-Qumuriyy</i>  <b>Union of the Comoros</b></p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Motto:</b> <i>Unité - Solidarité - Développement</i>" (French)  "Unity - Solidarity - Development"</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>Udzima wa ya Masiwa</i> (Comorian)  "The Union of the Great Islands"</p>	
	
<p><b>Capital</b>  (and largest city)</p>	<p>Moroni</p>

The first human inhabitants of the Comoro Islands are thought to have been Polynesian and Melanesian settlers, Malays and Indonesians ( Austronesians), travelling by boat. They settled there no later than the sixth century AD, the date of the earliest known archaeological site, found on Nzwani, though some sources speculate that settlement began as early as the first century. The islands of Comoros became populated by a succession of diverse groups from the coast of Africa, the Persian Gulf, Indonesia, and Madagascar. Swahili settlers first reached the islands as a part of the greater Bantu expansion that took place in Africa throughout the first millennium.

Development of the Comoros is periodized into phases, beginning with Swahili influence and settlement in the Dembini phase (ninth to tenth centuries), during which each island maintained a single, central village. From the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, trade with the island of Madagascar and merchants from the Middle East flourished, smaller villages emerged, and existing towns expanded. Unconfirmed legends tell of early Arab or Persian settlements dated even before their known arrival to the archipelago, and Swahili oral historians frequently trace genealogies back to Persian or Arab ancestors. Middle Eastern merchants first introduced Islam to the islands. As the religion gained in popularity, large mosques were constructed. The Comoro Islands, like other coastal areas in the region, were important stops in early Islamic trade routes frequented by Persians and Arabs. Despite its distance from the coast, Comoros is situated along the major sea route between Kilwa and Mozambique, an outlet for Zimbabwean gold.

By the nineteenth century, the influence of Sunni Persians from Shiraz, Iran, dominated the islands. The Shirazi traded along the coasts of East Africa, the Middle East, and India, and established colonies in the archipelago. Arab influence increased with the ascendancy of Zanzibar under Arab Omani rule, and Comorian culture, especially architecture and religion, increasingly reflected Arab contact. Many rival sultanates were established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

By the time Europeans showed interest in the Comoros, the dominant Arab cultural veneer of the islands led to many to emphasize the society's Arab foundations at the expense of its Swahili and African heritage. More recent scholarship by Thomas Spear and Randall Pouwells emphasizes African historical predominance over the diffusionist perspective.

## European contact and French colonization

Portuguese explorers first visited the archipelago in 1505.

In 1793, Malagasy warriors from Madagascar first started raiding the islands for slaves, and later settled and seized control in many locations. France first

<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic, French
<b>Demonym</b>	Comorian
<b>Government</b>	Federal republic
<span> </span> - President	Ahmed Abdallah M. Sambi
<b>Independence</b>	from France
<span> </span> - Date	July 6, 1975
<b>Area</b>	
<span> </span> - Total	2,235 km <sup>2</sup> ( 178th) 863 sq mi
<span> </span> - Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
<span> </span> - 2005 estimate	798,000 ( 159th)
<span> </span> - Density	275/km <sup>2</sup> ( 25th) 712.2/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2004 estimate
<span> </span> - Total	\$1.049 billion ( 171st)
<span> </span> - Per capita	\$1,660 ( 156th)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.561 ( <span style="color: orange;">medium</span> ) ( 134th)
<b>Currency</b>	Comorian franc ( <span style="font-variant: small-caps;">KMF</span> )
<b>Time zone</b>	EAT ( UTC+3)
<span> </span> - Summer ( DST)	not observed ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.km
<b>Calling code</b>	+269

established colonial rule in the Comoros in 1841. The first French colonists landed in Mayotte, and Andrian Tsouli, the Malagasy King of Mayotte, signed the Treaty of April 1841, which ceded the island to the French authorities. In 1886, Mohéli was placed under French protection by its Queen Salimba Mochimba. That same year, after consolidating his authority over all of Grande Comore, Sultan Said Ali agreed to French protection of his island, though he retained sovereignty until 1909. Also in 1909, Sultan Said Muhamed of Anjouan abdicated in favour of French rule. The Comoros (or *Les Comores*) was officially made a French colony in 1912, and the islands were placed under the administration of the French colonial governor general of Madagascar in 1914.

The Comoros served as a way station for merchants sailing to the Far East and India until the opening of the Suez Canal significantly reduced traffic passing through the Mozambique Channel. The only native commodities exported by the Comoros were coconuts. French settlers, French-owned companies, and wealthy Arab merchants established a plantation-based economy that now uses about one-third of the land for export crops. After its annexation, France converted Mayotte into a sugar plantation colony. The other islands were soon transformed as well, and the major crops of ylang-ylang, vanilla, coffee, cocoa, and sisal were introduced.

Agreement was reached with France in 1973 for Comoros to become independent in 1978. On July 6, 1975, however, the Comorian parliament passed a unilateral resolution declaring independence. The deputies of Mayotte, which remained under French control, abstained. Referendums on all four of the islands excluding Mayotte showed strong support for independence. Ahmed Abdallah proclaimed the of independence the **State of the Comoros** (*État comorien*; دولة القمر) on September 5, 1975 and became its first president.

## Independence

The next 30 years were a period of political turmoil. On August 3, 1975, mercenary Bob Denard, with clandestine support from Jacques Foccart and the French government, removed president Ahmed Abdallah from office in an armed coup and replaced him with United National Front of the Comoros (UNF) member Prince Said Mohammed Jaffar. Months later, in January 1976, Jaffar was ousted in favour of his Minister of Defense Ali Soilih. At this time, the population of Mayotte voted against independence from France in two referendums. The first, held in December 1974, won 63.8% support for maintaining ties with France, while the second, held in February 1976, confirmed that vote with an overwhelming 99.4%. The three remaining islands, ruled by President Soilih, instituted a number of socialist and isolationist policies that soon strained relations with France. On May 13, 1978, Bob Denard returned to overthrow President Soilih and re-instate Abdallah with the support of the French and South African governments. During Soilih's brief rule, he faced seven additional coup attempts until he was finally forced from office and killed.

In contrast to Soilih, Abdallah's presidency was marked by authoritarian rule and increased adherence to traditional Islam and the country was renamed the **Federal and Islamic Republic of Comoros** (*République Fédérale Islamique des Comores*; جمهورية القمر الاتحادية الإسلامية). Abdallah continued as president until 1989 when, fearing a probable coup d'état, he signed a decree ordering the Presidential Guard, led by Bob Denard, to disarm the armed forces. Shortly after the signing of the decree, Abdallah was allegedly shot dead in his office by a disgruntled military officer, though later sources claim an anti-tank missile launched into his bedroom killed him. Although Denard was also injured, it is suspected that Abdallah's killer was a soldier under his command. A few days later, Bob Denard was evacuated to South Africa by French paratroopers. Said Mohamed Djohar, Soilih's older half-brother, then became president and served until September 1995 when Bob Denard returned and attempted another coup. This time France intervened with paratroopers and forced Denard to surrender. The French removed Djohar to Reunion, and the Paris-backed Mohamed Taki Abdulkarim became president by election. He led the country from 1996, during a

time of labor crises, government suppression, and secessionist conflicts, until his death November 1998. He was succeeded by Interim President Tadjidine Ben Said Massoude.

The islands of Anjouan and Mohéli declared their independence from the Comoros in 1997, in an attempt to restore French rule. But France rejected their request, leading to bloody confrontations between federal troops and rebels. In April 1999, Colonel Azali Assoumani, Army Chief of Staff, seized power in a bloodless coup, overthrowing the Interim President Massoude, citing weak leadership in the face of the crisis. This was the Comoros' 18th coup d'état since independence in 1975. But Azali failed to consolidate power and reestablish control over the islands, which was the subject of international criticism. The African Union, under the auspices of President Mbeki of South Africa, imposed sanctions on Anjouan to help broker negotiations and effect reconciliation. The official name of the country was changed to the **Union of the Comoros** and a new system of political autonomy for each island, plus a union government for the three islands.

Azali stepped down in 2002 to run in the democratic election of the President of the Comoros, which he won. Under ongoing international pressure, as a military ruler who had originally come to power by force and was not always democratic while in office, Azali led the Comoros through constitutional changes that enabled new elections. A *Loi des compétences* law was passed in early 2005 that defines the responsibilities of each governmental body, and is in the process of implementation. The elections in 2006 were won by Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi, a Sunni Muslim Cleric nick-named the "Ayatollah" for his time spent studying Islam in Iran. Azali honored the election results, thus allowing the first peaceful and democratic exchange of power for the archipelago.

Colonel Mohammed Bacar, a French-trained former gendarme, seized power as President in Anjouan in 2001. He staged a vote in June 2007 to confirm his leadership that was rejected as illegal by the Comoros federal government and the African Union. On March 25, 2008 hundreds of soldiers from the African Union and Comoros seized rebel-held Anjouan, generally welcomed by the population. Some rebels were killed and injured, but there are no official figures. At least 11 civilians were wounded. Some officials were imprisoned. Bacar fled in a speedboat to the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte to seek asylum. Anti-French protests followed in Comoros (see 2008 invasion of Anjouan).

Since independence from France, the Comoros experienced more than 20 coups or attempted coups.

## Geography

The Comoros is formed by Ngazidja (Grande Comore), Mwali (Mohéli), Nzwani (Anjouan), and Mahoré (Mayotte), the major islands in the Comoros Archipelago, as well as many minor islets. The islands are officially known by their Comorian language names, though international sources still use their French names (in parentheses) commonly. The capital and largest city, Moroni, is located on Ngazidja. The archipelago is situated in the Indian Ocean, in the Mozambique Channel, between the African coast (nearest to Mozambique and Tanzania) and Madagascar, with no land borders. At 2,235 km<sup>2</sup> (863 sq mi), it is one of the smallest countries in the world. The Comoros also has claim to 320 km<sup>2</sup> (124 sq mi) of territorial seas. The interiors of the islands vary from steep mountains to low hills. The climate is generally tropical and mild, and the two major seasons are distinguishable by their relative raininess. The temperature reaches an average of 29-30°C (84-86°F) in March, the hottest month in the rainy season (December to April), and an average low of 19°C (66°F) in the cool, dry season (May to November). The islands are subject to cyclones during rainy season which are strong enough to devastate the infrastructure about twice every decade.



Map of Comoros

Ngazidja is the largest of the Comoros Archipelago, approximately equal in area to the other islands combined. It is also the most recent island, and therefore has rocky soil. The island's two volcanoes, Karthala and La Grille, and the lack of good harbors are distinctive characteristics of its terrain. Mwali, with its capital at Fomboni, is the smallest of the four major islands. Nzwani, whose capital is Mutsamudu, has a distinctive triangular shape caused by three mountain chains, Sima, Nioumakele, and Jimilime, emanating from a central peak, Mtingui (1,575 m, 5,177 ft). The oldest of the islands, Mahoré has the richest soil as well as good harbors and local fish populations, due to its ring of coral reefs. Dzaoudzi, a previous capital of all the colonial Comoros, is located on Pamanzi, (French: *Petite-Terre*), the largest islet of Mahoré. Mahoré's current capital is at Mamoudzou. The term *Mayotte* (or Mahoré) may also refer to the group of islands, of which the largest is known as Mahoré (French: *Grande-Terre*), and it includes Mahoré's surrounding islands, most notably Pamanzi (*Petite-Terre*).



Satellite view of Mount Karthala after a Nov. 2005 eruption. Ash obscures the islands (outlined).

The islands of the Comoros Archipelago were formed by volcanic activity. Mount Karthala, an active shield volcano located on Ngazidja, is the country's highest point, at 2,361 m or 7748 ft. It contains the Comoros' largest patch of its disappearing rainforest. Karthala is currently one of the most active volcanoes in the world, with a minor eruption in May 2006, and prior eruptions as recently as April 2005 and 1991. In the 2005 eruption, which lasted from April 17 to 19, 40,000 citizens were evacuated, and the crater lake in the volcano's 3 by 4 km (2 by 2½ mi) caldera was destroyed.

The Comoros also lays claim to the Glorioso Islands, comprised of Grande Glorieuse, Île du Lys, Wreck Rock, South Rock, Verte Rocks (three islets), and three unnamed islets, one of France's *Îles Éparses* or *Îles éparses de l'océan indien* (Scattered islands in the Indian Ocean) possessions. The Glorioso Islands were administered by the colonial Comoros before 1975, and are therefore sometimes considered part of the Comoros Archipelago. Banc du Geysier, a former island in the Comoros Archipelago, now submerged, is geographically located in the *Îles Éparses*, but was annexed by Madagascar in 1976 as an unclaimed territory. The Comoros now claims it as part of its exclusive economic zone.

## Government

Politics of the Union of the Comoros takes place in a framework of a federal presidential republic, whereby the President of the Comoros is both head of state and head of government, and of a multi-party system. The Constitution of the Union of the Comoros was ratified by referendum on December 23, 2001, and the islands' constitutions and executives were elected in the following months. It had previously been considered a military dictatorship, and the transfer of power from Azali Assoumani to Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi in May 2006 was the first peaceful transfer in Comorian history. Executive power is exercised by the government. Federal legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament. The preamble of the constitution guarantees an Islamic inspiration in governance, a commitment to human rights, and several specific enumerated rights, democracy, "a common destiny" for all Comorians. Each of the islands (according to Title II of the Constitution) has a great amount of autonomy in the Union, including having their own constitutions (or Fundamental Law), president, and Parliament. The presidency and Assembly of the Union are distinct from each of the Islands' governments. The presidency of the Union rotates between the islands. Anjouan holds the current presidency rotation, and so Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi is President of the Union; Mohéli and Ngazidja follow in four year terms.

The Comorian legal system rests on Islamic law and an inherited French ( Napoleonic code) legal code. Village elders or civilian courts settle most disputes. The judiciary is independent of the legislative and the executive. The Supreme Court acts as a Constitutional Council in resolving constitutional questions and supervising presidential elections. As High Court of Justice, the Supreme Court also arbitrates in cases where the government is accused of malpractice. The Supreme Court consists of two members selected by the president, two elected by the Federal Assembly, and one by the council of each island.

## **Military**

The military resources of the Comoros consist of a small standing army and a 500-member police force, as well as a 500-member defense force. A defense treaty with France provides naval resources for protection of territorial waters, training of Comorian military personnel, and air surveillance. France maintains a small troop presence in Comoros at government request. France maintains a small maritime base and a Foreign Legion Detachment (DLEM) on Mayotte. See also Military of Comoros.

## **Foreign relations**

In November 1975, Comoros became the 143rd member of the United Nations. The new nation was defined as comprising the entire archipelago, although France continues to maintain control over the island of Mayotte as an overseas collectivity. Comoros has repeatedly pressed its claim to the island before the United Nations General Assembly, which adopted a series of resolutions under the caption "Question of the Comorian Island of Mayotte", opining that Mayotte belongs to Comoros under the principle that the territorial integrity of colonial territories should be preserved upon independence. As a practical matter, however, these resolutions have little effect and there is no foreseeable likelihood that Mayotte will become *de facto* part of Comoros without its people's consent. More recently, the Assembly has maintained this item on its agenda but deferred it from year to year without taking action. Other bodies, including the UN General Assembly, the Organization of African Unity, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, have similarly questioned French sovereignty over Mayotte.

Comoros also is a member of the African Union, the Arab League, the European Development Fund, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Indian Ocean Commission, and the African Development Bank.

## Economy

Economic growth and poverty reduction are major priorities for the government. With a rate of 14.3%, unemployment is considered very high. Agriculture, including fishing, hunting, and forestry, is the leading sector of the economy, and 38.4% of the working population is employed in the primary sector. High population densities, as much as 1000 per square kilometer in the densest agricultural zones, for what is still a mostly rural, agricultural economy may lead to an environmental crisis in the near future, especially considering the high rate of population growth. The Comoros' real GDP growth was a low 1.9% in 2004 and real GDP per capita was continuing declining annually in 2004. These declines are explained by factors including declining investment, drops in consumption, rising inflation, and an increase in trade imbalance due in part to lowered cash crop prices, especially vanilla.

Comoros has an inadequate transportation system, a young and rapidly increasing population, and few natural resources. The low educational level of the labor force contributes to a subsistence level of economic activity, high unemployment, and a heavy dependence on foreign grants and technical assistance. Agriculture contributes 40% to GDP, employs 80% of the labor force, and provides most of the exports. Comoros is the world's largest producer of ylang-ylang, and a large producer of vanilla.

The government is struggling to upgrade education and technical training, to privatize commercial and industrial enterprises, to improve health services, to diversify exports, to promote tourism, and to reduce the high population growth rate.

The Comoros claims the Banc du Geysir and the Glorioso Islands as part of its exclusive economic zone.

## Demographics

With fewer than a million people, the Comoros is one of the least populous countries in the world, but is also one of the most densely populated, with an average of 275 people per km<sup>2</sup> (712 people per sq mi). In 2001, 34% of the population was considered urban, but that is expected to grow, since rural population growth is negative, while overall population growth is still relatively high. Major urban centers include Moroni, Mutsamudu, Domoni, Fomboni, and Tsémbéhou.

The islands of the Comoros share mostly African-Arab origins. Sunni Islam is the dominant religion, representing as much as 98% of the population. Although Arab culture is firmly established throughout the archipelago, a minority of the citizens of Mayotte (the Mahorais) are Roman Catholic and have been strongly influenced by French culture. Malagasy and Indian minorities also exist, as well as Creole-speaking minorities mostly descended from Réunionnaise. Chinese peoples are also present on Mayotte and parts of Grande Comore (especially Moroni).

The most common language is Comorian, or *Shikomor*, a descendant of Swahili with Arabic influences. Shingazidja, Shimwali, Shinzwani, and Shimaore are the local dialects spoken on each of the islands, Ngazidja, Mwali, Nzwani, and Mahoré, respectively. French and Arabic are also official languages, along with Comorian. Arabic is widely known as a second language, being the language of Quranic teaching, and French is the language of all other formal education. Malagasy is also spoken by a small number of Malagasy immigrants. About fifty-seven percent of the population is literate in the Latin alphabet, more with the Arabic alphabet; total literacy is estimated at 62.5%. Comorian has no native script, but both Arabic and Latin scripts have been used.

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# Greenland

2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Americas; North American Geography

**Greenland** ( Kalaallisut: *Kalaallit Nunaat*, meaning "Land of the Greenlanders"; Danish: *Grønland*) is a self-governing Danish province located between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, east of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Though physiographically and ethnically an Arctic island nation associated with the continent of North America, politically and historically Greenland is associated with Europe, specifically Iceland, Norway, and Denmark. In 1978, Denmark granted home rule to Greenland, making it an equal member of the Rigsfællesskab. Greenland is, by area, the world's largest island which is not a continent in its own right.

## History

In prehistoric times, Greenland was home to a number of Paleo-Eskimo cultures. From AD 984 it was colonized by Norse settlers in two settlements on the west coast on the fjords near the very southwestern tip of the island. They thrived for a few centuries, but disappeared sometime in the 15th century.

Data from ice cores indicate that from AD 800 to 1300 the regions around the fjords of southern Greenland experienced a relatively mild climate, with temperatures similar to today. Trees and herbaceous plants grew there, and the climate initially allowed farming of livestock as in Norway. These remote communities thrived on farming, hunting and trade with Norway. When the Norwegian kings converted their domains to Christianity, a bishop was installed in Greenland, subordinate to the archdiocese of Nidaros. The settlements seem to have coexisted relatively peacefully with the Inuit, who had migrated south from the Arctic islands of North America around 1200. In 1261, Greenland became part of the Kingdom of Norway.

Around the 14th and 15th centuries, the Norwegian settlements vanished, likely due to famine and increasing conflicts with the Inuit. The condition of human bones from this period indicates the Norse population was malnourished. Main reasons appeared to have been soil erosion due to destruction of the natural vegetation for farming, turf, and wood by the Norse, a decline in temperatures during the Little Ice Age, and armed conflicts with the Inuit. Jared Diamond suggests that cultural practices, such as rejecting fish as a source of food and reliance solely on livestock ill-adapted to Greenland's climate, caused by the mini-ice age, which resulted in recurring famines, with environmental degradation led to

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<b><i>Kalaallit Nunaat</i></b> <b><i>Grønland</i></b> <b>Greenland</b>	
 Flag	
<b>Anthem:</b> <i>Nunarput utoqqarsuanngoravit</i>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Nuuk (Godthåb)
<b>Official languages</b>	Kalaallisut , Danish
<b>Demonym</b>	Greenlandic
<b>Government</b>	Parliamentary democracy within a constitutional monarchy
- Monarch	Margrethe II
- Prime Minister	Hans Enoksen
<b>Autonomous province</b> of the Kingdom of Denmark	

the abandonment of the colony. However, other research has suggested that fish were a major source of food for the Norse Greenlanders from the early 1300s on.

The Kingdom of Denmark–Norway reasserted its latent claim to the colony in 1721. But ties with Norway were severed by the Treaty of Kiel of 1814, ceding Norway to the king of Sweden while Denmark retained the Norwegian overseas possessions: the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland, as well as Denmark-Norway's small territories in India ( Tranquebar), West Africa ( Danish Gold Coast), and the West Indies ( Danish Virgin Islands).

Norway occupied and claimed parts of (then uninhabited) East Greenland also called Erik the Red's Land in July 1931, claiming that it constituted Terra nullius. Norway and Denmark agreed to settle the matter at the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1933, where Norway lost.

During World War II, Greenland's connection to Denmark was severed on April 9, 1940 when Denmark was occupied by Germany. Greenland was able to buy goods from the United States and Canada, by selling cryolite from the mine in Ivigtût. During the war the system of government changed. Governor Eske Brun ruled the island via a 1925 law that allowed governors to take control under extreme circumstances. The other governor, Aksel Svane, was transferred to the US to lead the commission to supply Greenland. The Sirius Patrol, guarding the northeastern shores of Greenland using dog sleds, detected and destroyed several German weather stations, giving Denmark a better position in the postwar turmoil.

Greenland had been a protected and very isolated society until 1940. The Danish government, which governed its colony Greenland, had been convinced that the society would face exploitation from the outside world or even extinction if the country was opened up. But during World War II, Greenland developed a sense of self-reliance through its self-government and independent communication with the outside world.

However, a commission in 1946 (with the highest Greenlandic council Landsrådet as participant) recommended patience and no radical reformation of the system. Two years later the first step towards changing the government was initiated when a grand commission was founded. In 1950 the report (G-50) was presented. Greenland was to be a modern welfare society with Denmark as the sponsor and example. In 1953, Greenland was made an equal part of the Danish Kingdom. Home rule was granted in 1979.

## Etymology

The name *Greenland* comes from Scandinavian settlers. In the Icelandic sagas, it is said that Norwegian-born Erik the Red was exiled from Iceland for murder.

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- Home rule	1979
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	2,166,086 km <sup>2</sup> ( 13th) 836,109 sq mi
- Water (%)	81.1 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Population</b>	
- July 2007 estimate	56,344
- Density	0.026/km <sup>2</sup> ( 241th) 0.067/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2001 estimate
- Total	\$1.1 billion ( not ranked)
- Per capita	\$19,000 <sup>2</sup> ( not ranked)
<b>HDI (n/a)</b>	n/a (n/a) ( n/a)
<b>Currency</b>	Danish krone ( <span>₺</span> )
<b>Time zone</b>	( UTC0 to -4)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.gl
<b>Calling code</b>	+299
<p><sup>1</sup> As of 2000: 410,449 km<sup>2</sup> (158,433 sq. miles) ice-free; 1,755,637 km<sup>2</sup> (677,676 sq. miles) ice-covered.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> 2001 estimate.</p>	

He, along with his extended family and thralls, set out in ships to find the land that was rumoured to be to the northwest. After settling there, he named the land *Grænland* ("Greenland"). Greenland was also called *Gruntland* ("Ground-land") and *Engronelant* (or *Engroneland*) on early maps. Whether *green* is an erroneous transcription of *grunt* ("ground"), which refers to shallow bays, or vice versa, is not known. It should also be noted, however, that the southern portion of Greenland (not covered by glacier) is indeed very green in the summer and was likely to have been even greener in Erik's time because of the Medieval Warm Period.

## Sovereignty

Norse Greenlanders submitted to Norwegian rule in the 13th century — and Norway entered in a personal union with Denmark in 1380 and from 1397 as a part of the Kalmar Union. From 1536, after Sweden had broken out of the union, Norway entered into a closer dependency of Denmark, i.e., kingdom of Denmark-Norway which existed until 1814. At that time, the kingdom of Denmark-Norway found itself on the losing side of the Napoleonic Wars. In gratitude to Sweden for her assistance in defeating Napoleon (and as a consolation for the recent loss of Finland to Russia), mainland Norway and certain Norwegian territories were transferred to Sweden — thus, the personal union of Norway and Denmark ended. The dependencies of Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, however, remained part of the reorganised "Kingdom of Denmark".

In the early 20th century, the United States was believed to have claims made good by discovery and exploration of the Peary expeditions.

In 1933, Norway attempted to claim eastern Greenland. The Permanent Court of Arbitration decided that the entire island belonged to Denmark.

During the Cold War, the United States developed a geopolitical interest in Greenland, and therefore in 1946, the United States offered to buy Greenland from Denmark for \$100,000,000, but Denmark did not agree to sell.

Greenland became an integral part of the Kingdom of Denmark in 1953. It was granted home rule by the Folketing (Danish parliament) in 1978. The law went into effect on May 1, 1979. The Queen of Denmark, Margrethe II, remains Greenland's Head of State. Greenlandic voters subsequently chose to leave the European Economic Community upon achieving self-rule, because they did not want to allow European fishing fleets in Greenlandic waters.

A referendum on further self-rule is scheduled for 25 November 2008.

## Politics

Greenland's Head of State is currently Margrethe II. The Queen's government in Denmark appoints a *Rigsombudsmand* ( High commissioner) representing the Danish government and monarchy.



Icebergs at Cape York,  
Greenland

Greenland has an elected parliament of thirty-one members. The head of government is the Prime Minister, who is usually the leader of the majority party in Parliament. The current Prime Minister is Hans Enoksen.

In 1985, Greenland left the European Community (EC), unlike Denmark which remains a member. The EC later became the EU (European Union) when it was renamed and expanded in scope in 1992. Greenland retains some ties with the EU via Denmark.

## Geography and climate

The Atlantic Ocean borders Greenland's southeast; the Greenland Sea is to the east; the Arctic Ocean is to the north; and Baffin Bay is to the west. The nearest countries are Iceland, east of Greenland in the Atlantic Ocean, and Canada, to the west and across Baffin Bay. Greenland is the world's largest island, and is the largest dependent territory by area in the world. It also contains the world's largest national park.



Southeast coast of Greenland

The total area of Greenland measures 2,166,086 km<sup>2</sup> (836,109 sq mi), of which the Greenland ice sheet covers 1,755,637 km<sup>2</sup> (677,676 sq mi) (81%). The coastline of Greenland is 39,330 km (24,430 mi) long, about the same length as the Earth's circumference at the Equator. The highest point on Greenland is GUNNBjørn at 3,694 metres (12,119 ft).

The weight of the massive Greenlandic ice cap has depressed the central land area to form a basin lying more than 300 m (1,000 ft) below sea level. The ice flows generally to the coast from the centre of the island.

All towns and settlements of Greenland are situated along the ice-free coast, with the population being concentrated along the Western coast. The northeastern part of Greenland, which includes sections of North Greenland and East Greenland, is not part of any municipality, but is the site of the world's largest national park, Northeast Greenland National Park.

At least four scientific expedition stations and camps had been established in the ice-covered central part of Greenland (indicated as pale blue in the map to the right), on the ice sheet: Eismitte, North Ice, North GRIP Camp and The Raven Skiway. Currently, there is a year-round station, Summit Camp, on the ice sheet, established in 1989. The radio station Jørgen Brøndlund Fjord was, until 1950, the northernmost permanent outpost in the world.



Map of Greenland



A scene from South Greenland, near Nanortalik, where fjords and mountains dominate the landscape

The extreme north of Greenland, Peary Land, is not covered by an ice sheet, because the air there is too dry to produce snow, which is essential in the production and maintenance of an ice sheet. If the Greenland ice sheet were to completely melt away, sea level would rise by more than 7 m (23 ft) and Greenland would most likely become an archipelago.

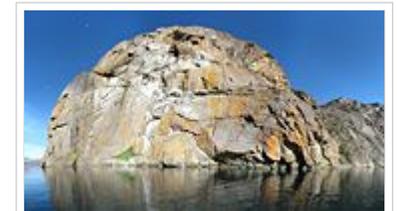
Between 1989 and 1993, U.S. and European climate researchers drilled into the summit of Greenland's ice sheet, obtaining a pair of two mile (3 km) long ice cores. Analysis of the layering and chemical composition of the cores has provided a revolutionary new record of climate change in the Northern Hemisphere going back about 100,000 years and illustrated that the world's weather and temperature have often shifted rapidly from one seemingly stable state to another, with worldwide consequences. The glaciers of Greenland are also contributing to global sea level rise at a faster rate than was previously believed. Between 1991 and 2004, monitoring of the weather at one location (Swiss Camp) found that the average winter temperature had risen almost 6 ° C (approx. 10 ° F). Other research has shown that higher snowfalls from the North Atlantic oscillation caused the interior of the ice cap to thicken by an average of 6 cm/yr between 1994 and 2005.

However, a recent study suggests a much warmer planet in relatively recent geological times:

Scientists who probed two kilometers (1.2 miles) through a Greenland glacier to recover the oldest plant DNA on record said Thursday the planet was far warmer hundreds of thousands of years ago than is generally believed. DNA of trees, plants and insects including butterflies and spiders from beneath the southern Greenland glacier was estimated to date to 450,000 to 900,000 years ago, according to the remnants retrieved from this long-vanished boreal forest. That view contrasts sharply with the prevailing one that a lush forest of this kind could only have existed in Greenland as recently as 2.4 million years ago. The existence of those DNA samples suggest the temperature probably reached 10 degrees C (50 degrees Fahrenheit) in the summer and -17 ° C (1 ° F) in the winter. They also indicated that during the last interglacial period, 116,000–130,000 years ago, when temperatures were on average 5 ° C (9 ° F) higher than now, the glaciers on Greenland did not completely melt away.

In 1996, the American "Top of the World" expedition found the world's northernmost island off Greenland: ATOW1996. An even more northerly candidate was spotted during the return from the expedition, but its status is yet to be confirmed.

In 2007, the existence of a "new" island was announced. Named "Uunartoq Qeqertoq" (English: *Warming Island*), this island has always been present off the coast of Greenland, but was covered by an ice sheet. This ice sheet was discovered to be shrinking rapidly in 2002, and by 2007 had completely melted away, leaving the exposed island. This however was not the first occurrence of the island distinction. In Arctic Riviera, published by Ernst Hofer in 1957, in maps, and pictures, Ernst Hofer showed the distinct three fingered island separate from the mainland, during a similar warming event.



Panorama of the island Nunâ in Greenland.

## Topography

About 81 percent of Greenland's surface is covered by the Greenland ice sheet. The weight of the ice has depressed the central land area into a basin shape, whose base lies more than 300 metres (984 ft) below the surrounding ocean. Elevations rise suddenly and steeply near the coast. Approximately one-twentieth of the world's ice and one-quarter of the earth's surface ice is found in Greenland.

<http://cd3wd.com> [wikipedia-for-schools](http://wikipedia-for-schools) <http://gutenberg.org> page no: 27 of 185

## Economy

Greenland today is critically dependent on fishing and fish exports; the shrimp fishing industry is by far the largest income earner. Despite resumption of several interesting hydrocarbon and mineral exploration activities, it will take several years before hydrocarbonate production can materialize. The state oil company NUNAOIL was created in order to help develop the hydrocarbon industry in Greenland. The state company Nunamineral has been launched on the OMX20 Stock exchange of Copenhagen to raise more capital to increase the newly started gold production. Exploitation of ruby deposits have also begun, even though production is still in its dawn. Numerous other mineral reserves are growing increasingly interesting as prices are increasing; these include uranium, aluminium, nickel, platinum, tungsten, titanium, and copper. Tourism is the only sector offering any near-term potential and even this is limited due to a short season and high costs. The public sector, including publicly owned enterprises and the municipalities, plays the dominant role in Greenland's economy. About half the government revenues come from grants from the Danish Government, an important supplement to the gross domestic product (GDP). Gross domestic product per capita is equivalent to that of the weaker economies of Europe.

Greenland suffered economic contraction the early 1990s, but since 1993 the economy has improved. The Greenland Home Rule Government (GHRG) has pursued a tight fiscal policy since the late 1980s which has helped create surpluses in the public budget and low inflation. Since 1990, Greenland has registered a foreign trade deficit following the closure of the last remaining lead and zinc mine that year.

## Transport

The major airport is Kangerlussuaq Airport on the West coast at Kangerlussuaq. Intercontinental flights connect mainly to Copenhagen. As of May 2007, Air Greenland initiated a seasonal route to and from Baltimore in the United States. However, on March 10, 2008, the route was cancelled due to financial losses. Also new for summer 2007, Air Iceland plans to fly between Keflavík and Nuuk three times a week. In addition to these routes there are scheduled international flights between Narsarsuaq and Copenhagen and between Kulusuk on the East coast to Reykjavík. Kangerlussuaq is the hub for domestic flights within Greenland.

## Demographics

Greenland has a population of 56,344 (2007), of whom 88% are Inuit or mixed Danish and Inuit. The remaining 12% are of European extraction, mainly Danish. The majority of the population is Evangelical Lutheran. Nearly all Greenlanders live along the fjords in the south-west of the main island, which have a relatively mild climate.

## Languages

The official languages of Greenland are Greenlandic (Kalaallisut) and Danish, and most of the population speak both of the languages. Greenlandic is spoken by about 50,000 people, some of whom are monolingual. A minority of Danish migrants with no Inuit ancestry speak Danish as their first, or only, language.

English is widely spoken as a third language.

The Greenlandic language is the most populous of the languages of the Eskimo-Aleut language family and it has as many speakers as all the other languages of the family combined. Within Greenland, three main dialects are recognized: the northern dialect Inuktun or *Avanersuarmitut* spoken by around 1000 people in the region of Qaanaaq, Western Greenlandic or Kalaallisut which serves as the official standard language, and the Eastern dialect Tunumiit oraasiat or *Tunumiutut* spoken in eastern Greenland.

## Culture

The Greenland National Museum and Archives is located in Nuuk.

## Sport

Association football is the national sport of Greenland, but Greenland is not a member of FIFA. In January 2007, Greenland took part in the World Men's Handball Championship in Germany, finishing 22nd in a field of 24 national teams.

Greenland competes in the bi-annual Island Games.

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland>"

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# Iran

2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

**Iran**, ( Persian: ایران, [ʔiˈrɒn] ērān', īrān'), officially the **Islamic Republic of Iran** ( Persian: جمهوری اسلامی ایران, pronounced [dʒomhɒrɪje ʔeslɒmɪje ʔɪrɒn]), formerly known internationally as **Persia** until 1935, is a country in Central Eurasia. Located in the heart of the Persian Gulf, an important oil-producing area, Iran is bounded by the Gulf of Oman to its south-east and the Caspian Sea to its north. Shi'a Islam is the official religion, and Persian is the official language The 18th largest country in the world in terms of area at 1,648,195 km<sup>2</sup>, Iran has a population of over seventy million. Iran borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia to the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, and Turkey and Iraq to the west.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 4000 BCE. Throughout history, Iran has been of geostrategic importance because of its central location in Eurasia and is a regional power. Iran is a founding member of the UN, NAM, OIC, and OPEC. The political system of Iran, based on the 1979 Constitution, comprises several intricately connected governing bodies. The highest state authority is the Supreme Leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran occupies an important position in international energy security and world economy due to its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas. The name Iran is a cognate of *Aryan*, and means "Land of the Aryans". "Land of Kindness" (سرزمین مهر) is used as an alternative name for Iran in Persian literature and Iranian media.

## Etymology

The term *Iran* (ایران) in modern Persian derives from the Proto-Iranian term *Aryānām* first attested in Zoroastrianism's Avesta tradition. *Ariya-* and *Airiia-* are also attested as an ethnic designator in Achaemenid inscriptions. The term *Ērān* from Middle Persian *Ērān*, Pahlavi 'yr'n, is found at the inscription that accompanies the investiture relief of Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam. In this inscription, the king's appellation in Middle Persian contains the term *ērān* (Pahlavi: 'ry'n), while in the Parthian language inscription that accompanies it, Iran is mentioned as *aryān*. In Ardashir's time *ērān* retained this

<p>جمهوری اسلامی ایران <i>Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Īrān</i> <b>Islamic Republic of Iran</b></p>	
	
Flag	Emblem
<p><b>Motto:</b> <i>Esteqlāl, āzādī, jomhūrī-ye eslāmī</i><sup>1</sup> (Persian) "Independence, freedom, Islamic Republic"</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>Sorūd-e Mellī-e Īrān</i><sup>2</sup></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Tehran
<b>Official languages</b>	Persian
<b>Demonym</b>	Iranian
<b>Government</b>	Islamic Republic
- Supreme Leader	Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
- President	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

meaning, denoting *the people* rather than *the state*.

Notwithstanding this inscriptional use of *ērān* to refer to the Iranian peoples, the use of *ērān* to refer to the empire is also attested by the early Sassanid period. An inscription of Shapur I, Ardashir's son and immediate successor, apparently "includes in *Ērān* regions such as Armenia and the Caucasus which were not inhabited predominantly by Iranians." In Kartir's inscriptions the high priest includes the same regions in his list of provinces of the antonymic *Anērān*. Both *ērān* and *aryān* comes from the Proto-Iranian term *Aryānām*, (Land) of the (Iranian) Aryas. The word and concept of Airyanem Vaejah is present in the name of the country Iran (Lit. Land of the Aryans) where Iran (*Ērān*), is modern-Persian of the word *Aryānā*.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the official name of the country is "Islamic Republic of Iran."

In the outside world the official name of Iran from 6th century BC until 1935 was **Persia**. In this year Reza Shah asked International community to call this country by its native name "Iran". A few years later some Persian scholars protested the government that changing the name has separated the country from its past so in 1959 Mohammad Reza Shah announced both terms can be used interchangeably. Now both terms are common but "Iran" mostly in modern political context and "Persia" in cultural and historical context.

## Geography and climate

<b>Unification</b>	
- Unified by Cyrus the Great	559 BCE
- Parthian (Arsacid) dynastic empire (first reunification)	248 BCE – 224 CE
- Sassanid dynastic empire	224–651 CE
- Safavid dynasty (second reunification)	May 1502
- First Constitution	1906
- Islamic Revolution	1979
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	1,648,195 km <sup>2</sup> ( 18th) 636,372 sq mi
- Water (%)	0.7
<b>Population</b>	
- 2006 (1385 AP) census	70,472,846 <sup>3</sup> ( 18th)
- Density	42/km <sup>2</sup> ( 158th) 109/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$852 billion (2007) ( 15th)
- Per capita	\$12,300 ( 65th)
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	2005/2006 estimate
- Total	\$222,889 billion ( 29nd)
- Per capita	\$3,920 ( 89nd)
<b>Gini (1998)</b>	43.0 (medium)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.759 (medium) (

Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world after Libya and before Mongolia. Its area roughly equals the size of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany combined, or slightly smaller than the state of Alaska. Its borders are with Azerbaijan (432 km/268 mi) and Armenia (35 km/22 mi) to the north-west; the Caspian Sea to the north; Turkmenistan (992 km/616 mi) to the north-east; Pakistan (909 km/565 mi) and Afghanistan (936 km/582 mi) to the east; Turkey (499 km/310 mi) and Iraq (1,458 km/906 mi) to the west; and finally the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south. Iran's area is 1,648,000 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 636,300 sq mi).

Most of Iran is situated on the Iranian Plateau with the exception of the coast of the Caspian Sea and Khuzestan. Iran is one of the world's most mountainous countries, its landscape is dominated by rugged mountain ranges that separate various basins or plateaus from one another. The populous western part is the most mountainous, with ranges such as the Caucasus, Zagros and Alborz Mountains; the latter contains Iran's highest point, Mount Damavand at 5,604 m (18,386 ft), which is not only the country's highest peak but also the highest mountain on the Eurasian landmass west of the Hindu Kush. The eastern part consists mostly of desert basins like the saline Dasht-e Kavir, Iran's largest desert, located in the north-central portion of the country, and the Dasht-e Lut, in the east, as well as some salt lakes. This is because the mountain ranges are too high for rain clouds to reach these regions.



Mount Damavand is Iran's highest point.

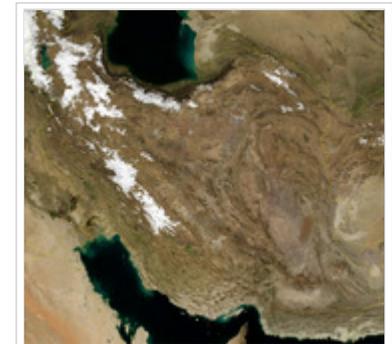
The only large plains are found along the coast of the Caspian Sea and at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, where Iran borders the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab (or the Arvand Rūd) river. Smaller, discontinuous plains are found along the remaining coast of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman.

Iran's climate is mostly arid or semiarid, to subtropical along the Caspian coast. On the northern edge of the country (the Caspian coastal plain) temperatures nearly fall below freezing and remain humid for the rest of the year. Summer temperatures rarely exceed 29 °C (84 °F). Annual precipitation is 680 mm (27 in) in the eastern part of the plain and more than 1,700 mm (67 in) in the western part. To the west, settlements in the Zagros Mountains basin experience lower temperatures, severe winters, sub-freezing average daily temperatures and heavy snowfall. The eastern and central basins are arid, with less than 200 mm (eight in) of rain and have occasional desert. Average summer temperatures exceed 38 °C (100 °F). The coastal plains of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman in southern Iran have mild winters, and

very humid and hot summers. The annual precipitation ranges from 135 to 355 mm (five to fourteen inches).

## Provinces and Cities

	94th)
<b>Currency</b>	Iranian rial (ریال) ( IRR)
<b>Time zone</b> - Summer ( DST)	IRST ( UTC+3:30) not observed ( UTC+3:30)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.ir
<b>Calling code</b>	+98
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 bookrags.com</li> <li>2 iranchamber.com</li> <li>3 Statistical Centre of Iran. ۱۳۸۵-۱۳۳۵ طی سال های جمعیت کشور (Persian). Retrieved on 2007- 05-16.</li> <li>4 CIA Factbook</li> </ol>	



Satellite image of Iran



The landscape of Fars Province

Iran is divided into 30 provinces (*ostān*), each governed by an appointed governor (استاندار, *ostāndār*). The provinces are divided into counties (*shahrestān*), and subdivided into districts (*bakhsh*) and sub-districts (*dehestān*).

- |                    |                                |                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Tehran          | 11. Hamadān                    | 21. Sistān and Baluchestān |
| 2. Qom             | 12. Kermanshah                 | 22. Kermān                 |
| 3. Markazī         | 13. Īlām                       | 23. Yazd                   |
| 4. Qazvin          | 14. Lorestān                   | 24. Isfahan                |
| 5. Gīlān           | 15. Khūzestān                  | 25. Semnān                 |
| 6. Ardabil         | 16. Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari  | 26. Māzandarān             |
| 7. Zanjan          | 17. Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad | 27. Golestān               |
| 8. East Azerbaijan | 18. Bushehr                    | 28. North Khorasan         |
| 9. West Azerbaijan | 19. Fārs                       | 29. Razavi Khorasan        |
| 10. Kurdistan      | 20. Hormozgān                  | 30. South Khorasan         |



After the revolution, Shahyad Tower was renamed Freedom Tower

Iran has one of the highest urban-growth rates in the world. From 1950 to 2002 the urban proportion of the population increased from 27% to 60%. The United Nations predicts that by 2030 the urban population will form 80% of the overall population. Most of the internal migrants have settled near the cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz, and Qom. The listed populations are from the 2006/2007 (1385 AP) census.

Tehran, with population of 7,705,036, is the largest city in Iran and is the Capital city. Tehran is home to around 11% of Iran's population. Tehran, like many big cities, suffers from severe air pollution. It is the hub of the country's communication and transport network. Mashhad is the second largest Iranian city and is one of the holiest Shi'a cities in the world as it is the site of the shrine. It is the second largest city and with a population of 2.8 million is the centre of the province of Razavi Khorasan. It's the centre of tourism in Iran and between 15 and 20 million pilgrims go to the Imam Reza's shrine every year.

Other major Iranian cities include Isfahan (population 1,583,609), Tabriz (population 1,378,935) and Karaj (population 1,377,450). Isfahan is the capital of Isfahan Province. The Naghsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The city also contains a wide variety of Islamic architectural sites ranging from the eleventh to the nineteenth century. Tabriz is situated north of the volcanic cone of Sahand south of the Eynali mountain. Tabriz is the largest city in north-western Iran and is the capital of East Azarbaijan Province. Karaj is located in Tehran province and is situated 20 km west of Tehran, at the foot of Alborz mountains, however the city is increasingly becoming an extension of the metropolitan Tehran.

## History

## Parthian and Sassanid Empires (248 BCE–651 CE)



Sassanid art

Parthia was led by the Arsacid Dynasty (اشکانیان Ashkânîân), who reunited and ruled over the Iranian plateau, after defeating the Greek Seleucid Empire, beginning in the late third century BCE, and intermittently controlled Mesopotamia between ca 150 BCE and 224 CE. These were the third native dynasty of ancient Iran and lasted five centuries. After the conquests of Media, Assyria, Babylonia and Elam, the Parthians had to organize their empire. The former elites of these countries were Greek, and the new rulers had to adapt to their customs if they wanted their rule to last. As a result, the cities retained their ancient rights and civil administrations remained more or less undisturbed.

Parthia was the arch-enemy of the Roman Empire in the east, limiting Rome's expansion beyond Cappadocia (central Anatolia). By using a heavily-armed and armoured cataphract cavalry, and lightly armed but highly-mobile mounted archers, the Parthians "held their own against Rome for almost 300 years". Rome's acclaimed general Mark Antony led a disastrous campaign against the Parthians in 36 BCE in which he lost 32,000 men. By the time of Roman emperor Augustus, Rome and Parthia were settling some of their differences through diplomacy. By this time, Parthia had acquired an assortment of *golden eagles*, the cherished standards of Rome's legions, captured from Mark Antony, and Crassus, who suffered "a disastrous defeat" at Carrhae in 53 BCE.

The end of the Parthian Empire came in 224 CE, when the empire was loosely organized and the last king was defeated by Ardashir I, one of the empire's vassals. Ardashir I then went on to create the Sassanid Empire. Soon he started reforming the country both economically and militarily. The Sassanids established an empire roughly within the frontiers achieved by the Achaemenids, referring to it as *Erânshahr* or *Iranshahr*,

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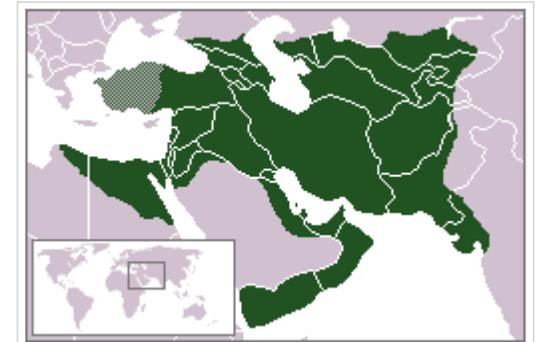
, "Dominion of the Aryans", i.e. of

Iranians), with their capital at Ctesiphon. The Romans suffered repeated losses particularly by Ardashir I, Shapur I, and Shapur II. During their reign, Sassanid battles with the Roman Empire caused such pessimism in Rome that the historian Cassius Dio wrote:

“ *Here was a source of great fear to us. So formidable does the Sassanid king seem to our eastern legions, that some are liable to go over to him, and others are unwilling to fight at all.* ”

In 632AD raiders from the Arab peninsula began attacking the Sassanid Empire. Iran was defeated in the Battle of al-Qâdisiyah, paving way for the Islamic conquest of Persia.

During Parthian, and later Sassanid era, trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Indian subcontinent, and Rome, and helped to lay the foundations for the modern world. Parthian remains display classically Greek influences in some instances and retain their oriental mode in others, a clear expression of "the cultural diversity that characterized Parthian art and life". The Parthians were innovators of many architecture designs such as that of Ctesiphon, which bears resemblance to, and might have influenced, European Romanesque architecture. Under the Sassanids, Iran expanded relations with China, the arts, music, and architecture greatly flourished, and centres such as the School of Nisibis and Academy of Gundishapur became world renowned centres of science and scholarship.

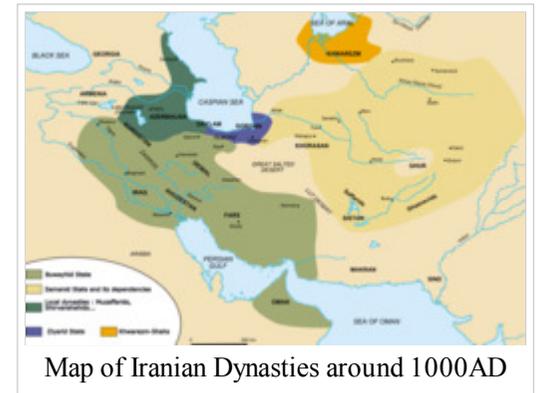


The Sassanid Empire at its greatest extent under Khosrau II

### From the fall of the Sassanid Dynasty to the Safavid Empire (652–1501)

After the Islamic conquest of Persia, Iran was annexed into the Arab Umayyad Caliphate. But the Islamization of Iran was to yield deep transformations within the cultural, scientific, and political structure of Iran's society: The blossoming of Persian literature, philosophy, medicine and art became major elements of the newly-forming Muslim civilization. Culturally, politically, and religiously, the Iranian contribution to this new Islamic civilization is of immense importance. Indeed, the culmination of Iran caused the "Islamic Golden Age".

Abu Moslem, an Iranian general, expelled the Umayyads from Damascus and helped the Abbasid caliphs to conquer Baghdad. The Abbasid caliphs frequently chose their "wazirs" (viziers) among Iranians, and Iranian governors acquired a certain amount of local autonomy. Thus in 822 CE, the governor of Khorasan, Tahir, proclaimed his independence and founded a new Persian dynasty of Tahirids. And by the Samanid era, Iran's efforts to regain its independence had been well solidified.



Map of Iranian Dynasties around 1000AD

Attempts of Arabization thus never succeeded in Iran, and movements such as the Shuubiyah became catalysts for Iranians to regain their independence in their relations with the Arab invaders. The cultural revival of the post-Abbasid period led to a resurfacing of Iranian national identity. The resulting cultural

movement reached its peak during the ninth and tenth centuries. The most notable effect of the movement was the continuation of the Persian language, the language of the Persians and the official language of Iran to the present day. Ferdowsi, Iran's greatest epic poet, is regarded today as the most important figure in maintaining the Persian language.

After an interval of silence Iran re-emerged as a separate, different and distinctive element within Islam. Iranian philosophy after the Islamic conquest, is characterized by different interactions with the Old Iranian philosophy, the Greek philosophy and with the development of Islamic philosophy. The Illumination School and the Transcendent Philosophy are regarded as two of the main philosophical traditions of that era in Persia.

The movement continued well into the eleventh century, when Mahmud-a Ghaznavi founded a vast empire, with its capital at Isfahan and Ghazna. Their successors, the Seljuks, asserted their domination from the Mediterranean Sea to Central Asia. As with their predecessors, the divan of the empire was in the hands of Iranian viziers, who founded the Nizamiyya. During this period, hundreds of scholars and scientists vastly contributed to technology, science and medicine, later influencing the rise of European science during the Renaissance.

In 1218, the eastern Khwarazmid provinces of Transoxiana and Khorasan suffered a devastating invasion by Genghis Khan. During this period more than half of Iran's population were killed, turning the streets of Persian cities like Neishabur into "rivers of blood", as the severed heads of men, women, and children were "neatly stacked into carefully constructed pyramids around which the carcasses of the city's dogs and cats were placed". Between 1220 and 1260, the total population of Iran had dropped from 2,500,000 to 250,000 as a result of mass extermination and famine. In a letter to King Louis IX of France, Holaku, one of the Genghis Khan's grandsons, alone took responsibility for 200,000 deaths in his raids of Iran and the Caliphate. He was followed by yet another conqueror, Tamerlane, who established his capital in Samarkand. The waves of devastation prevented many cities such as Neishabur from reaching their pre-invasion population levels until the twentieth century, eight centuries later. But both Hulagu, Timur, and their successors soon came to adopt the ways and customs of that which they had conquered, choosing to surround themselves with a culture that was distinctively Persian.

### **From the Safavid Dynasty to the Islamic Revolution (1501–1979)**



A Latin copy of Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*, which was the standard medical text in Europe for seven centuries.



Safavid Dynasty, an Iranian Kingdom at its Greatest Extent

Iran's first encompassing Shi'a Islamic state was established under the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722) by Shah Ismail I. The Safavid Dynasty soon became a major political power and promoted the flow of bilateral state contacts. The Safavid peak was during the rule of Shah Abbas The Great. The Safavid Dynasty frequently locked horns with Ottoman Empire, Uzbek tribes and the Portuguese Empire. The Safavids moved their capital from Tabriz to Qazvin and then to Isfahan where their patronage for the arts propelled Iran into one of its most aesthetically productive eras. Under their rule, the state became highly centralized, the first attempts to modernize the military were made, and even a distinct style of architecture developed. In 1722 Afghan rebels defeated Shah Sultan Hossein and ended the Safavid Dynasty, but in 1735, Nader Shah successfully drove out the Afghan rebels from Isfahan and established the Afsharid Dynasty. He then staged an incursion into India in 1738 securing the Peacock throne, Koh-i-Noor, and Darya-ye Noor among other royal treasures.

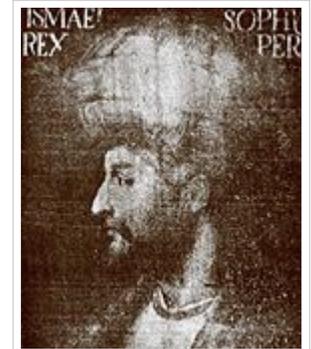
His rule did not last long however, and he was assassinated in 1747. The Mashhad based Afshar Dynasty was succeeded by the Zand dynasty in 1750, founded by Karim Khan, who established his capital at Shiraz. His rule brought a period of relative peace and renewed prosperity.

The Zand dynasty lasted three generations, until Aga Muhammad Khan executed Lotf Ali Khan, and founded his new capital in Tehran, marking the dawn of the Qajar Dynasty in 1794. The capable Qajar chancellor Amir Kabir established Iran's first modern college system, among other modernizing reforms. Iran suffered several wars with Imperial Russia during the Qajar era, resulting in Iran losing almost half of its territories to Imperial Russia and the British Empire. In spite of The Great Game Iran managed to maintain her sovereignty and was never colonized, unlike neighbouring states in the region. Repeated foreign intervention and a corrupt and weakened Qajar rule led to various protests, which by the end of the Qajar period resulted in Persia's constitutional revolution establishing the nation's first parliament in 1906, within a constitutional monarchy.



Former Iranian prime minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh.

In 1921, Reza Khan overthrew the weakening Qajar Dynasty and became Shah. Reza Shah initiated industrialization, rail road construction, and the establishment of a national education system. Reza Shah sought to balance Russian and British influence, but when World War II started, his nascent ties to Germany alarmed both Britain and Russia. In 1941, Britain and the USSR invaded Iran in order to utilize Iranian rail road capacity during World War II. The Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In 1951, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh was elected prime minister. As prime minister, Mossadegh became enormously popular in Iran after he nationalized the Iran's oil reserves. In response, Britain embargoed Iranian oil and invited the United States to join in a plot to depose of Mossadegh; and, in 1953, President Eisenhower authorized Operation Ajax. The operation was successful, and Mossadegh was arrested on August 19, 1953. After Operation Ajax Mohammad Reza Pahlavi rule became increasingly autocratic. With American support, the Shah was able to rapidly modernize Iranian infrastructure, but he simultaneously crushed all forms of political opposition with his intelligence agency, SAVAK. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became an active critic of the Shah's White Revolution and publicly denounced the government. Khomeini,



Shah Ismail I, the founder of the Safavid Dynasty (1501 to 1736)



Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Queen Farah about to depart after a visit to the United States.

who was popular in religious circles, was arrested and imprisoned for 18 months. After his release in 1964, Khomeini publicly criticized the United States government. The Shah was persuaded to send him into exile by General Hassan Pakravan. Khomeini was sent first to Turkey, then to Iraq and finally to France. While in exile, he continued to denounce the Shah.

### **Islamic Republic (1979–)**

The Iranian Revolution, also known as the Islamic Revolution, began in January 1978 with the first major demonstrations against the Shah. After strikes and demonstrations paralysed the country and its economy, the Shah fled the country in January 1979 and Ayatollah Khomeini soon returned from exile to Tehran, enthusiastically greeted by millions of Iranians. The Pahlavi Dynasty collapsed ten days later on February 11 when Iran's military declared itself "neutral" after guerrillas and rebel troops overwhelmed troops loyal to the Shah in armed street fighting. Iran officially became an Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979 when Iranians overwhelmingly approved a national referendum to make it so. In December 1979 the country approved a theocratic constitution, whereby Khomeini became Supreme Leader of the country. The speed and success of the revolution surprised many throughout the world, as it had not been precipitated by a military defeat, a financial crisis, or a peasant rebellion. Although both nationalists and Marxists joined with Islamic traditionalists to overthrow the Shah, the revolution ultimately resulted in an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Image:Imam in Mehrabad.jpg  
Arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini on February 1, 1979 from France.



Donald Rumsfeld meets Saddam Hussein on 19–20 December 1983. Rumsfeld visited again on 24 March 1984, the day the UN reported that Iraq had used mustard gas and tabun nerve agent against Iranian troops. *The New York Times* reported from Baghdad on 29 March 1984, that "American diplomats pronounce themselves satisfied with Iraq and the U.S., and suggest that normal diplomatic ties have been established in all but name."

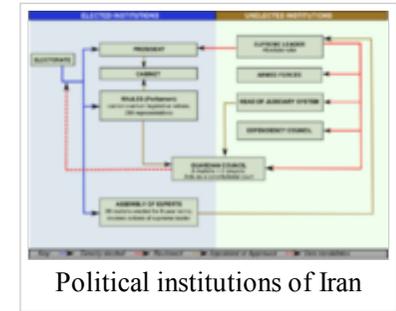
Iran's relationship with the United States deteriorated rapidly during the revolution. On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students seized U.S. embassy personnel, labelling the embassy a "den of spies". They accused its personnel of being CIA agents plotting to overthrow the revolutionary government, as the CIA had done to Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. While the student ringleaders had not asked for permission from Khomeini to seize the embassy, Khomeini nonetheless supported the embassy takeover after hearing of its success. While most of the female and African American hostages were released within the first months, the remaining fifty-two hostages were held for 444 days. This is often considered a violation of the long-standing principle of international law that diplomats are immune from arrest ( diplomatic immunity). The students demanded the handover of the Shah in exchange for the hostages, and following the Shah's death in the summer of 1980, that the hostages be put on trial for espionage. Subsequently attempts by the Jimmy Carter administration to negotiate or rescue were unsuccessful until January 1981 when the Algiers declaration was agreed upon. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein decided to take advantage of what he perceived to be disorder in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and its unpopularity with Western governments. The once-strong Iranian military had been disbanded during the revolution. Saddam sought to expand Iraq's access to the Persian Gulf by acquiring territories that Iraq had claimed earlier from Iran during the Shah's rule. Of chief importance to Iraq was Khuzestan which not only has a substantial Arab population, but boasted rich oil fields as well. On the unilateral behalf of the United Arab Emirates, the islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs became objectives as well. With these ambitions in mind, Hussein planned a full-scale assault on Iran, boasting that his forces could reach the capital within three days. On September 22, 1980 the Iraqi army invaded Iran at Khuzestan, precipitating the Iran-Iraq War. The attack took revolutionary Iran completely by surprise.

Although Saddam Hussein's forces made several early advances, by 1982, Iranian forces managed to push the Iraqi army back into Iraq. Khomeini sought to export his Islamic revolution westward into Iraq, especially on the majority Shi'a Arabs living in the country. The war then continued for six more years until 1988, when Khomeini, in his words, "drank the cup of poison" and accepted a truce mediated by the United Nations. Tens of thousands of Iranian civilians and military personnel were killed

when Iraq used chemical weapons in its warfare. Iraq was financially backed by Egypt, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact states, the United States (beginning in 1983), France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, and the People's Republic of China (which also sold weapons to Iran). There were more than 100,000 Iranian victims of Iraq's chemical weapons during the eight-year war. The total Iranian casualties of the war were estimated to be anywhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000. Almost all relevant international agencies have confirmed that Saddam engaged in chemical warfare to blunt Iranian human wave attacks; these agencies unanimously confirmed that Iran never used chemical weapons during the war.

## Government and politics

The political system of the Islamic Republic is based on the 1979 Constitution. The system comprises several intricately connected governing bodies. **The Supreme Leader of Iran** is responsible for delineation and supervision of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Supreme Leader is *Commander-in-Chief* of the armed forces, controls the military intelligence and security operations; and has sole power to declare war or peace. The heads of the judiciary, state radio and television networks, the commanders of the police and military forces and six of the twelve members of the Council of Guardians are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The Assembly of Experts elects and dismisses the Supreme Leader on the basis of qualifications and popular esteem. The Assembly of Experts is responsible for supervising the Supreme Leader in the performance of legal duties.



After the Supreme Leader, the Constitution defines the **President of Iran** as the highest state authority. The President is elected by universal suffrage for a term of four years and can only be re-elected for one term. Presidential candidates must be approved by the Council of Guardians prior to running in order to ensure their allegiance to the ideals of the Islamic revolution. The President is responsible for the implementation of the Constitution and for the exercise of executive powers, except for matters directly related to the Supreme Leader, who has the final say in all matters. The President appoints and supervises the Council of Ministers, coordinates government decisions, and selects government policies to be placed before the legislature. Eight Vice-Presidents serve under the President, as well as a cabinet of twenty two ministers, who must all be approved by the legislature. Unlike many other states, the executive branch in Iran does not control the armed forces. Although the President appoints the Ministers of Intelligence and Defense, it is customary for the President to obtain explicit approval from the Supreme Leader for these two ministers before presenting them to the legislature for a vote of confidence. Iran's current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was elected in a run-off poll in the 2005 presidential elections. His term expires in 2009.

The current **legislature of Iran** (Also known as the Majlis of Iran) is a unicameral body. Before the Iranian Revolution, the legislature was bicameral, but the upper house was removed under the new constitution. The Majlis of Iran comprises 290 members elected for four-year terms. The Majlis drafts legislation, ratifies international treaties, and approves the national budget. All Majlis candidates and all legislation from the assembly must be approved by the **Council of Guardians**. The Council of Guardians comprises twelve jurists including six appointed by the Supreme Leader. The others are elected by the Parliament from among the jurists nominated by the Head of the Judiciary. The Council interprets the constitution and may veto Parliament. If a law is deemed incompatible with the constitution or *Sharia* (Islamic law), it is referred back to Parliament for revision.



The Supreme Leader appoints the head of **Iran's Judiciary**, who in turn appoints the head of the Supreme Court and the chief public prosecutor. There are several types of courts including public courts that deal with civil and criminal cases, and "revolutionary courts" which deal with certain categories of offenses, including crimes against national security. The decisions of the revolutionary courts are final and cannot be appealed. The Special Clerical Court handles crimes allegedly committed by clerics, although it has also taken on cases involving lay people. The Special Clerical Court functions independently of the regular judicial framework and is accountable only to the Supreme Leader. The Court's rulings are final and cannot be appealed.

The **Assembly of Experts**, which meets for one week annually, comprises 86 "virtuous and learned" clerics elected by adult suffrage for eight-year terms. As

with the presidential and parliamentary elections, the Council of Guardians determines candidates' eligibility. The Assembly elects the Supreme Leader and has the constitutional authority to remove the Supreme Leader from power at any time. As all of their meetings and notes are strictly confidential, the Assembly has never been publicly known to challenge any of the Supreme Leader's decisions.

Finally, **Local City Councils** are elected by public vote to four-year terms in all cities and villages of Iran. According to article seven of Iran's Constitution, these local councils together with the Parliament are "decision-making and administrative organs of the State". This section of the constitution was not implemented until 1999 when the first local council elections were held across the country. Councils have many different responsibilities including electing mayors, supervising the activities of municipalities; studying the social, cultural, educational, health, economic, and welfare requirements of their constituencies; planning and co-ordinating national participation in the implementation of social, economic, constructive, cultural, educational and other welfare affairs.

## Economy

Iran's economy is a mixture of central planning, state ownership of oil and other large enterprises, village agriculture, and small-scale private trading and service ventures. Its economic infrastructure has been improving steadily over the past two decades but continues to be affected by inflation and unemployment. Iran's official annual growth rate is at 6%. In the early twenty-first century the service sector contributed the largest percentage of the GDP, followed by industry ( mining and manufacturing) and agriculture. In 2006, about 45% of the government's budget came from oil and natural gas revenues, and 31% came from taxes and fees. Government spending contributed to an average annual inflation rate of 14% in the period 2000–2004. In 2007, the GDP was estimated at \$206 billion (\$852 billion at PPP), or \$3,160 per capita (\$12,300 at PPP). Because of these figures and the country's diversified but small industrial base, the United Nations classifies Iran's economy as semi-developed.

The services sector has seen the greatest long-term growth in terms of its share of GDP, but the sector remains volatile. State investment has boosted agriculture with the liberalization of production and the improvement of packaging and marketing helping to develop new export markets. Thanks to the construction of many dams throughout the country in recent years, large-scale irrigation schemes, and the wider production of export-based agricultural items like dates, flowers, and pistachios, produced the fastest economic growth of any sector in Iran over much of the 1990s. Although successive years of severe drought in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 have held back output growth substantially, agriculture remains one of the largest employers, accounting for 22% of all jobs according to the 1991 census. Iran's major commercial partners are China, Germany, South Korea, France, Japan, Russia and Italy.



Tehran was one of the first cities in Iran which was modernized in the Pahlavi era.

Since the late 1990s, Iran has increased its economic cooperation with other developing countries, including Syria, India, Cuba, Venezuela, and South Africa. Iran is expanding its trade ties with Turkey and Pakistan and shares with its partners the common goal of creating a single economic market in West and Central Asia, called ECO. Iran expects to attract billions of dollars of foreign investment by creating a more favorable investment climate, such as reduced restrictions and duties on imports, and free-trade zones in Chabahar, Qeshm and Kish Island.

The administration continues to follow the market reform plans of the previous one and indicated that it will diversify Iran's oil-reliant economy. It is attempting to do this by investing revenues in areas like automobile manufacturing, aerospace industries, consumer electronics, petrochemicals and nuclear technology. Iran has also developed a biotechnology,

nanotechnology, and pharmaceuticals industry. The strong oil market since 1996 helped ease financial pressures on Iran and allowed for Tehran's timely debt service payments. Iranian budget deficits have been a chronic problem, in part due to large-scale state subsidies, totaling more than \$40 billion per year, that include foodstuffs and especially gasoline.

## Energy



As a further drive toward diversification of energy sources, Iran has also established wind farms in several areas, this one near Manjeel.

Iran ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and third in oil reserves. In 2005, Iran spent US\$4 billion dollars on fuel imports, because of contraband and inefficient domestic use. Oil industry output averaged 4 million barrels per day in 2005, compared with the peak of six million barrels per day reached in 1974. In the early 2000s, industry infrastructure was increasingly inefficient because of technological lags. Few exploratory wells were drilled in 2005.

In 2004, a large share of Iran's natural gas reserves were untapped. The addition of new hydroelectric stations and the streamlining of conventional coal- and oil-fired stations increased installed capacity to 33,000 megawatts. Of that amount, about 75% was based on natural gas, 18% on oil, and 7% on hydroelectric power. In 2004, Iran opened its first wind-powered and geothermal plants, and the first solar thermal plant is to come online in 2009. Demographic trends and intensified industrialization have caused electric power demand to grow by 8% per year. The government's goal of 53,000 megawatts of installed capacity by 2010 is to be reached by bringing on line new gas-fired plants and by adding hydroelectric, and nuclear power generating capacity. Iran's first nuclear power plant at Bushehr was not online by 2007.

## Industrial production

The authorities so as the private sector have put in the past 15 years an emphasis on the local production of domestic-consumption oriented goods such as home appliances, cars, agricultural products, pharmaceutical, etc. Today, Iran possesses a good manufacturing industry, despite restrictions imposed by foreign countries. However, nationalized industries such as the bonyads have often been managed badly, making them ineffective and uncompetitive with years. Today, the government is trying to privatize these industries, such as Damavand Mineral water company or some down stream industries of the National Iranian Oil Company, and despite some successes, there are still several problems to be overcome such as the lagging corruption in the public sector (and therefore, nationalized industries) and lack of competitiveness.

Globally, Iran has leading manufacture industry in the fields of car-manufacture and transportations, construction materials, home appliances, food and agricultural goods, armaments, pharmaceuticals, information technology and petrochemicals.



Samand is Iran's national car, manufactured by Iran Khodro

## Tourism



Xerxes Gate, The gate of all nations at Persepolis

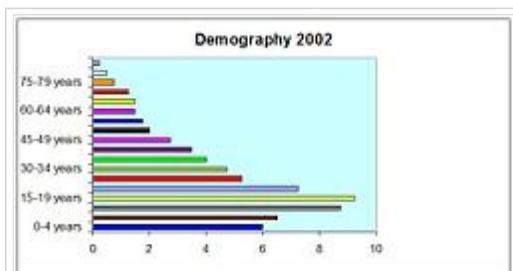
The tourist industry declined dramatically during the war with Iraq in the 1980s but has subsequently revived. The majority of the 300,000 tourist visas granted in 2003 were obtained by Asian Muslims, who presumably intended to visit important pilgrimage sites in Mashhad and Qom. About 1,659,000 foreign tourists visited Iran in 2004; most came from Asian countries, including the republics of Central Asia, while a small share came from the countries of the European Union and North America. Several organized tours from Germany, France, and other European countries come to Iran annually to visit archaeological sites and monuments. The government reported that in 2004 some four million tourists, including over two million Iranians on vacation, spent nearly US\$2 billion in Iran, an increase of 10% over 2003. However, in the early 2000s the industry still faced serious limitations in infrastructure, communications, regulatory norms, and personnel training.

Iran currently ranks 68th in tourism revenues worldwide. Iran with attractive natural and historical sites is rated among the 10 most touristic countries in the world. Close to 1.8% of national employment is generated in the tourism sector which is slated to increase to 10% in the next five years.

## Demography

Iran is a diverse country consisting of people of many religions and ethnic backgrounds cemented by the Persian culture. Persians constitute the majority of the population. 70% of present-day Iranians are Iranic peoples, native speakers of Iranian branches of the Indo-European languages. The majority of the population speaks the official language, Persian, or another Iranian language or dialect, however Arabic is also spoken by the Arabic minority, (ie. in the south, in provinces like Khuzestan), and Turkic dialects, (ie. Azeri, etc). are spoken by the Turkic minority (ie. in the north, in provinces like Tabriz). The main ethnic groups are Persians (51%), Azeris (24%), Gilaki and Mazandarani (8%), Kurds (7%), Arabs (3%), Baluchi (2%), Lurs (2%), Turkmens (2%), Laks, Qashqai, Armenians, Persian Jews, Georgians, Assyrians, Circassians, Tats, Pashtuns, Mandeans, Gypsies, Brahuis, Hazara and others (1%).

Iran's population increased dramatically during the latter half of the twentieth century, reaching about 70 million by 2006. In recent years, however, Iran's birth rate has dropped significantly. Studies show that Iran's rate of population growth will continue to slow until it stabilizes, by the year 2050, above 90 million. More than two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30, and the literacy rate is 79%.



Demography of Iran (2002)

There are some four million Iranian peoples who emigrated to North America, Europe, and Australia, mostly during the Iran-Iraq war. Iran also hosts one of the largest refugee population in the world, with more than one million refugees, mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq. Since 2006, Iranian officials have been working with the UNHCR and Afghan officials for their repatriation.

Most Iranians are Muslims; 90% belong to the Shi'a branch of Islam, the official state religion, and about 8% belong to the Sunni branch, mainly Kurds and Iran's Balochi Sunni. The remaining 2% are non-Muslim religious minorities, including Bahá'ís, Mandeans, Hindus, Sikhs, Yezidis, Yarsanis, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians. The latter three minority religions are officially recognized and protected, and have reserved seats in the *Majles* (Parliament). However the Bahá'í Faith, Iran's largest religious minority, is not officially recognized, and has been persecuted

during its existence in Iran. Since the 1979 revolution the persecution of Bahá'ís has increased with executions, the denial of civil rights and liberties, and the denial of access to higher education and employment. Currently, the Islamic Republic of Iran is noted for significant human rights violations, despite efforts by human right activists, writers, NGOs and some political parties. Human rights violations include governmental impunity, restricted freedom of speech, gender inequality, treatment of homosexuals, execution of minors, and in some cases torture.

According to the Iranian Constitution, the government is required to provide every citizen of the country with access to social security that covers retirement, unemployment, old age, disability, accidents, calamities, health and medical treatment and care services. This is covered by public revenues and income derived from public contributions. The World Health Organization in the last report on health systems ranks Iran's performance on health level 58th, and its overall health system performance 93rd among the world's nations.

## Foreign relations and military

Iran's foreign relations are based on two strategic principles: eliminating outside influences in the region and pursuing extensive diplomatic contacts with developing and non-aligned countries. Iran maintains diplomatic relations with almost every member of the United Nations, except for Israel, which Iran does not recognize, and the United States since the Iranian Revolution. Since 2005, Iran's Nuclear Program has become the subject of contention with the West because of suspicions regarding Iran's military intentions. This has led the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against Iran on select companies linked to this program, thus furthering its economic isolation on the international scene.

Image:Shafaq.jpg

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The Islamic Republic of Iran has two kinds of armed forces: the regular forces Islamic Republic of Iran Army, Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force, Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), totalling about 545,000 active troops. Iran also has around 350,000 Reserve Force totalling around 900,000 trained troops.

Iran also has a paramilitary, volunteer militia force within the IRGC, called the Basij, which includes about 90,000 full-time, active-duty uniformed members. Up to 11 million men and women are members of the Basij who could potentially be called up for service; GlobalSecurity.org estimates Iran could mobilize "up to one million men". This would be among the largest troop mobilizations in the world.

Iran's military capabilities are kept largely secret. Since 1992, it has produced its own tanks, armored personnel carriers, guided missiles, submarines, and fighter planes. In recent years, official announcements have highlighted the development of weapons such as the Fajr-3 (MIRV), Hoot, Kowsar, Zelzal, Fateh-110, Shahab-3 missiles, and a variety of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The Fajr-3 (MIRV) is currently Iran's most advanced ballistic missile. It is a domestically-developed and produced liquid fuel missile with an unknown range. The IRIS solid-fuelled missile is a program which is supposed to be Iran's first missile to bring satellites into orbit. In 2005, Iran's military spending represented 3.3% of the GDP or \$91 per capita, the lowest figure of the Persian Gulf nations. Iran's military doctrine is to defend its territorial integrity only.

## Culture

<http://cd3wd.com> [wikipedia-for-schools](http://wikipedia-for-schools) <http://gutenberg.org> page no: 44 of 185

The Indo-Iranian culture probably originated in Central Asia. The Andronovo culture is strongly suggested as the candidate for the common Indo-Iranian culture *ca.* 2000 BCE. Iran, as a historical entity, dates to the time of the Achaemenids. Daily life in modern Iran is closely interwoven with Shia Islam and the country's art, literature, and architecture are an ever-present reminder of its deep national tradition and of a broader literary culture. Iranian culture has long been a predominant culture of the Middle East and Central Asia, with Persian considered the language of intellectuals during much of the second millennium CE, and the language of religion and the populace before that.

The Iranian New Year ( Norouz) is an ancient tradition celebrated on March 21 to mark the beginning of spring in Iran, Afghanistan, Albania, Georgia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. and also by Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. Norouz was nominated as one of UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2004.

The Sassanid era was an important and influential historical periods in Iran Their cultural influenced Roman civilization considerably and so influencing as far as Western Europe, Africa, China and India and also playing a prominent role in the formation of both European and Asiatic medieval art. This influence carried forward to the Islamic world. Most of what later became known as Islamic learning, such as philology, literature, jurisprudence, philosophy, medicine, architecture and the sciences were some of the practises taken from the Sassanid Persians in to the broader Muslim world. After the Arab invasion Islamic rituals have penetrated in the Iranian culture. The most noticeable one of them is commemoration of Husayn ibn Ali. Every year in Day of Ashura most of Iranians even Armenians and Zoroastrians participate in mourning for the martyrs of battle of Karbala. The commemoration of Karbala has permeated all of Persian culture and finds expression in poetry, music, and the solemn Shia view of the world.

The cuisine of Iran is diverse, with each province featuring dishes, as well as culinary traditions and styles, distinct to their region. Iranian food is not spicy. Most meals consist of a large serving of seasoned rice and an accompanying course, typically consists of meat, poultry, or fish. Herbs are used frequently. Onions and garlic are normally used in the preparation of the accompanying course, but are also served separately during meals, either in raw or pickled form.

There is no consensus on the origin of the first hand-made carpet, but the discovery of the “Pazirik” carpet proves the great role of Iranians in creating this valuable art.

Iranian cinema has thrived in modern Iran, and many Iranian directors have garnered worldwide recognition for their work. Iranian movies have won over three hundred awards in the past twenty-five years. One of the best-known directors is Abbas Kiarostami. The Media of Iran is a mixture of private and state-owned, but books and movies must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance before being released to the public. State censorship is often brought upon films which do not meet approval. The Internet has become enormously popular among the Iranian youth. Iran is now the world's fourth largest country of bloggers. Women today compose more than half of the incoming classes for universities around the country and increasingly continue to play pivotal roles in society.

## **Language and literature**



The region where Persian (green) and other Iranian languages are spoken

Many languages have originated from Iran such as Mazandarani and Gilaki, but Persian is the most used language. Persian is a tongue belonging to the Aryan or Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The oldest records in Old Persian date back to the Achaemenid Empire and examples of Old Persian have been found in present-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. Since then it has changed significantly, being greatly influenced by Arabic after the conquest of Persia. In the late eighth century the Persian language was highly Arabized and written in a modified Arabic script. This caused a movement supporting the revival of Persian. An important event of this revival was the writing of the Shahname by Ferdowsi (Persian: *Epic of Kings*), Iran's national epic, which is said to have been written entirely in native Persian. This gave rise to a strong reassertion of Iranian national identity, and is in part responsible for the continued existence of Persian as a separate language.

“

بسی رنج بردم در این سال سی  
عجم زنده کردم بدین پارسی

*For thirty years, I suffered much pain and strife  
with Persian I gave the Ajam verve and life*

”

— Ferdowsi (935–1020)

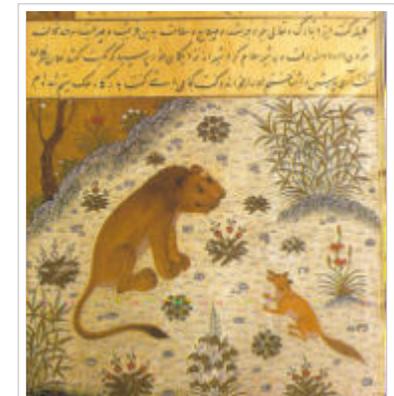
Persian beside Arabic has been a medium for literary and scientific contributions to the Islamic world especially in Anatolia, central Asia and Indian sub-continent. Poetry is a very important part of Persian culture. Poetry is used in many classical works, whether from Persian literature, science, or metaphysics. For example about half of Avicenna's medical writings are known to be versified. Iran has produced a number of famous poets, however only a few names such as Rumi and Omar Khayyám have surfaced among western popular readership, even though the likes of Hafez and Saadi are considered by many Iranians to be just as influential. The books of famous poets have been translated into western languages since 1634. An example of Persian poetic influence is the poem below which is inscribed on the entrance of United Nations' Hall of Nations.

“

بنی آدم اعضاء یک پیکرند  
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند  
چو عضوی ببرد آورد روزگارد  
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار

*Of one Essence is the human race  
thus has Creation put the base  
One Limb impacted is sufficient  
For all Others to feel the Mace*

”



*Kelileh va Demneh Persian manuscript copy dated 1429*

Art



Naghsh-i Jahan Square

Greater Iran is home to one of the richest artistic traditions in world history and encompasses many disciplines, including architecture, painting, weaving, pottery, calligraphy, metalworking and stone masonry. Persians were among the first to use mathematics, geometry, and astronomy in architecture and also have extraordinary skills in making massive domes which can be seen frequently in the structure of bazaars and mosques. The main building types of classical Iranian architecture are the mosque and the palace. Iran, besides being home to a large number of art houses and galleries, also holds one of the largest and valuable jewel collections in the world.

Iran ranks seventh among countries in the world with the most archeological architectural ruins and attractions from antiquity as recognized by UNESCO. Fifteen of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites are creations of Iranian architecture and the mausoleum of Mausollos was identified as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.



Seventeenth-century painting from Hasht-Bahesht palace, Isfahan

## Science and technology



13th century manuscript depicting an epicyclic planetary model

Science in Iran has a considerable history. From the Qanat to the Yakhchal, to the windmill. Iranians contributed significantly to the current understanding of astronomy, nature, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy. Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī is sometimes considered (along with Diophantus) as the "father of Algebra". The isolation of ethanol (alcohol) as a pure compound was first achieved by Persian alchemists. Throughout the Middle Ages, the natural philosophy and mathematics of the ancient Greeks and Persians were furthered and preserved within Persia. The Academy of Gundishapur was a renowned centre of learning in the city of Gundeshapur during late antiquity and was the most important medical centre of the ancient world during the sixth and seventh centuries. During this period, Persia became a centre for the manufacture of scientific instruments, retaining its reputation for quality well into the nineteenth century.

Iran strives to revive the golden age of Persian science. The country has increased its publication output nearly tenfold from 1996 through 2004, and has been ranked first in terms of output growth rate followed by China.

Despite the limitations in funds, facilities, and international collaborations, Iranian scientists remain highly productive in several experimental fields as pharmacology, pharmaceutical chemistry, organic chemistry, and polymer chemistry. Iranian scientists are also helping construct the Compact Muon Solenoid, a detector for CERN's Large Hadron Collider due to come online in May 2008.

In the biomedical sciences, Iran's Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics is a UNESCO chair in biology, and in late 2006, Iranian scientists successfully cloned a sheep by somatic cell nuclear transfer, at the Rouyan research centre in Isfahan.

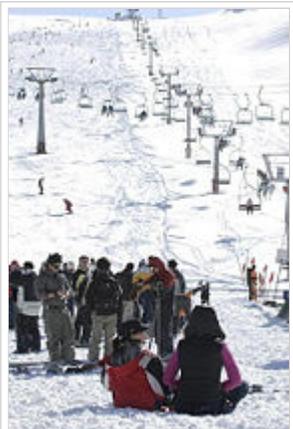
The Iranian nuclear program was launched in the 1950s. Iran's current facilities includes several research reactors, a uranium mine, an almost complete commercial nuclear reactor, and uranium processing facilities that include a uranium enrichment plant. The Iranian Space Agency launched its first reconnaissance satellite named Sina-1 in 2006, and a "space rocket" in 2007, which aimed at improving science and research for university students.

Iranian scientists are a significant portion of the international scientific community. In 1960, Ali Javan co-invented the first gas laser, along with American physicist William R. Bennett, Jr. In 1965, fuzzy set theory was introduced by Lotfi Zadeh. Iranian cardiologist, Tofy Mussivand invented the first artificial cardiac pump, the precursor of the artificial heart, and developed it further afterwards. HbA1c was discovered by Samuel Rahbar and introduced to the medical community, thereby furthering research and treatment of Diabetes. Iranian physics is especially strong in string theory, with many papers being published in Iran. Iranian-American string theorist Cumrun Vafa proposed the Vafa-Witten theorem together with Edward Witten. The KPZ equation in theoretical physics was named after Mehran Kardar.



An eighteenth-century Persian astrolabe

## Sports



International Snowboard championship at Dizin

With two thirds of Iran's population under the age of 25, sports constitutes a highly active portion of Iran's society, both traditional and modern. Iran hence was the birthplace of sports such as polo, backgammon, and Varzesh-e Pahlavani.

Freestyle Wrestling is traditionally referred to as Iran's national sport. Former WWF champion Iron Sheik wrestled as an amateur in Iran before moving to the United States but today, the most popular sport in Iran is football (soccer), with national team being a World Cup finalist three times, having won the Asian Cup on three occasions and was the first country in the Middle East to host the Asian Games. Iran is home to several unique skiing resorts, with the Tochal resort being the world's fifth-highest ski resort (3,730 m/12,238 ft at its highest station) situated only fifteen minutes away from Tehran. Being a mountainous country, Iran offers enthusiasts abundant challenges for hiking, rock climbing, and mountain climbing.

Women are also active in sports, primarily in volleyball and badminton and even rallying. Female drivers participate in national rally tournaments, such as the famous driver Laleh Seddigh.



Azadi Football Stadium

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# Iraq

2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

The **Federal Republic of Iraq**, usually known as **Iraq** (Arabic: العراق, pronounced [ʕiˈrɑːq]), formerly known as Mesopotamia, is a country in the Middle East spanning most of the northwestern end of the Zagros mountain range, the eastern part of the Syrian Desert and the northern part of the Arabian Desert. It shares borders with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south, Jordan to the west, Syria to the northwest, Turkey to the north, and Iran to the east. It has a very narrow section of coastline at Umm Qasr on the Persian Gulf. There are two major flowing rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates. These provide Iraq with agriculturally capable land and contrast with the desert landscape that covers most of the Middle East.

The capital city, Baghdad, is in the centre-east. Iraq's rich history dates back to ancient Mesopotamia. The region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers is identified as the Fertile Crescent—the cradle of civilization—and the birthplace of writing. During its long history, Iraq has been the centre of the Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Abbasid empires, and part of the Achaemenid, Macedonian, Parthian, Umayyad, Sassanid, Ottoman and British empires.

Since an invasion in 2003, a multinational coalition of forces, mainly American and British, has occupied Iraq. The invasion has had wide-reaching consequences: increased civil violence, political breakdown, the removal and execution of former authoritarian President Saddam Hussein, and national problems in the development of political balance, economy, infrastructure, and use of the country's huge reserves of oil. According to the 2007 Failed States Index, produced by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Foreign Policy magazine and the Fund for Peace, Iraq has recently emerged as the world's second most unstable country, after Sudan. Under the control of the U.S. military, Iraq is developing a parliamentary democracy composed of 18 governorates (known as *muhafadhat*).

## Etymology

The origin of the name "Iraq" (Arabic: العراق 'al-ʿIrāq, Turkish: Irak, Assyrian: ܩܪܝܢܐ, Kurdish: عێراق) is disputed. There are several suggested origins for the name. One dates to the Sumerian city of Uruk (or Erech); another maintains that *Iraq* comes from the Aramaic language, meaning "the land along the banks of the rivers"; another that *Iraq* refers to the root of a palm tree numerous in the country.

<p>جمهورية العراق  <i>Jumhūriyyat ul-ʿIrāq</i> (Arabic)            کۆماری عێراق  <b>Komara Iraqê</b> (Kurdish)  <b>Republic of Iraq</b></p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Motto:</b> الله أكبر (Arabic)  <i>"Allahu Akbar"</i> (transliteration)            "God is the Greatest"</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>Mawtini</i> (new)  <i>Ardh Alforatain</i> (previous)<sup>1</sup></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Baghdad <sup>2</sup>

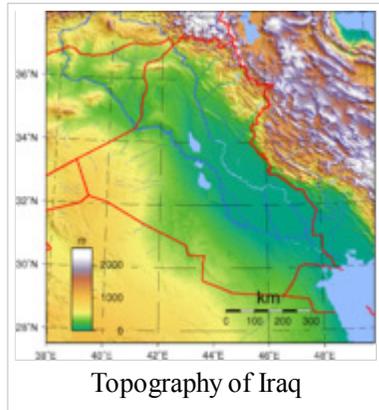
According to Professor Wilhelm Eilers, *The name al-‘Irāq, for all its Arabic apperance, is derived from Middle Persian erāq lowlands."*

Under the Persian Sassanid dynasty, there was a region called "Erak Arabi," referring to the part of the south western region of the Persian Empire that is now part of southern Iraq. The name *Al-Iraq* was used by the Arabs themselves, from the 6th century, for the land Iraq covers.

In English, there are several ways of pronouncing Iraq.(1) [ɪ.ˈɪɑ(:)k], (2) [ɪ.ˈɪæk], (3) [aɪ.ˈɪæk]. (1) is the preferred pronunciation in most dictionaries, and the only pronunciation listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. MQD lists (2) first. (1) is closer to the Arabic than (2) is. The original Arabic pronunciation is [ʕiˈrɑːq].

## Geography

<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic, Kurdish
<b>Demonym</b>	Iraqi
<b>Government</b>	Developing parliamentary republic
- President	Jalal Talabani
- Prime Minister	Nouri al-Maliki
<b>Independence</b>	
- from the Ottoman Empire	October 1, 1919
- from the United Kingdom	October 3, 1932
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	438,317 km <sup>2</sup> ( 58th) 169,234 sq mi
- Water (%)	1.1
<b>Population</b>	
- 2006 estimate	26,783,383 <sup>4</sup> ( 40th)
- Density	66/km <sup>2</sup> ( 125th) 171/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2006 estimate
- Total	\$89.8 billion ( 61st)
- Per capita	\$2,900 ( 130th)
<b>Currency</b>	Iraqi dinar ( IQD)
<b>Time zone</b>	AST ( UTC+3)
- Summer ( DST)	ADT ( UTC+4)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.iq
<b>Calling code</b>	+964
<sup>1</sup>	The Kurds use <i>Ey Reqîb</i> .



Iraq is located at . Spanning 437,072 km<sup>2</sup> (168,743 sq mi), it is the 58th-largest country in the world. It is comparable in size to the US state of California, and somewhat larger than Paraguay.

Iraq mainly consists of desert, but between the two major rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) the area is fertile, the rivers carrying about 60 million cubic metres (78 million cu. yd) of silt annually to the delta. The north of the country is mostly composed of mountains; the highest point being at 3,611 metres (11,847 ft) point, unnamed on the map opposite, but known locally as Cheekah Dar (black tent). Iraq has a small coastline along the Persian Gulf. Close to the coast and along the Shatt al-Arab (known as *arvandrud*: اروندرود among Iranians) there used to be marshlands, but many were drained in the 1990s.

The local climate is mostly desert, with mild to cool winters and dry, hot, cloudless summers. The northern mountainous regions have cold winters with occasional heavy snows, sometimes causing extensive flooding.

Comprising 112 billion barrels of proven oil, Iraq ranks second in the world behind Saudi Arabia in the amount of Oil reserves; the United States Department of Energy estimates that up to 90% of the country remains unexplored. These regions could yield an additional 100 billion barrels. Iraq's oil production costs are among the lowest in the world but only about 2,000 oil wells have been drilled in Iraq, compared with about 1 million wells in Texas alone.

## History

### Ancient Mesopotamia

- 2 The capital of Iraqi Kurdistan is Arbil.
- 3 Arabic and Kurdish are the official languages of the Iraqi government. According to Article 4, Section 4 of the Iraqi Constitution, Assyrian (Syriac) (a dialect of Aramaic) and Iraqi Turkmen (a dialect of Southern Azerbaijani) languages are official in areas where the respective populations they constitute density of population.
- 4 [ CIA World Factbook]



A scaled map of Iraq showing major cities, the Euphrates & the Tigris, the unnamed peak, and the surrounding area.



The upper part of the stela of Hammurabi's code of laws

The region of Iraq was historically known as Mesopotamia ( Greek: "between the rivers"). It was home to the world's first known civilization, the Sumerian culture, followed by the Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures, whose influence extended into neighboring regions as early as 5000 BC. These civilizations produced some of the earliest writing and some of the first sciences, mathematics, laws and philosophies of the world; hence its common epithet, the "Cradle of Civilization".

In the sixth century BC, Cyrus the Great conquered the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and Mesopotamia was subsumed in the Achaemenid Persian Empire for nearly four centuries. Alexander the Great conquered the region again, putting it under Macedonian rule for nearly two centuries. A Central Asian tribe of ancient Iranian peoples known as the Parthians later annexed the region, followed by the Sassanid Persians. The region remained a province of the Persian Empire for nine centuries, until the 7th century.

### Islamic Caliphate

Beginning in the seventh century AD, Islam spread to what is now Iraq during the Islamic conquest of Persia, led by the Muslim Arab commander Khalid ibn al-Walid. Under the Rashidun Caliphate, the prophet Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law Ali moved his capital to Kufa "fi al-Iraq" when he

became the fourth caliph. The Umayyad Caliphate ruled the province of Iraq from Damascus in the 7th century. (However, eventually there was a separate, independent Caliphate of Cordoba.)

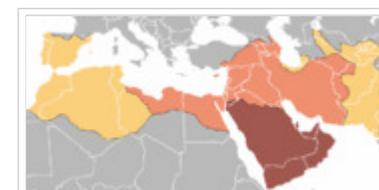
The Abbasid Caliphate built the city of Baghdad in the 8th century as their capital, and it became the leading metropolis of the Arab and Muslim world for five centuries. Baghdad was the largest multicultural city of the Middle Ages, peaking at a population of more than a million, and was the centre of learning during the Islamic Golden Age. The Mongols destroyed the city during the sack of Baghdad in the 13th century.

### Mongol Conquest

In 1257, Hulagu Khan amassed an unusually large army, a significant portion of the Mongol Empire's forces, for the purpose of conquering Baghdad. When they arrived at the Islamic capital, Hulagu demanded surrender but the caliph refused. This angered Hulagu, and, consistent with Mongol strategy of discouraging resistance, Baghdad was decimated. Estimates of the number of dead range from 200,000 to a million.

The Mongols destroyed the Abbasid Caliphate and The Grand Library of Baghdad (Arabic بيت الحكمة Bayt al-Hikma, lit., House of Wisdom), which contained countless, precious, historical documents. The city would never regain its status as major centre of culture and influence.

In 1401, warlord of Turco-Mongol descent Tamerlane (Timur Lenk) invaded Iraq. After the capture of Bagdad, 20,000 of its citizens were massacred. Timur ordered that every soldier should return with at least two severed human heads to show him (many warriors were so scared they killed prisoners captured earlier in the campaign just to ensure they had heads to present to Timur).



The Arab empire and the caliph during their greatest extent.

Under Prophet Mohammad, 622-632

Under the Patriarchal Caliphate, 632-661

Under the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750

## Ottoman Empire

Later, the Ottoman Turks took Baghdad from the Persians in 1535. The Ottomans lost Baghdad to the Iranian Safavids in 1609, and took it back in 1632. From 1747 to 1831, Iraq was ruled, with short intermissions, by the Mamluk officers of Georgian origin who enjoyed local autonomy from the Sublime Porte. In 1831, the direct Ottoman rule was imposed and lasted until World War I, during which the Ottomans sided with Germany and the Central Powers.

During World War I the Ottomans were driven from much of the area by the United Kingdom during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The British lost 92,000 soldiers in the Mesopotamian campaign. Ottoman losses are unknown but the British captured a total of 45,000 prisoners of war. By the end of 1918 the British had deployed 410,000 men in the area, though only 112,000 were combat troops.

During World War I the British and French divided the Middle East in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Treaty of Sèvres, which was ratified in the Treaty of Lausanne, led to the advent of the modern Middle East and Republic of Turkey. The League of Nations granted France mandates over Syria and Lebanon and granted the United Kingdom mandates over Iraq and Palestine (which then consisted of two autonomous regions: Palestine and Transjordan). Parts of the Ottoman Empire on the Arabian Peninsula became parts of what are today Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

## British Mandate of Mesopotamia

At the end of World War I, the League of Nations granted the area to the United Kingdom as a mandate. It initially formed two former Ottoman *vilayets* (regions): Baghdad, and Basra into a single country in August 1921. Five years later, in 1926, the northern vilayet of Mosul was added, forming the territorial boundaries of the modern Iraqi state.

For three out of four centuries of Ottoman rule, Baghdad was the seat of administration for the vilayets of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. During the mandate, British colonial administrators ruled the country, and through the use of British armed forces, suppressed Arab and Kurdish rebellions against the occupation. They established the Hashemite king, Faisal, who had been forced out of Syria by the French, as their client ruler. Likewise, British authorities selected Sunni Arab elites from the region for appointments to government and ministry offices.

## Hashemite monarchy

Britain granted independence to Iraq in 1932, on the urging of King Faisal, though the British retained military bases and transit rights for their forces. King Ghazi of Iraq ruled as a figurehead after King Faisal's death in 1933, while undermined by attempted military coups, until his death in 1939. The United Kingdom invaded Iraq in 1941, for fear that the government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani might cut oil supplies to Western nations, and because of his strong ideological leanings to Nazi Germany. A military occupation followed the restoration of the Hashemite monarchy, and the occupation ended on October 26, 1947. The rulers during the occupation and the remainder of the Hashemite monarchy were Nuri al-Said, the autocratic prime minister, who also ruled from 1930–1932, and 'Abd al-Ilah, an advisor to the king Faisal II.



British troops entering Baghdad.

## Republic of Iraq

The reinstated Hashemite monarchy lasted until 1958, when it was overthrown by a coup d'etat of the Iraqi Army, known as the 14 July Revolution. The coup brought Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qassim to power. He withdrew from the Baghdad Pact and established friendly relations with the Soviet Union, but his government lasted only until 1963, when it was overthrown by Colonel Abdul Salam Arif. Salam Arif died in 1966 and his brother, Abdul Rahman Arif, assumed the presidency. In 1968, Rahman Arif was overthrown by the Arab Socialist Baath Party. This movement gradually came under the control of Saddam Hussein al-Majid al Tikriti, who acceded to the presidency and control of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), then Iraq's supreme executive body, in July 1979, while killing many of his opponents.

## Saddam Hussein

Saddam's regime lasted throughout the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), during which Iraqi forces attacked Iranian soldiers and civilians with chemical weapons. This period is notorious for the Saddam regime's human rights abuses, for instance, during the Al-Anfal campaign. The war ended in stalemate, largely due to American and Western support for Iraq. This was part of the US policy of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran.

In 1977, the Iraqi government ordered the construction of Osirak (also spelled Osiraq) at the Al Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Centre, 18 km (11 miles) south-east of Baghdad. It was a 40 MW light-water nuclear materials testing reactor (MTR). In 1981, Israeli aircraft bombed the facility, in order to prevent the country from using the reactor for creation of nuclear weapons.

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, resulting in the Gulf War and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations at the behest of the U.S. The economic sanctions were intended to compel Saddam to dispose of weapons of mass destruction. Critics estimate that more than 500,000 Iraqi children died as a result of the sanctions. The U.S. and the UK declared no-fly zones over Kurdish northern and Shiite southern Iraq to oversee the Kurds and southern Shiites.

## Invasion by American-led Coalition forces

In March 2003, a United States-organized coalition invaded Iraq, with the stated reason that Iraq had failed to abandon its nuclear and chemical weapons development program in violation of United Nations **resolution 687**. When Iraq invaded Kuwait during the first Gulf War, the United Nations Security Council, under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, adopted **resolution 678**, authorizing U.N. member states to use *all necessary means* to "restore international peace and security in the area." After Iraq was expelled from Kuwait the United Nations passed a cease-fire resolution 687. The agreement included provisions obligating Iraq to discontinue its nuclear weapons program. The United States asserted that because Iraq was in "material breach" of resolution 687, the armed forces authorization of resolution 678 was revived.

The United States gave further justification for the invasion of Iraq in claims that Iraq had or was developing weapons of mass destruction and the opportunity to remove an oppressive dictator from power and bring democracy to Iraq. In his State of Union Address on 29 January, 2002, the American President George W. Bush declared that Iraq was a member of the "axis of evil", and that, like North Korea and Iran, Iraq's attempt to acquire weapons of mass destruction gave credence to the claim that the Iraqi government posed a serious threat to America's national security. He added, "Iraq continues to flaunt its hostilities toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade... This is a regime that agreed to international inspections—then kicked out inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world... By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes [Iran, Iraq and North Korea] pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred." However, no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have been found since the invasion.

## Post-invasion

Following the invasion, the United States established the Coalition Provisional Authority to govern Iraq. Government authority was transferred to an Iraqi Interim Government in June 2004 and a permanent government was elected in October 2005. More than 140,000 Coalition troops remain in Iraq.

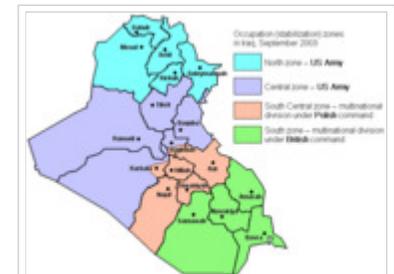
Studies have placed the number of civilians deaths as high as 655,000 (see The Lancet study), although most studies have put the number much lower: the Iraq Body Count project has a figure of less than 10% of The Lancet Study. The website of the Iraq body count however states, "Our maximum therefore refers to reported deaths - which can only be a sample of true deaths unless one assumes that every civilian death has been reported. It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported by the media." .

After the invasion, al-Qaeda took advantage of the insurgency to entrench itself in the country concurrently with an Arab-Sunni led insurgency and sectarian violence.

On December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was hanged . Hussein's half-brother and former intelligence chief Barzan Hassan and former chief judge of the Revolutionary Court Awad Hamed al-Bandar were likewise executed on January 15, 2007; as was Taha Yassin Ramadan, Saddam's former deputy and former vice-president (originally sentenced to life in prison but later to death by hanging), on March 20, 2007. Ramadan was the fourth and last man in the al-Dujail



Downtown Baghdad monument of Saddam Hussein vandalized by Iraqis shortly after the invasion of Coalition forces in April 2003.



Occupation zones in Iraq after invasion.

trial to die by hanging for crimes against humanity.

At the Anfal genocide trial, Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid (aka Chemical Ali), former defense minister Sultan Hashim Ahmed al-Tay, and former deputy Hussein Rashid Mohammed were sentenced to hang for their role in the Al-Anfal Campaign against the Kurds on June 24, 2007.

Acts of sectarian violence have led to claims of ethnic cleansing in Iraq, and there have been many attacks on Iraqi minorities such as the Yezidis, Mandaeans, Assyrians and others.

In 2007 Foreign Policy Magazine named Iraq as the second most unstable nation in the world after Sudan.

Although violence has declined from the summer of 2007, the U.N. reported of a cholera outbreak in Iraq.

## **Iraqi diaspora**

The dispersion of native Iraqis to other countries is known as the Iraqi diaspora. There have been many large-scale waves of emigration from Iraq, beginning early in the regime of Saddam Hussein and continuing through to 2007. The UN High Commission for Refugees has estimated that nearly two million Iraqis have fled the country in recent years, mostly to Jordan and Syria. Although some expatriates returned to Iraq after the 2003 invasion, the flow had virtually stopped by 2006.

In addition to the 2 million Iraqis who fled to neighbouring countries, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates the number of people currently displaced within the country at 1.9 million.

Roughly 40% of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled, the U.N. said. Most are fleeing systematic persecution and have no desire to return. Refugees are mired in poverty as they are generally barred from working in their host countries.

In recent times the Diaspora seems to be reversing with the increased security of the last few months, and the Iraqi government claims that so far 46,000 refugees have returned to their homes in October of 2007 alone ..

## **Government and politics**

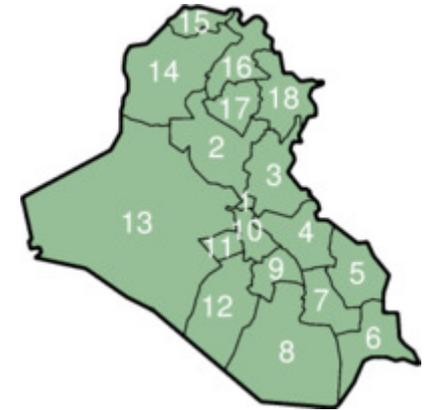
### **Government**

The federal government of Iraq is defined under the current Constitution as an Islamic, democratic, federal parliamentary republic. The federal government is composed of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as numerous independent commissions. Aside from the federal government, there are regions (made of one or more governorates), governorates, and districts within Iraq with jurisdiction over various matters as defined by law.

## Regions, governorates and districts

Currently, Kurdistan is the only legally defined region within Iraq, with its own government and quasi-official militia, the Peshmerga. Iraq itself is divided into eighteen governorates (or provinces) (Arabic: *muhafadhat*, singular - *muhafadhah*, Kurdish: پارێزگه *Pârîzga*). The governorates are subdivided into *districts* (or *qadhas*).

- |                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Baghdad       | 10. Babil              |
| 2. Salah ad Din  | 11. Karbala            |
| 3. Diyala        | 12. An Najaf           |
| 4. Wasit         | 13. Al Anbar           |
| 5. Maysan        | 14. Ninawa             |
| 6. Al Basrah     | 15. Dahuk              |
| 7. Dhi Qar       | 16. Arbil              |
| 8. Al Muthanna   | 17. At Ta'mim (Kirkuk) |
| 9. Al-Qādisiyyah | 18. As Sulaymaniyah    |



## Politics

Iraq was under Baath Party rule from 1968 to 2003; in 1979 Saddam Hussein took control and remained president until 2003 after which he was unseated by a US-led invasion.

On October 15, 2005, more than 63% of eligible Iraqis came out across the country to vote on whether to accept or reject the new constitution. On October 25, the vote was certified and the constitution passed with a 78% overall majority, with the percentage of support varying widely between the country's territories. The new constitution had overwhelming backing among the Shia and Kurdish communities, but was overwhelmingly rejected by Arab Sunnis. Three majority Arab Sunni provinces rejected it ( Salah ad Din with 82% against, Ninawa with 55% against, and Al Anbar with 97% against).

Under the terms of the constitution, the country conducted fresh nationwide parliamentary elections on December 15 to elect a new government. The overwhelming majority of all three major ethnic groups in Iraq voted along ethnic lines, turning this vote into more of an ethnic census than a competitive election, and setting the stage for the division of the country along ethnic lines.

Iraqi politicians have been under significant threat by the various factions that have promoted violence as a political weapon. The ongoing violence in Iraq has been incited by an amalgam of religious extremists that believe an Islamic Caliphate should rule, old sectarian regime members that had ruled under Saddam that want back the power they had, and Iraqi nationalists that are fighting the U.S. military presence.



Jalal Talabani, the sanctioned President of Iraq.

Iraq has number of ethnic minority groups in Iraq: Kurds, Assyrians, Mandeans, Iraqi Turkmen, Shabaks and Roma. These groups have not enjoyed equal status with the majority Arab populations throughout Iraq's eighty-five year history. Since the establishment of the "no-fly zones" following the Gulf War of 1990–1991, the situation of the Kurds has changed as they have established their own autonomous region. The remainder of these ethnic groups continue to suffer discrimination on religious or ethnic grounds.

## Economy

Iraq's economy is dominated by the oil sector, which has traditionally provided about 95% of foreign exchange earnings. In the 1980s financial problems caused by massive expenditures in the eight-year war with Iran and damage to oil export facilities by Iran led the government to implement austerity measures, borrow heavily, and later reschedule foreign debt payments. Iraq suffered economic losses from the war of at least US\$100 billion. After hostilities ended in 1988, oil exports gradually increased with the construction of new pipelines and restoration of damaged facilities. A combination of low oil prices, repayment of war debts (estimated at around US\$3 billion a year) and the costs of reconstruction resulted in a serious financial crisis which was the main short term motivation for the invasion of Kuwait.



An old 50 dinar bill

On November 20, 2004, the Paris Club of creditor nations agreed to write off 80% (\$33 billion) of Iraq's \$42 billion debt to Club members. Iraq's total external debt was around \$120 billion at the time of the 2003 invasion, and had grown by \$5 billion by 2004. The debt relief will be implemented in three stages: two of 30% each and one of 20%.

At the end of 2005, and in the first half of 2006, Iraq implemented a restructuring of about \$20 billion of commercial debt claims on terms comparable to that of its November 2004 Paris Club agreement (i.e. with an 80% writeoff). Iraq offered to its larger claimants a U.S. dollar denominated bond maturing in 2028. Smaller commercial claimants received a cash settlement of comparable value.

## Reconstruction

## Demographics

A July 2006 estimate of the total Iraqi population is 26,783,383.

Seventy-four percent of Iraq's population are Arabs; the other major ethnic groups are the Kurds at 20.54%, Assyrians, Iraqi Turkmen and others (5%), who mostly live in the north and northeast of the country. Other distinct groups are Persians and Armenians. About 25,000–60,000 Marsh Arabs live in southern Iraq.

Arabic and Kurdish are official languages. Assyrian and Turkmen are official languages in areas where the Assyrians and Iraqi Turkmen are located respectively. Armenian and Persian are also spoken but to a lesser extent. English is the most commonly spoken Western language.

Ethnic composition includes:

- Arab, 74.45%; Kurdish, 20.54%; Turkoman, Assyrian or other 5.1%.

Religious composition includes:

- Muslim, 97%; Christian or other, 3%.

There are no official figures available, mainly due to the highly politically charged nature of the subject. Two estimates of the Muslim proportions of the population are:

- Shi'a as much as 60%, Sunni about 40% (source: Britannica, Religion section of Iraq article).

Shi'a 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37% (source: CIA World Fact Book).

The Shi'a are mostly Arabs, some are Turkmen and Faili Kurds, and almost all are Twelver school. Sunnis are composed of Arabs, Turkmen who are Hanafi school and Kurds who are Shafi school.

According to most western sources the majority of Iraqis are Shi'ite Arab Muslims (around 60%), and Sunnis represent about 40% of the population made up of Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. Sunnis hotly dispute these figures, including an ex-Iraqi Ambassador, referring to American sources. They claim that many reports or sources only include Arab Sunnis as 'Sunni', missing out the Kurdish and Turkmen Sunnis.

Ethnic Assyrians (most of whom are adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East) account for most of Iraq's Christian population, along with Armenians. Bahá'ís, Mandaeans, Shabaks, and Yezidis also exist. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, although the Faili (Feyli) Kurds are largely Shi'a.

As of November 4, 2006, the UNHCR estimated that 1.8 million Iraqis had been displaced to neighboring countries, and 1.6 million were displaced internally, with nearly 100,000 Iraqis fleeing to Syria and Jordan each month. A May 25, 2007 article notes that in the past seven months only 69 people from Iraq have been granted refugee status in the United States.

## Culture

In the most recent millennium, what is now Iraq has been made up of five cultural areas: Kurdish in the north centered on Arbil, Sunni Islamic Arabs in the centre around Baghdad, Shi'a Islamic Arabs in the south centered on Basra, the Assyrians, a Christian people, living in various cities in the north, and the Marsh Arabs, a nomadic people, who live on the marshlands of the central river. There are also the Bedouin tribes primarily in southern and western Iraq, with smaller groups scattered throughout the country. Markets and bartering are the common form of trade.

## Music

Iraq is known primarily for an instrument called the *oud* (similar to a lute) and a *rebab* (similar to a fiddle); its stars include Ahmed Mukhtar and the Assyrian Munir Bashir. Until the fall of Saddam Hussein, the most popular radio station was the Voice of Youth. It played a mix of western rock, hip hop and pop music, all of which had to be imported via Jordan due to international economic sanctions. Iraq has also produced a major pan-Arab pop star-in-exile in Kathem Al Saher, whose songs include *Ladghat E-Hayya*, which was banned for its racy lyrics.

## Sport

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq>"

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Kathem Al Saher, a well known Iraqi born pop singer, songwriter, and musician.

# Israel

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**Israel** (Hebrew: **יִשְׂרָאֵל**, *Yisra'el*; Arabic: **إسرائيل**, *Isrā'īl*((*u*); Russian: Израиль, *Izrá'il*'), officially the **State of Israel** (Hebrew: **מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל**, *Medīnat Yisra'el*; Arabic: **دَوْلَةُ إِسْرَائِيل**, *Dawlat Isrā'īl*), is a country in Southwest Asia located on the southeastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. It has borders with Lebanon in the north, Syria and Jordan in the east, and Egypt on the southwest, and contains geographically diverse features within its relatively small area. The West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are partially administrated by the Palestinian National Authority, are also adjacent. With a population of about 7.2 million, the majority of whom are Jews, Israel is the world's only Jewish state. It is also home to Arab Muslims, Christians and Druze, as well as other religious and ethnic minority groups. Jerusalem is the nation's capital, seat of government, and largest city.

The modern state of Israel has its roots in the Land of Israel, a concept central to Judaism for over three thousand years. After World War I, the League of Nations approved the British Mandate for Palestine with the intent of creating a "national home for the Jewish people". In 1947, the United Nations approved the partition of the Mandate of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Arab League rejected the plan, but on May 14, 1948, Israel declared its independence. The new country's victory in the subsequent Arab-Israeli War expanded the borders of the Jewish state beyond those in the UN Partition Plan. Since then, Israel has been in conflict with many of the neighboring Arab countries, resulting in several major wars and decades of violence. Since its foundation, Israel's boundaries and even the State's very right to exist have been subject to dispute, although Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and efforts are being made to reach a permanent accord with the Palestinians.

Unlike most countries in the Middle East, Israel is a liberal democracy and a developed country. It has also been ranked as the most progressive Middle Eastern country in terms of freedom of the press, economic competition, and human development.

## Etymology

Over the past three thousand years, the name "Israel" has meant in common and religious usage both the Land of Israel and the entire Jewish nation. The name originated from a verse in the Bible ( Genesis,

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<p>מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל      دولة إسرائيل <i>Medīnat Yisrā'el</i>      <i>Dawlat Isrā'īl</i></p>	
<b>State of Israel</b>	
 <p>Flag</p>	<p>Image:COA of Israel.svg</p> <p>Emblem</p>
<b>Anthem:</b> Hatikvah <i>The Hope</i>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Jerusalem
<b>Official languages</b>	Hebrew, Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Israeli

32:28) where Jacob is renamed Israel after successfully wrestling with an angel of God. Commentators differ on the meaning of the name. Some say the name comes from the verb *šarar* ("to rule, be strong, have authority over"), thereby making the name mean "God rules" or "God judges". Other possible meanings include "the prince of God" (from the King James Version) or "El fights/struggles". Regardless of the precise meaning of the name, the biblical nation fathered by Jacob thus became the "Children of Israel" or the "Israelites".

The first historical mention of the word "Israel" is in the Merneptah Stele of ancient Egypt (dated the late 13th century BCE), although scholars disagree on whether it refers to a people or a homeland. The modern country was named *Medinat Yisrael*, or the State of Israel, after other proposed names, including *Eretz Israel* ("the Land of Israel"), Zion, and Judea, were rejected. In the early weeks of independence, the government chose the term "Israeli" to denote a citizen of Israel, with the formal announcement made by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett.

## History

### Early roots

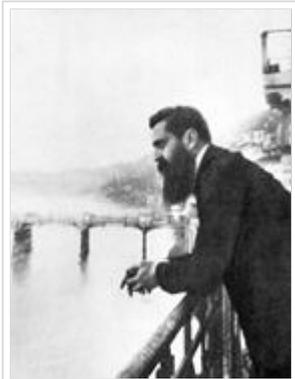
The Land of Israel, known in Hebrew as *Eretz Yisrael*, has been sacred to the Jewish people since the time of the biblical patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Bible has placed this period in the early 2nd millennium BCE. According to the Torah, the Land of Israel was promised to the Jews as their homeland, and the sites holiest to Judaism are located there. Around the 11th century BCE, the first of a series of Jewish kingdoms and states established rule over the region; these Jewish kingdoms and states ruled intermittently for the following one thousand years.

Between the time of the Jewish kingdoms and the 7th-century Muslim conquests, the Land of Israel fell under Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Sassanian, and Byzantine rule. Jewish presence in the region dwindled after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 CE and the resultant large-scale expulsion of Jews. Nevertheless, a continuous Jewish presence in Palestine was maintained, although the main Jewish population shifted from the Judea region to the Galilee; the Mishna and part of the Talmud, among Judaism's most important religious texts, were composed in Israel during this period. The Land of Israel was captured from the Byzantine Empire around 636 CE during the initial Muslim conquests. Control of the region transferred between the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Crusaders over the next six centuries, before falling in the hands of the Mamluk Sultanate, in 1260. In 1516, the Land of Israel became a part of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the region until the 20th century.

<b>Government</b>	Parliamentary democracy
- President	Shimon Peres
- Prime Minister	Ehud Olmert
<b>Independence</b>	from UK-administered League of Nations mandate
- Declaration	14 May 1948 (05 Iyar 5708)
<b>Area</b>	
- Total <sup>1</sup>	20,770 / 22,072 km <sup>2</sup> ( 151st) 8,019 / 8,522 sq mi
- Water (%)	~2%
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	7,184,000 <sup>2</sup> ( 96th)
- 1995 census	5,548,523
- Density	324/km <sup>2</sup> ( 34th) 839/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$232.7 billion ( 44rd)
- Per capita	\$33,299 ( 22th)
<b>Gini (2005)</b>	38.6
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: blue;">—</span> 0.932 ( <b>high</b> ) ( 23rd)
<b>Currency</b>	New Israeli Sheqel (₪) ( NIS)
<b>Time zone</b>	IST ( UTC+2)
- Summer ( DST)	( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.il
<b>Calling code</b>	+972
<small>1 Excluding / Including the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem; see below.</small>	
<small>2 Includes Israeli population in the West Bank.</small>	

## Zionism and the British Mandate

Jews living in the Diaspora have long aspired to return to Zion and the Land of Israel. That hope and yearning was articulated in the Bible and is a central theme in the Jewish prayer book. Beginning in the twelfth century, a small but steady stream of Jews began to leave Europe to settle in the Holy Land, increasing in numbers after Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492. During the 16th century large communities struck roots in the Four Holy Cities, and in the second half of the 18th century, entire Hasidic communities from eastern Europe settled in the Holy Land.



Theodor Herzl,  
visionary of the Jewish  
State

The first large wave of modern immigration, known as the First Aliyah (Hebrew: עלייה), began in 1881, as Jews fled pogroms in Eastern Europe. While the Zionist movement already existed in theory, Theodor Herzl is credited with founding political Zionism, a movement which sought to establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, by elevating the Jewish Question to the international plane. In 1896, Herzl published *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*), offering his vision of a future state; the following year he presided over the first World Zionist Congress.

The Second Aliyah (1904–1914), began after the Kishinev Pogrom. Some 40,000 Jews settled in Palestine. Both the first and second waves of migrants were mainly Orthodox Jews, but those in the Second Aliyah included socialist pioneers who established the *kibbutz* movement. During World War I, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issued what became known as the Balfour Declaration, which "view[ed] with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." The Jewish Legion, a group of battalions composed primarily of Zionist volunteers, assisted in the British conquest of

Israel. Arab opposition to the plan led to the 1920 Palestine riots and the formation of the Jewish defense organization known as the Haganah, from which the Irgun and Lehi split off. In 1922, the League of Nations granted Great Britain, a mandate over Palestine for the express purpose of "placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home".

Jewish immigration continued with the Third Aliyah (1919–1923) and Fourth Aliyah (1924–1929), which together brought 100,000 Jews to Palestine. In the wake of the Jaffa riots in the early days of the Mandate, the British restricted Jewish immigration and territory slated for the Jewish state was allocated to Transjordan. The rise of Nazism in the 1930s led to the Fifth Aliyah, with an influx of a quarter of a million Jews. This influx resulted in the Arab revolt of 1936–1939 and led the British to cap immigration with the White Paper of 1939. With countries around the world turning away Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust, a clandestine movement known as Aliyah Bet was organized to bring Jews to Palestine. By the end of World War II, Jews accounted for 33% of the population of Palestine, up from 11% in 1922.

### Aliyah to Israel and settlement

#### Pre-Zionist Aliyah

- The Return to Zion
- The Old Yishuv

#### Prior to the founding of Israel

- First Aliyah
- Second Aliyah
- During WWI
- Third Aliyah
- Fourth Aliyah
- Fifth Aliyah
- During and after WWII
- Beriḥah

#### After the founding of Israel

- Operation Magic Carpet
- Operation Ezra and Nehemiah
- Jewish exodus from Arab lands
- Polish aliyah in 1968
- Aliyah from the Soviet Union in the 1970s
- Aliyah from Ethiopia
- Aliyah from the Commonwealth of Independent States in the 1990s
- Aliyah from Latin America in the 2000s

#### Related topics

## Independence and first years

In 1947, the British government withdrew from commitment to the Mandate of Palestine, stating it was unable to arrive at a solution acceptable to both Arabs and Jews. The newly-created United Nations approved the UN Partition Plan (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181) on November 29, 1947, dividing the country into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. Jerusalem was to be designated an international city – a *corpus separatum* – administered by the UN to avoid conflict over its status. The Jewish community accepted the plan, but the Arab League and Arab Higher Committee rejected it.

Regardless, the State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948, one day before the expiry of the British Mandate for Palestine. Not long after, five Arab countries – Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq – attacked Israel, launching the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. After almost a year of fighting, a ceasefire was declared and temporary borders, known as the Green Line, were instituted. Jordan annexed what became known as the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip. Israel was admitted as a member of the United Nations on May 11, 1949. During the course of the hostilities, 711,000 Arabs, according to UN estimates, fled from Israel. The fate of the Palestinian refugees today is a major point of contention in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the early years of the state, the Labor Zionist movement led by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion dominated Israeli politics. These years were marked by mass immigration of Holocaust survivors and Jews fleeing Arab lands; the population rose from 800,000 to two million between 1948 and 1958. Most arrived as refugees with no possessions and were housed in temporary camps known as *ma'abarot*. By 1952, over two hundred thousand immigrants were living in these tent cities. The need to solve the crisis led Ben-Gurion to sign a reparations agreement with West Germany that triggered mass protests by Jews angered at the idea of Israel "doing business" with Germany.

Image:Eichmann2.jpg  
Adolf Eichmann on trial in  
Jerusalem

During the 1950s, Israel was frequently attacked by Arab fedayeen, mainly from the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip. In 1956, Israel joined a secret alliance with Great Britain and France aimed at recapturing the Suez Canal, which the Egyptians had nationalized (see the Suez Crisis). Despite capturing the Sinai Peninsula, Israel was forced to retreat due to pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union in return for guarantees of Israeli shipping rights in the Red Sea and the Canal.

At the start of the following decade, Israel captured Adolf Eichmann, an implementer of the Final Solution hiding in Argentina, and brought him to trial. The trial had a major impact on public awareness of the Holocaust and to date Eichmann remains the only person sentenced to death by Israeli courts.

## Conflicts and peace treaties

In 1967, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria massed troops close to Israeli borders, expelled UN peacekeepers and blocked Israel's access to the Red Sea. Israel saw these actions as a *casus belli* for a pre-emptive strike that launched the Six-Day War, during which it captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan

Jewish history • Jewish diaspora •  
History of the Jews in the Land of Israel  
• Yishuv • History of Zionism (Timeline)  
• Revival of Hebrew language  
• Religious Zionism • Haredim and Zionism  
• Anti-Zionism



David Ben-Gurion proclaiming Israeli independence on May 14, 1948 below a portrait of Herzl

Heights. The 1949 Green Line became the administrative boundary between Israel and the occupied territories. Jerusalem's boundaries were enlarged, incorporating East Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Law, passed in 1980, reaffirmed this measure and reignited international controversy over the status of Jerusalem.

In the early 1970s, Palestinian groups launched a wave of attacks against Israeli targets around the world, including a massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics. Israel responded with Operation Wrath of God, in which those responsible for the Munich massacre were tracked down and assassinated. On October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, the Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a surprise attack against Israel. The war ended on October 26 with Israel successfully repelling Egyptian and Syrian forces but suffering great losses. An internal inquiry exonerated the government of responsibility for the war, but public anger forced Prime Minister Golda Meir to resign.

The 1977 Knesset elections marked a major turning point in Israeli political history as Menachem Begin's Likud party took control from the Labor Party. Later that year, Egyptian President Anwar Al Sadat made a trip to Israel and spoke before the Knesset in what was the first recognition of Israel by an Arab head of state. In the two years that followed, Sadat and Menachem Begin signed the Camp David Accords and the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula and agreed to enter negotiations over an autonomy for Palestinians across the Green Line, a plan which was never implemented.

In 1982, Israel intervened in the Lebanese Civil War to destroy the bases from which the Palestine Liberation Organization launched attacks and missiles at northern Israel. That move developed into the First Lebanon War. Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon in 1986, but maintained a borderland buffer zone until 2000. The First Intifada, a Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule, broke out in 1987 with waves of violence occurring in the occupied territories. Over the following six years, more than a thousand people were killed in the ensuing violence, much of which was internal Palestinian violence. During the 1991 Gulf War, the PLO and many Palestinians supported Saddam Hussein and Iraqi missile attacks against Israel.



Prime Minister Golda Meir, who resigned following the Yom Kippur War



Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shake hands, presided over by Bill Clinton, at the signing of the Oslo Accords, September 13, 1993

In 1992, Yitzhak Rabin became Prime Minister following an election in which his party promoted compromise with Israel's neighbors. The following year, Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, on behalf of Israel and the PLO, signed the Oslo Accords, which gave the Palestinian National Authority the right to self-govern parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in return for recognition of Israel's right to exist and an end to terrorism. In 1994, the Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace was signed, making Jordan the second Arab country to normalize relations with Israel. Public support for the Accords waned as Israel was struck by a wave of attacks from Palestinians. The November 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a far-right-wing Jew, as he left a peace rally, shocked the country. At the end of the 1990s, Israel, under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, withdrew from Hebron and signed the Wye River Memorandum, giving greater control to the Palestinian National Authority.

Ehud Barak, elected Prime Minister in 1999, began the new millennium by withdrawing forces from Southern Lebanon and conducting negotiations with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and U.S. President Bill Clinton at the July 2000 Camp David Summit. During the summit, Barak offered a plan for the establishment of a Palestinian state, but Yasser Arafat rejected it. After the collapse of the talks, Palestinians began the Second Intifada.

Ariel Sharon soon after became the new prime minister in a 2001 special election. During his tenure, Sharon carried out his plan to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip and also spearheaded the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier. In January 2006, after Ariel Sharon suffered a severe hemorrhagic stroke which left him in a coma, the powers of office were transferred to Ehud Olmert. The kidnappings of Israeli soldiers by Hamas and Hezbollah and the shelling of settlements on Israel's northern border led to a five-week war, known in Israel as the Second Lebanon War. The conflict was brought to end by a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations. After the war, Israel's Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, resigned.

On November 27, 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas agreed to begin negotiations on all issues, and to make every effort reach an agreement by the end of 2008.

## Geography and climate

Israel is located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, bounded by Lebanon to the north, Syria and Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the southwest. The sovereign territory of Israel, excluding all territories captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War, is approximately 20,770 square kilometers (8,019 sq mi) in area, of which two percent is water. The total area under Israeli law, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, is 22,072 square kilometers (8,522 sq mi). The total area under Israeli control, including the military-controlled and Palestinian-governed territory of the West Bank, is 27,799 square kilometers (10,733 sq mi).

Despite its small size, Israel is home to a variety of geographic features, from the Negev desert in the south to the mountain ranges of the Galilee, Carmel, and the Golan in the north. The Israeli Coastal Plain on the shores of the Mediterranean is home to seventy percent of the nation's population. East of the central highlands lies the Jordan Rift Valley, which forms a small part of the 6,500-kilometer (4,040-mi) Great Rift Valley. The Jordan River runs along the Jordan Rift Valley, from Mount Hermon through the Hulah Valley and the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the surface of the Earth. Unique to Israel and the Sinai Peninsula are makhteshim, or erosion cirques. The largest makhtesh in the world is Ramon Crater in the Negev, which measures 40 kilometers by 8 kilometers (25 mi by 5 mi).

Temperatures in Israel vary widely, especially during the winter. The more mountainous regions can be windy, cold, and sometimes snowy; Mount Hermon's peak is covered with snow most of the year and Jerusalem usually receives at least one snowfall each year. Meanwhile, coastal cities, such as Tel Aviv and Haifa, have a typical Mediterranean climate with cool, rainy winters and long, hot summers. From May to September, rain in Israel is rare. With scarce water resources, Israel has developed various water-saving technologies, including drip irrigation. Israelis also take advantage of the considerable sunlight available for solar energy; making Israel the leading nation in solar energy use per capita.

## Government and politics



Negev Desert landscape

Israel operates under a parliamentary system as a democratic country with universal suffrage. The President of Israel is the head of state, but his duties are largely ceremonial. A Parliament Member supported by a majority in parliament becomes the Prime Minister, usually the chairman of the largest party. The Prime Minister is the head of government and head of the Cabinet. Israel is governed by a 120-member parliament, known as the Knesset. Membership in the Knesset is based on proportional representation of political parties. Parliamentary elections are held every four years, but the Knesset can dissolve the government at any time by a no-confidence vote. The Basic Laws of Israel function as an unwritten constitution. In 2003, the Knesset began to draft an official constitution based on these laws.



The Knesset, home of the Israeli parliament

Israel has a three-tier court system. At the lowest level are magistrate courts, situated in most cities across the country. Above them are district courts, serving both as appellate courts and courts of first instance; they are situated in five of Israel's six districts. The third and highest tier in Israel is the Supreme Court, seated in Jerusalem. It serves a dual role as the highest court of appeals and the High Court of Justice. In the latter role, the Supreme Court rules as a court of first instance, allowing individuals, both citizens and non-citizens, to petition against decisions of state authorities. Israel is not a member of the International Criminal Court as it fears the court would be biased against it due to political pressure. Israel's legal system combines English common law, civil law, and Jewish law. It is based on the principle of *stare decisis* (precedent) and is an adversarial system, where the parties in the suit bring evidence before the court. Court cases are decided by professional judges rather than juries. Marriage and divorce are under the jurisdiction of the religious courts: Jewish, Muslim, Druze, and Christian. A committee of Knesset members, Supreme Court justices, and Israeli Bar members carries out the election of judges.



Districts of Israel: (1) Northern, (2) Haifa, (3) Centre, (4) Tel Aviv, (5) Jerusalem, (6) Southern

The Israeli Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty seeks to defend human rights and liberties. Israel is the only country in the region ranked "Free" by Freedom House based on the level of civil and political rights; the "Israeli Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority" was ranked "Not Free." Similarly, Reporters Without Borders rated Israel 50th out of 168 countries in terms of freedom of the press and highest among Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless, groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have often disapproved of Israel's human rights record in regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel's civil liberties also allow for self-criticism, from groups such as B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization. Israel's system of socialized medicine, which guarantees equal health care to all residents of the country, was anchored in law in 1995.

### Administrative districts

The State of Israel is divided into six main administrative districts, known as *mehozot* (מחוזות; singular: *mahoz*) – Centre District, Haifa District, Jerusalem District, Northern District, Southern District, and Tel Aviv District. Districts are further divided into fifteen sub-districts known as *nafot* (נפות; singular: *nafa*), which are themselves partitioned into fifty natural regions. For statistical purposes, the country is divided into three metropolitan areas: Tel Aviv and Gush Dan (population 3,150,000), Haifa (population 996,000), and Beersheba (population 531,600). However, Israel's largest city, both in population and area, is Jerusalem with 732,100 residents in an area of 126 square kilometers (49 sq mi). Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Rishon LeZion rank as Israel's next most populous cities, with populations of 384,600, 267,000, and 222,300 respectively.

### Occupied territories

The Israeli-occupied territories – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights – are the areas Israel captured from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria during the Six-Day War. The term was also used to describe the Sinai Peninsula, which was returned to Egypt as part of the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. Following Israel's capture of these territories, settlements consisting of Israeli citizens were established within each of them. Israel has applied civilian law to the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, incorporating them into its territory and offering their inhabitants Israeli

citizenship. In contrast, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have remained under military occupation, and are widely seen – by Israel, the Palestinians, and the international community alike – as the site of a future Palestinian state. Most negotiations relating to the territories have been on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which calls on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories in return for peaceful actions from Arab states (see Land for peace).



A road crossing the Israeli West Bank barrier in Bethlehem

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip both have populations consisting primarily of Arab Palestinians, including historic residents of the territories and refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. From their occupation in 1967 until 1993, the Palestinians living in these territories were under Israeli military administration. Since the Israel-PLO letters of recognition, most of the Palestinian population and cities have been under the internal jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, and only partial Israeli military control, although Israel has on several occasions redeployed its troops and reinstated full military administration during periods of unrest. In response to increasing attacks as part of the Second Intifada, the Israeli government started to construct the Israeli West Bank barrier, which

opponents note is partially built within the West Bank. In 2005, Israel removed all of its residents and forces in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank as part of its unilateral disengagement plan.

## Foreign relations

Israel maintains diplomatic relations with 161 countries and has 94 diplomatic missions around the world. Only three members of the Arab League have normalized relations with Israel; Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties in 1979 and 1994, respectively, and Mauritania opted for full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999. Two other members of the Arab League, Morocco and Tunisia, which had some diplomatic relations with Israel, severed them at the start of the Second Intifada in 2000. Since 2003, however, ties with Morocco have been on the upswing, and Israel's foreign minister has visited the country. Under Israeli law, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Yemen are enemy countries and Israeli citizens may not visit them without permission from the Ministry of the Interior. Since 1995, Israel has been a member of the Mediterranean Dialogue, which fosters cooperation between seven countries in the Mediterranean Basin and the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The United States, Turkey, Germany, The UK and India are among Israel's closest allies. The United States was the first country to recognize the State of Israel, followed by the Soviet Union. It may regard Israel as its primary ally in the Middle East, based on shared political and religious values. Although Turkey and Israel did not establish full diplomatic relations until 1991, Turkey has cooperated with the State since its recognition of Israel in 1949. However, Turkey's ties to the other Muslim-majority nations in the region have at times resulted in pressure from Arab states to temper its relationship with Israel. Germany's strong ties with Israel may stem from a desire to make amends for the Holocaust. The two countries have cooperated on scientific and educational endeavors and remain strong economic partners. India established full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992 and has fostered a strong military and cultural partnership with the country since then. United Kingdom has kept full diplomatic relations with Israel since its formation having had two visits from heads of state in 2007. It has also has a strong trade relationship, **Israel** being the 23rd largest market. Relations between two countries were also made stronger by former prime minister Tony Blair's efforts for a two state resolution. The UK is seen as having a "natural" relationship with Israel on the count of the British Mandate of Palestine. Iran had diplomatic relations with Israel under the Pahlavi dynasty but withdrew its recognition of Israel during the Iranian Revolution.



Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel, presenting U.S. President Harry S. Truman with a Torah scroll in 1948

## Military

The Israel Defense Forces consists of the Israeli Army, Israeli Air Force and Israeli Navy. It was founded during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War out of paramilitary organizations – chiefly the Haganah – that preceded the establishment of the state. The IDF also draws upon the resources of the Military Intelligence Directorate (*Aman*), which works with the Mossad and Shabak. The involvement of the Israel Defense Forces in major wars and border conflicts has made it one of the most battle-trained armed forces in the world.

The majority of Israelis are drafted into the military at the age of eighteen. Men serve three years and women serve two years. Following compulsory service, Israeli men join the reserve forces and do several weeks of reserve duty every year until their forties. Most women are exempt from reserve duty. Israeli Arabs and those engaged in full-time religious studies are exempt from military service, although the exemption of yeshiva students has been a source of contention in Israeli society for many years. An alternative for those who receive exemptions on various grounds is *Sherut Leumi*, or national service, which involves a program of service in hospitals, schools and other social welfare frameworks. As a result of its conscription program, the IDF maintains approximately 168,000 active troops and an additional 408,000 reservists.

The nation's military relies heavily on high-tech weapons systems designed and manufactured in Israel as well as some foreign imports. The United States is a particularly notable foreign contributor; they are expected to provide the country with \$30 billion in military aid between 2008 and 2017. The Israeli- and U.S.-designed Arrow missile is one of the world's only operational anti-ballistic missile systems. Since the Yom Kippur War, Israel has developed a network of reconnaissance satellites. The success of the *Ofeq* program has made Israel one of seven countries capable of launching such satellites. The country has also developed its own main battle tank, the Merkava. Since its establishment, Israel has had to spend a significant portion of its gross domestic product on defense. In 1984, for example, the country spent 24% of its GDP on defense. Today, that figure has dropped to 7.3%.

Israel has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and maintains a policy of deliberate ambiguity toward its nuclear capabilities, though it is widely regarded as possessing nuclear weapons. After the Gulf War in 1991, when Israel was attacked by Iraqi Scud missiles, a law was passed requiring all apartments and homes in Israel to have a *mamad*, a reinforced security room impermeable to chemical and biological substances.

## Economy



Arrow missile test launch

Israel is considered one of the most advanced countries in the Middle East in economic and industrial development. The country has been ranked highest in the region on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index as well as in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report. It has the second-largest number of startup companies in the world (after the United States) and the largest number of NASDAQ-listed companies outside North America. In 2007, Israel had the 44rd-highest gross domestic product and 22th-highest gross domestic product per capita (at purchasing power parity) at US\$232.7 billion and US\$33,299, respectively. In 2007, Israel was invited to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which promotes cooperation between countries that adhere to democratic principles and operate free-market economies.



A main business district in Ramat Gan outside Tel Aviv, where the diamond stock exchange is located

Despite limited natural resources, intensive development of the agricultural and industrial sectors over the past decades has made Israel largely self-sufficient in food production, apart from grains and beef. Other major imports to Israel, totaling US\$47.8 billion in 2006, include fossil fuels, raw materials, and military equipment. Leading exports include fruits, vegetables, pharmaceuticals, software, chemicals, military technology, and diamonds; in 2006, Israeli exports reached US\$42.86 billion.

Israel is a global leader in water conservation and geothermal energy, and its development of cutting-edge technologies in software, communications and the life sciences have evoked comparisons with Silicon Valley. Intel and Microsoft built their first overseas research and development centers in Israel, and other high-tech multi-national corporations, such as IBM, Cisco Systems, and Motorola, have opened facilities in the country. In July 2007, U.S. billionaire Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway bought an Israeli company Iscar, its first non-U.S. acquisition, for \$4 billion. Since the 1970's, Israel has received economic aid from the United States, whose loans account for the bulk of Israel's external debt, although that aid is expected to end in 2008.

Tourism, especially religious tourism, is another important industry in Israel, with the country's temperate climate, beaches, archaeological and historical sites, and unique geography also drawing tourists. Israel's security problems have taken their toll on the industry, but the number of incoming tourists is on the rebound.

## Science and education

Israel has the highest school life expectancy in the Greater Middle East and Southwest Asia, and is tied with Japan for second-highest school life expectancy on the Asian continent (after South Korea). Israel similarly has the highest literacy rate in the Middle East, according to the United Nations. The State Education Law, passed in 1953, established five types of schools: state secular, state religious, ultra orthodox, communal settlement schools, and Arab schools. The public secular is the largest school group, and is attended by the majority of Jewish and non-Arab pupils in Israel. Most Arabs send their children to schools where Arabic is the language of instruction.

Image:Weizmann Institute.jpg  
The particle accelerator at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot

Education is compulsory in Israel for children between the ages of three and eighteen. Schooling is divided into three tiers – primary school (grades 1–6), middle school (grades 7–9), and high school (grades 10–12) – culminating with *Bagrut* matriculation exams. Proficiency in core subjects such as mathematics, Bible, Hebrew language, Hebrew and general literature, English, history, and civics is necessary to receive a Bagrut certificate. In Arab, Christian and Druze schools, the exam on Biblical studies is replaced by an exam in Islam, Christianity or Druze heritage. In 2003, over half of all Israeli twelfth

graders earned a matriculation certificate.

Israel's eight public universities are subsidized by the state. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel's oldest university, houses the Jewish National and University Library, the world's largest repository of books on Jewish subjects. In 2006, the Hebrew University was ranked 60th and 119th in two surveys of the world's top universities. Other major universities in the country include the Technion, the Weizmann Institute of Science, Tel Aviv University, Bar-Ilan University, the University of Haifa, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Israel ranks third in the world in the number of citizens who hold university degrees (20 percent of the population). During the 1990s, an influx of a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union (forty percent of whom were university graduates) helped boost Israel's high-tech sector. Israel has produced four Nobel Prize-winning scientists and publishes among the most scientific papers per capita of any country in the world. In 2003, Ilan Ramon became Israel's first astronaut, serving as payload specialist of STS-107, the fatal mission of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*.

## Demographics

Israel's population, as of 2007, is 7.22 million.

Of those, over 260,000 Israeli citizens lived in the West Bank settlements in Israeli cities such as Ma'ale Adumim and Ariel, and communities that predated the establishment of the State but were re-established after the Six-Day War, such as Hebron and Gush Etzion. 18,000 settlers Jews living in the Golan Heights. In 2005, there were 180,000 Jews living in East Jerusalem. The total number of Jewish settlers is over 470,000 (6.5 % of the Israeli population). Approximately 7,800 Israelis lived in settlements in the Gaza Strip until they were evacuated by the government as part of its 2005 disengagement plan.

Israel's two official languages are Hebrew and Arabic. Hebrew is the primary language of the state and spoken by the majority of the population. Arabic is spoken by the Arab minority and Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arab lands. Most Israelis can communicate reasonably well in English, as many television programs are in English and many schools begin to teach English in the early grades. As a country of immigrants, dozens of languages can be heard on the streets of Israel. A large influx of people from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia have made Russian and Amharic widely spoken in Israel. Between 1990 and 1994, the immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union increased Israel's population by twelve percent.

## Religion

Israel was established as a homeland for the Jewish people and is often referred to as the Jewish state. The country's Law of Return grants all Jews and those of Jewish lineage the right to Israeli citizenship. Just over three quarters, or 76.1%, of the population are Jews from a diversity of Jewish backgrounds. Approximately sixty-eight percent of Israeli Jews are Israeli-born, twenty-two percent are immigrants from Europe and the Americas, and ten percent are immigrants from Asia and Africa (including the Arab world). The religious affiliation of Israeli Jews varies widely: eight percent define themselves as "Haredi Jews" and twenty percent consider themselves "secular Jews". The majority of Israeli Jews, fifty-five percent, say they are "traditional." The remaining seventeen percent define themselves as Orthodox Jews.



Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa

Making up 16.2% of the population, Muslims constitute Israel's largest religious minority. Israeli Arabs, who comprise 19.8% of the population, contribute significantly to that figure as over four fifths (82.6%) of them are Muslim. Of the remaining Israeli Arabs, 8.8% are Christian and 8.4% are Druze. Members of many other religious groups, including Buddhists and Hindus, maintain a presence in Israel, albeit in small numbers.

The city of Jerusalem enjoys a special place in the hearts of Jews, Muslims, and Christians as the home of sites that are pivotal to their religious beliefs, such as the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Other landmarks of religious importance are located in the West Bank, among them the birthplace of Jesus and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith and the Shrine of the Báb are located at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa and the leader of the faith is buried in Acre. Apart from maintenance staff, there is no Bahá'í community in Israel, although it is a destination for pilgrimages.

## Culture

Israel's diverse culture stems from the diversity of the population: Jews from around the world have brought their cultural and religious traditions with them, creating a melting pot of Jewish customs and beliefs. Israel is the only country in the world where life revolves around the Hebrew calendar. Work and school holidays are determined by the Jewish holidays, and the official day of rest is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Israel's large Arab minority has left its imprint on Israeli culture in such spheres as architecture, music, and cuisine.

Israeli literature is primarily poetry and prose written in Hebrew, as part of the renaissance of Hebrew as a spoken language since the mid-19th century, although a small body of literature is published in other languages, such as Arabic and English. By law, two copies of all printed matter published in Israel must be deposited in the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 2001, the law was amended to include audio and video recordings, and other non-print media. In 2006, 85 percent of the 8,000 books transferred to the library were in Hebrew. Hebrew Book Week is held each June and features book fairs, public readings, and appearances by Israeli authors around the country. During the week, Israel's top literary award, the Sapir Prize, is presented. In 1966, Shmuel Yosef Agnon shared the Nobel Prize in Literature with German Jewish author Nelly Sachs.

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The Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem



Hebrew Book Week 2005 in Jerusalem



Habima National Theatre in Tel Aviv

Israeli music contains musical influences from all over the world; Yemenite music, Hasidic melodies, Arabic music, Greek music, jazz, and pop rock are all part of the music scene. The nation's canonical folk songs, known as "Songs of the Land of Israel," deal with the experiences of the pioneers in building the Jewish homeland. Among Israel's world-renowned orchestras is the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, which has been in operation for over seventy years and today performs more than two hundred concerts each year. Israel has also produced many musicians of note, some achieving international stardom. Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman are among the internationally-acclaimed musicians born in Israel. Israel has participated in the Eurovision Song Contest nearly every year since 1973, winning the competition three times and hosting it twice. Eilat has hosted its own international music festival, the Red Sea Jazz Festival, every summer since 1987. Continuing the strong theatrical traditions of the Yiddish theatre in Eastern Europe, Israel maintains a vibrant theatre scene. Founded in 1918,

Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv is Israel's oldest repertory theater company and national theatre.

The Israel Museum in Jerusalem is one of Israel's most important cultural institutions and houses the Dead Sea Scrolls, along with an extensive collection of Judaica and European art. Israel's national Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, houses the world's largest archive of Holocaust-related information. On the campus of Tel Aviv University is Beth Hatefutsoth (the Diaspora Museum), an interactive museum devoted to the history of Jewish communities around the world. Apart from the major museums in large cities, there are also small but high-quality artspaces in many towns and *kibbutzim*.

## Sports

Sports and physical fitness have not always been paramount in Jewish culture. Athletic prowess, which was prized by the Ancient Greeks, was looked down upon as an unwelcome intrusion of Hellenistic values. Maimonides, however, who was both a rabbi and a physician, emphasized the importance of physical activity and keeping the body in shape. This approach received a boost in the 19th century from the physical culture campaign of Max Nordau, and in the early 20th century when the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Abraham Isaac Kook, declared that "the body serves the soul, and only a healthy body can ensure a healthy soul".

The Maccabiah Games, an Olympic-style event for Jewish athletes, was inaugurated in the 1930s, and has been held every four years since then. The most popular spectator sports in Israel today are football (soccer) and basketball. Ligat ha'Al is the country's premier soccer league, and Ligat Winner is the premier basketball league. Maccabi Tel Aviv B.C. has won the European championship in basketball five times. Beersheba has become a national chess centre and home to many chess champions from the former Soviet Union. The city hosted the World Team Chess Championship in 2005, and chess is taught in the city's kindergartens. Two years later, in 2007, an Israeli tied for second place in the World Chess Championship. To date, Israel has won six Olympic medals, including a gold medal in windsurfing at the 2004 Summer Olympics.



Fans of Maccabi Tel Aviv F.C. before a match

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# Jordan

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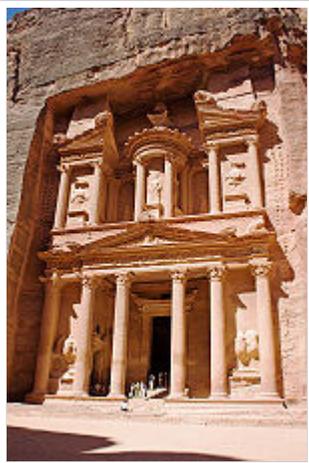
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**Jordan** (Arabic: الأردنّ, transliterated as *al-Urdunn*), officially the **Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan** (المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية), is a country in the Arab World in Southwest Asia, bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the north-east, Israel and the West Bank to the west, and Saudi Arabia to the east and south. It shares the coastlines of the Dead Sea, and the Gulf of Aqaba with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with representative government. The reigning monarch is the head of state, the chief executive and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The king exercises his executive authority through the prime ministers and the Council of Ministers, or cabinet. The cabinet, meanwhile, is responsible before the elected House of Deputies which, along with the House of Notables (Senate), constitutes the legislative branch of the government. The judicial branch is an independent branch of the government.

## History

<p>المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية  <b>Al-Mamlakah al-Urdunniyyah</b>  <b>al-Hāšimiyah</b>  <i>The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan</i></p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Anthem:</b> عاش الملك  <i>The Royal Anthem of Jordan</i>          ("As-salam al-malaki al-urdoni")<sup>1</sup>  <i>Long live the King</i></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Amman



The ancient city of Petra.

With the break-up of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the League of Nations created the French Mandate of Syria and British Mandate Palestine. Approximately 90% of the British Mandate of Palestine was east of the Jordan river and was known as " Transjordan". In 1921 , the British gave semi-autonomous control of Transjordan to the future King Abdullah I of Jordan, of the Hashemite family. Abdullah I continued to rule until a Palestinian Arab assassinated him in 1951 as he was departing from the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. At first he ruled "Transjordan", under British supervision until after World War II. In 1946, the British requested that the United Nations approve an end to British Mandate rule in Transjordan. Following this approval, the Jordanian Parliament proclaimed King Abdullah as the first ruler of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In 1950, Jordan annexed the West Bank, which had been under its control since the armistice that followed the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The annexation was recognized only by the United Kingdom (*de facto* in the case of East Jerusalem).

<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Jordanian
<b>Government</b>	Constitutional monarchy
- King	Abdullah
- Prime Minister	Nader al-Dahabi
<b>Independence</b>	
- End of British League of Nations mandate	25 May 1946
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	89,342 km <sup>2</sup> ( 112th) 45,495 sq mi
- Water (%)	0.8
<b>Population</b>	
- July 2007 estimate	6,053,193 ( 110th)
- 2004 census	5,100,000
- Density	64/km <sup>2</sup> ( 131st) 166/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2005 estimate
- Total	\$27.96 billion ( 97th)
- Per capita	\$4,900 ( 103rd)
<b>Gini (2002–03)</b>	38.8 (medium)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	▲ 0.773 (medium) ( 86th)
<b>Currency</b>	Jordanian dinar ( ج.د.)
<b>Time zone</b>	UTC+2 ( UTC+2)
- Summer ( DST)	UTC+3 ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.jo

In 1965, there was an exchange of land between Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Jordan gave up a relatively large area of inland desert in return for a small piece of sea-shore near Aqaba.

Jordan signed a mutual defense pact in May 1967 with Egypt, and it participated in the June 1967 war against Israel along with Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. During the war, Jordan lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Israel (the western sector having been under Israeli control). In 1988, Jordan renounced all claims to the West Bank but retained an administrative role pending a final settlement, and its 1994 treaty with Israel allowed for a continuing Jordanian role in Muslim and Christian holy places in Jerusalem.

The 1967 war led to a dramatic increase in the number of Palestinians, especially from the West Bank, living in Jordan. Its Palestinian refugee population — 700,000 in 1966 — grew by another 300,000 from the West Bank. The period following the 1967 war saw an upsurge in the power and importance of Palestinian resistance elements (*fedayeen*) in Jordan. King Hussein's armed forces targeted the *fedayeen*, and open fighting erupted in June 1970. The battle in which Palestinian fighters from various Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) groups were expelled from Jordan is commonly known as Black September.

The heaviest fighting occurred in northern Jordan and Amman. The Syrian army battled the Jordanian army in Amman and other urban areas. The global media portrayed King Hussein as a corrupt King slaughtering the Palestinian refugees. Other Arab governments attempted to work out a peaceful solution. In the ensuing heavy fighting, a Syrian tank force invaded northern Jordan to support the *fedayeen* but subsequently retreated. King Hussein asked "the United States and Great Britain to intervene in the war in Jordan, asking the United States, in fact, to attack Syria, and some transcripts of diplomatic communiques show that Hussein requested Israeli intervention against Syria. " Israel, which found the move undesirable threatened that it would invade Jordan if Syria intervened, so performed mock air strikes on the Syrian column at the Americans' request. Possibly alarmed at the prospect of an armed conflict with Israel, Syria's president at the time, Nureddin Atassi, ordered a hasty retreat. By September 22, Arab foreign ministers meeting at Cairo had arranged a cease-fire beginning the following day. Sporadic violence continued, however, until Jordanian forces, led by Habis Al-Majali, with the help of Iraqi forces (who had bases in Jordan after the war of 1967), won a decisive victory over the *fedayeen* on July 1971, expelling them from the country.

At the Rabat summit conference in 1974, Jordan agreed, along with the rest of the Arab League, that the PLO was the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", thereby relinquishing to that organization its role as representative of the West Bank.

Fighting occurred along the 1967 Jordan River cease-fire line during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Jordan sent a brigade to Syria to fight Israeli units on Syrian territory but did not engage Israeli forces from Jordanian territory. Jordan did not participate in the Gulf War of 1990–91. In 1991, Jordan agreed, along with Syria, Lebanon, and Palestinian fedayeen representatives, to participate in direct peace negotiations with Israel at the Madrid Conference, sponsored by the U.S. and Russia. It negotiated an end to hostilities with Israel and signed a declaration to that effect on July 25, 1994 (see Washington Declaration). As a result, an Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty was concluded on October 26, 1994. Following the outbreak of Israel-Palestinian Authority fighting in September 2000, the Jordanian government offered its good offices to both parties.

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<b>Calling code</b>	+962
1 Also serves as the Royal anthem.	



King Abdullah I (ruled: 1921-1951).



King Hussein (ruled: 1952-1999)

Jordan has since sought to remain at peace with all of its neighbors.

On November 9, 2005 Jordan experienced three simultaneous bombings at hotels in Amman. At least 57 people died and 115 were wounded. " Al-Qaeda in Iraq", a group led by terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a native Jordanian, claimed responsibility.

## Geography

Jordan is a Southwest Asian country, bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the northeast, Saudi Arabia to the east and south and Israel and the West Bank to the west. All these border lines add up to 1,619 km (1,006 mi). The Gulf of Aqaba and the Dead Sea also touch the country, and thus Jordan has a coastline of 26 km (16 mi).

Jordan consists of arid forest plateau in the east irrigated by oasis and seasonal water streams, with highland area in the west of arble land and Mediterranean evergreen forestry. The Great Rift Valley of the Jordan River separates Jordan, the west bank and Israel. The highest point in the country is Jabal Ram, it is 1,734 m (5,689 ft) above sea level, while the lowest is the Dead Sea -420 m (-1,378 ft). Jordan is part of a region considered to be "the cradle of civilization", the Levant region of the Fertile Crescent.

Major cities include the capital Amman in the northwest, Irbid and Az Zarqa, both in the north. Karak and Aqaba in the south.

The climate in Jordan is dry in summer with average temperature in the mid-30°C (mid-90°F) and relatively cold in winter averaging around the 0 °C (32 °F). The western part of the country receives greater precipitation during the winter season from November to March and snowfall in Amman (756 m (2,480 ft) ~ 980 m (3,215 ft) above sea-level) and Western Heights of 500 m (1,640 ft). Excluding the rift valley the rest of the country is entirely above 300 m (984 ft)(SL).



Map of Jordan

## Administrative Divisions

Administratively, Jordan is divided into 12 provinces called governorates, each headed by a governor appointed by the king. They are the sole authorities for all government departments and development projects in their respective areas. The Governorates are:

Province	Population (2008 est.)	Capital city	Population (Metropolitan, 2008 est)
Ajlun Governorate	118,496	Ajlun	8,161
Amman Governorate	1,939,405	Amman	1,135,733
Aqaba Governorate	107,115	Aqaba	95,408

Balqa Governorate	349,580	Assalt	87,778
Irbid Governorate	950,700	Irbid	650,000
Jerash Governorate	156,680	Jerash	39,540
Kerak Governorate	214,225	Kerak	22,580
Ma'an Governorate	103,920	Ma'an	30,050
Madaba Governorate	135,890	Madaba	83,180
Mafraq Governorate	245,670	Mafraq	56,340
Tafilah Governorate	81,000	Tafilah	
Zarqa Governorate	838,250	Zarqa	447,880

The Governorates are subdivided into approximately fifty-two *nahias*.

## Demographics

The Jordan National Census for the year 2004, which was released on October 1st of the same year, gave the following results:

1. As of October 1st 2004, Jordan had a population of 5,100,981. The census estimated that there are another 190,000 who were not counted (for being out of the country at the time the census was taken, or did not turn in their forms).
2. The census showed that the national growth rate was 2.5% (at maximum) compared to 3.3% of the 1994 census.
3. The census of 2004 also shows that males made up 51.5% of Jordan's population (2,628,717). Females: 2,472,264 (48.5%).
4. Jordanian citizens made up 93% of the population (4,750,463), while non Jordanins made up 7% (349,933). However, it is estimated that most of those who did not turn in their forms were immigrants from neighboring countries, or non Arabic-speaking foreigners.
5. There were 946,000 families in Jordan in 2004, with an average of 5.3 persons/family (compared to 6 persons/family for the census of 1994). The next census is scheduled to take place in 2014.

During the years 2004-2007, Jordan saw a rapid increase in its population due to the heavy immigration of Iraqis, an independent census carried in 2007, estimated that there are 700,000 Iraqis residing in Jordan. Most estimates put the population of Jordan slightly over 6,000,000 as of the year 2007.

95% of Jordan's population are Arabs, the remaining non-Arabs of the population are mainly Circassians, Chechens, Armenians ( 13th largest in the world), and Kurds, but have integrated into the Jordanian and Arab cultures in the country. Many Native Jordanians are also of European origin assimilated into the Arabophone genepool that has resulted from the vast history of civilisations on its land.

The number of Lebanese permanently settling in Jordan since the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict has not been established, and is estimated to be very little. According to Labour Ministry figures, the number of guest workers in the country now stands just over 300,000, most are Egyptians who makeup 227,000 of the foreign labor, and the remaining 36,150 workers are mostly from Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka and India. Since the Iraq War many Christians ( Assyrians and Chaldeans) from Iraq have settled permanently or temporarily in Jordan.

Jordanian Christians permanently residing in Jordan form approximately 6% of the population and are allocated 10% of the seats in parliament (The Department of Statistics released no information about the religion distribution from the census of 2004). Most Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox church (called "Ruum Urthudux" in Arabic). The rest are Roman Catholics (called "Lateen"), Eastern Catholics who are Melkites (called "Ruum Katoleek" to distinguish them from "Western Catholics"), and various Protestant communities including Baptists. Christians in Jordan are of many nationalities, as evinced, for example, by the Catholic mass being celebrated in Arabic, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Tagalog and Sinhala, as well as in Iraqi dialects of Arabic. However, Jordanian Christians are indigenous Arabs that share the Greater culture of Jordan and the Broader East Mediterranean Levantine Arab Identity.

Other Jordanians belonging to religious minorities include adherents to the Druze and Bahá'í Faith, which fall administratively under Islamic denomination. The Druze are mainly located in the Eastern Oasis Town of Azraq and the city of Zarka, while the Village of Adassiyeh bordering The Jordan Valley is home to Jordan's Bahá'í community.

The official language is Arabic, but English is used widely in commerce and government and among educated people. Arabic and English are obligatory learning at public and private schools. French is taught at some public and private schools but is not obligatory. However, a vibrant Francophone community has emerged in modern Jordan. Radio Jordan offers radio services in Arabic, English and French.

A portion of the people are registered as Palestinian refugees and displaced persons reside in Jordan, most as citizens. Since 2003 many Iraqis fleeing the Iraq War have settled in Jordan; latest estimates indicate between 700,000 and 1.7 million Iraqis living in Jordan; mainly in Amman, the capital.

## Politics



King Abdullah II, Jordanian Head of State.

## Constitution

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy based on the constitution promulgated on January 8, 1952. Executive authority is vested in the king and his council of ministers. The king signs and executes all laws. His veto power may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the National Assembly. He appoints and may dismiss all judges by decree, approves amendments to the constitution, declares war, and commands the armed forces. Cabinet decisions, court judgments, and the national currency are issued in his name. The council of ministers, led by a prime minister, is appointed by the king, who may dismiss other cabinet members at the prime minister's request. The cabinet is responsible to the Chamber of Deputies on matters of general policy and can be forced to resign by a two-thirds vote of "no confidence" by that body.

The constitution provides for three categories of courts: civil, religious, and special. Administratively, Jordan is divided into twelve governorates, each headed by a governor appointed by the king. They are the sole authorities for all government departments and development projects in their respective areas.

The Royal Armed Forces and General Intelligence Department of Jordan are under the control of the king.

## Legal system and legislation

Jordan's legal system is based on Islamic law and French codes. Judicial review of legislative acts occurs in a special High Tribunal. It has not accepted compulsory International Court of Justice jurisdiction.

Article 97 of Jordan's constitution guarantees the independence of the judicial branch, clearly stating that judges are 'subject to no authority but that of the law.' While the king must approve the appointment and dismissal of judges, in practice these are supervised by the Higher Judicial Council.

The Jordanian legal system draws upon civil traditions as well as Islamic law and custom. Article 99 of the Constitution divides the courts into three categories: civil, religious and special. The civil courts deal with civil and criminal matters in accordance with the law, and they have jurisdiction over all persons in all matters, civil and criminal, including cases brought against the government. The civil courts include Magistrate Courts, Courts of First Instance, Courts of Appeal, High Administrative Courts and the Supreme Court.

The religious courts include Sharia (Islamic law) courts and the tribunals of other religious communities. Religious courts deal only with matters involving personal law such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. Sharia courts also have jurisdiction over matters regarding Islamic waqfs (a religious endowment such as an area of land). In cases involving parties of different religions regular courts have jurisdiction.

Specialized courts involve various bodies. One such body is the Supreme Council which will interpret the Constitution if requested by either the National Assembly or the prime minister, according to Dew et al.: "...such courts are usually created in areas that the legislator deems should be governed by specialized courts with more experience and knowledge in specific matters than other regular courts." Other examples of special courts include the Court of Income Tax and the Highest Court of Felonies.

Prior to 2002 Jordan's legal system only allowed men to file for divorce, however, during this year the first Jordanian woman successfully filed for divorce; this was made possible from a proposal by a royal human rights commission which had been established by King Abdullah who had vowed to improve the status of women in Jordan.

Despite being traditionally dominated by men the number of women involved as lawyers in the Jordan legal system has been increasing. As of mid-2006 Jordan had 1,284 female lawyers, out of a total number of 6,915, and 35 female judges from a total of 630.

## **Kings of Jordan and political events**

King Abdullah I ruled Jordan after independence from Britain. After the assassination of King Abdullah I in 1951, his son King Talal ruled briefly. King Talal's major accomplishment was the Jordanian constitution. King Talal was removed from the throne in 1952 due to mental illness. At that time his son, Hussein, was too young to rule, and hence a committee ruled over Jordan.

After Hussein reached 18, he ruled Jordan as king from 1953 to 1999, surviving a number of challenges to his rule, drawing on the loyalty of his military, and serving as a symbol of unity and stability for both the Bedouin-related and Palestinian communities in Jordan. King Hussein ended martial law in 1991 and legalized political parties in 1992. In 1989 and 1993, Jordan held free and fair parliamentary elections. Controversial changes in the election law led Islamist parties to boycott the 1997 elections.

King Abdullah II succeeded his father Hussein following the latter's death in February 1999. Abdullah moved quickly to reaffirm Jordan's peace treaty with Israel and its relations with the United States. Abdullah, during the first year in power, refocused the government's agenda on economic reform.

Jordan's continuing structural economic difficulties, burgeoning population, and more open political environment led to the emergence of a variety of political parties. Moving toward greater independence, Jordan's parliament has investigated corruption charges against several regime figures and has become the major forum in which differing political views, including those of political Islamists, are expressed. While King Abdullah remains the ultimate authority in Jordan, the parliament plays an important role.

## **Parliament of Jordan**

The 1952 Constitution provided for the establishment of the bicameral Jordanian National Assembly ('Majlis al-Umma'). The Parliament consists of two Chambers: The Chamber of Deputies ('Majlis al-Nuwaab') and the Senate ('Majlis al-Aayan'; literally, 'Assembly of Notables'). The Senate has 55 Senators, all of whom are directly appointed by the King, whilst the Chamber of Deputies/House of Representatives has 80 elected members representing 12 constituencies. Of the 80 members of the Lower Chamber, 71 must be Muslim and 9 Christians, with six seats held back specifically for women. The Constitution ensures that the Senate cannot be more than half the size of the Chamber of Deputies.

## **Legislative Procedure**

Both Chambers initiate debates and vote on legislation. Proposals are referred by the Prime Minister to the Chamber of Deputies where they are either accepted, amended, or rejected. Every proposal is referred to a committee of the Lower Chamber for consideration. If it is approved, then it is referred to the government to draft in the form of a bill and submit it to the Chamber of Deputies. If approved by this Chamber, it is passed onto the Senate for debate and a vote. If the Senate gives its approval, then the King can either grant consent or refuse. In this case the bill is passed back to the Chamber of Deputies where the review and voting process is repeated. If both Chambers pass the bill by a two-thirds majority, it becomes an Act of Parliament overriding the King's veto. Article 95 of the Constitution empowers both Chambers to submit legislation to the government in the form of a draft law.

The Constitution does not provide a strong system of checks and balances within which the Jordanian Parliament can assert its role in relationship to the Monarch. During the suspension of Parliament between 2001 and 2003, the scope of King Abdullah II's power was demonstrated with the passing of 110 temporary laws. Two of such laws dealt with election law and were seen to reduce the power of Parliament.

## **Term**

Senators have terms of four years and are appointed by the King and can be reappointed. Prospective Senators must be at least forty years old and have held senior positions in either the government or military. Appointed Senators have included former Prime Ministers and Members of the Chamber of Deputies. Deputies are elected to also serve a four year term. Candidates must be older than thirty-five, cannot have blood ties to the King, and must not have any financial interests in government contracts.

## **Political Parties**

Despite the reforms of 1989, multi-party politics has yet to develop in Jordan. The only political party that plays a role in the legislature is the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Political parties can be seen to represent four sections: Islamists, leftists, Arab nationalists and conservative. There are over 30 other political parties in Jordan including the Jordanian Arab Democratic Party, Jordanian Socialist Party, Muslim Centre Party, but these have little impact on the political process.

## **Economy**

Jordan is a small country with limited natural resources. The country is currently exploring ways to expand its limited water supply and use its existing water resources more efficiently, including through regional cooperation. Jordan also depends on external sources for the majority of its energy requirements. During the 1990s, its crude petroleum needs were met through imports from Iraq and neighboring countries. Since early 2003, oil has been provided by some Gulf Cooperation Council member countries. In addition, the Arab Gas Pipeline from Egypt to the southern port city of Aqaba was completed in 2003. The government plans to extend this pipeline north to the Amman area and beyond. Since 2000, exports of light manufactured products, principally textiles and garments manufactured in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) that enter the United States tariff and quota free, have been driving economic growth. Jordan exported €5.6 million (\$6.9 million) in goods to the U.S. in 1997, when two-way trade was €321 million (\$395 million); it exported €538 million (\$661 million) in 2002 with two-way trade at €855 million (\$1.05 billion). Similar growth in exports to the United States under the bilateral US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement that went into effect in December 2001, to the European Union under the bilateral Association Agreement, and to countries in the region, holds considerable promise for diversifying Jordan's economy away from its traditional reliance on exports of phosphates and potash, overseas remittances, and foreign aid. The government has emphasized the information technology (IT) and tourism sectors as other promising growth sectors. The low tax and low regulation Aqaba Special Economic Zone ( ASEZA) is considered a model of a government-provided framework for private sector-led economic growth.



The Four Seasons hotel in Amman, Jordan's capital.

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States that went into effect in December 2001 will phase out duties on nearly all goods and services by 2010. The agreement also provides for more open markets in communications, construction, finance, health, transportation, and services, as well as strict application of international standards for the protection of intellectual property. In 1996, Jordan and the United States signed a civil aviation agreement that provides for open skies between the two countries, and a U.S.-Jordan treaty for the protection and encouragement of bilateral investment entered into force in 2003. Jordan has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 2000.

Textile and clothing exports from Jordan to the United States shot up 2,000 percent from 2000 to 2005, following introduction of the FTA. According to the National Labor Committee, a U.S.-based NGO, Jordan has experienced sharp increases in sweatshop conditions in its export-oriented manufacturing sector.

Jordan is classified by the World Bank as a "lower middle income country." The per-capita GDP was approximately \$1,817 (€1,479) for 2003 and 14.5% of the economically active population, on average, was unemployed in 2003. The GDP per capita in 2005 is at \$USD 4,200. Education and literacy rates and measures of social well-being are relatively high compared to other countries with similar incomes. Jordan's population growth rate is high, but has declined in recent years, to approximately 2.8% currently. One of the most important factors in the government's efforts to improve the well-being of its citizens is the macroeconomic stability that has been achieved since the 1990s. However, unemployment rates remain high, with the official figure standing at 12.5%, and the unofficial around 30%. Rates of price inflation are low, at 2.3% in 2003, and the currency has been stable with an exchange rate fixed to the U.S. dollar since 1995.



Spring in northern Jordan.

While pursuing economic reform and increased trade, Jordan's economy will continue to be vulnerable to external shocks and regional unrest. Without calm in the region, economic growth seems destined to stay below potential. On the positive side, however, there is huge potential in the solar energy falling on Jordan's deserts, not only for the generation of pollution-free electricity but also for such spin-offs as desalination of sea water (see Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy Cooperation (TREC)).



The treasury, as seen from al-Siq.



An Arabian Desert castle in Al Azrak.

## Tourism

Tourism is a very important sector of the Jordanian economy, contributing between 10 percent and 12 percent to the country's Gross National Product in 2006. In addition to the country's political stability, the geography offered makes Jordan an attractive tourism destination. Jordan's major tourist activities include numerous ancient places, its unique desert castles and unspoiled natural locations to its cultural and religious sites. The best known attractions include:

- Ancient sightseeing
  - Petra in Ma'an, the home of the Nabateans, is a complete city carved in a mountain. The huge rocks are colorful, mostly pink, and the entrance to the ancient city is through a 1.25 km narrow gorge in the mountain - called the Siq. In the city are various structures, all (except 2) are carved into rock, including al Khazneh - known as the Treasury - which has been designated as one of the " New Seven Wonders of the World" by the for-profit New Open World Corporation. Other major sites of interest in Petra include the Monastery, the Roman theatre, the Royal Tombs, the High Place of Sacrifice. Petra was rediscovered for the western world by Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt in 1812.
  - Umm Qais, a town located on the site of the ruined Hellenistic-Roman city of Gadara.
  - Ajlun, famous for the Al-Rabad Castle.
  - Jerash, famous for its ancient Roman architecture, including the colonnaded streets, arches, Roman theatres, and the Oval Plaza.
  - Amman contains the Roman theatre, in addition to several museums, where one may find remains of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
  - Al Karak contains an important castle from the times of Salah al-Din, known as Al-Karak Castle.
- Religion-related
  - Madaba, well known for its mosaics, as well as important religious sites such as:
    - The Madaba Map.
    - The River Jordan, which is the river where Jesus of Nazareth was baptised, by John the Baptist.
    - Mount Nebo, where Moses was said to have gone to get a view of the Promised Land before he died.
- Seaside
  - The Dead Sea - It is the lowest point on earth, 402 meters below sea level, and becomes 1 meter lower each year. It is located near River Jordan.
  - Aqaba is a town on the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba with numerous shopping centers, hotels and access to water sports.
- Other sites
  - Wadi Rum is a desert full of mountains and hills located south of Jordan. It is popular for its sights in addition to a variety of sports that are practiced there, such as rock-climbing. It is also known for its connection to Lawrence of Arabia.
  - Fuheis, a beautiful town about 20 minutes north-west of Amman.
  - Mahis with important religious sites, and wonderful landscape.
  - Al-Omvia's Palace, placed to the north east of Jordan, of Islamic design.



The Corinthian columns are a popular tourist attraction in Jerash.

## Influence of the Southwest Asian conflict

The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf War, and other conflicts in Southwest Asia have made huge impacts on the economy of Jordan. The fact that Jordan has peace with the surrounding countries, combined with its stability, has made it a preference for many Palestinians, Lebanese, and people from the Persian Gulf immigrants and refugees. Though this may have resulted in a more active economy, it has also damaged it by substantially decreasing the amount of resources each person is entitled to. Jordan has a law that states that any Palestinian may immigrate and obtain Jordanian citizenship, but must remit his/her Palestinian claim. Palestinians are not allowed to purchase land unless they give up their Palestinian citizenship. In November 2005, King Abdullah called for a "war on extremism" in the wake of three suicide bombings in Amman.

## Foreign relations

Jordan has consistently followed a pro-Western foreign policy and traditionally has had close relations with the United States and the United Kingdom. These relations were damaged by Jordan's neutrality and maintaining relations with Iraq during the first Gulf War. Jordan has a well earned reputation for usually following a pragmatic and non-confrontational foreign policy, leading to fair relations with its neighbours.

Following the Gulf war, Jordan largely restored its relations with Western countries through its participation in the Southwest Asia peace process and enforcement of UN sanctions against Iraq. Relations between Jordan and the Gulf countries improved substantially after King Hussein's death. Following the fall of the Iraqi regime, Jordan has played a pivotal role in supporting the restoration of stability and security to Iraq. The Government of Jordan signed a memorandum of understanding with the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq to facilitate the training of up to 30,000 Iraqi police cadets at a Jordanian facility.

Jordan signed a non-belligerency agreement with Israel (the Washington Declaration) in Washington, D.C., on 25 July 1994. King Hussein and Yitzhak Rabin negotiated this treaty. Jordan and Israel signed a historic peace treaty on 26 October 1994, witnessed by President Bill Clinton, accompanied by U.S. Secretary, Warren Christopher. The U.S. has participated with Jordan and Israel in trilateral development discussions in which key issues have been water-sharing and security; cooperation on Jordan Rift Valley development; infrastructure projects; and trade, finance, and banking issues. Jordan also participates in the multilateral peace talks. Jordan belongs to the UN and several of its specialized and related agencies, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Jordan also is a member of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Nonaligned Movement (NAM), and Arab League.



King Abdullah II on a visit to The Pentagon.

## Education

Jordan has given great attention to education in particular. Its educational system is of international standards and its secondary education program is accepted

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in world-class universities. It is ranked 84<sup>th</sup> in the world according to literacy rate.

## School education

School education in Jordan could be categorized into two sections:

- **Secondary education**, which consists of two years of school study, for students who have completed the 10-year basic cycle. It comprises two major tracks:
  1. **Secondary education**, which can either be academic or vocational. At the end of the two-year period, students sit for the general secondary examination ( Tawjihi) in the appropriate branch and those who pass are awarded the Tawjihi (General Secondary Education Certificate). The academic stream qualifies students for university entrance, whereas the vocational or technical type qualifies for entrance to Community colleges or universities or the job market, provided they pass the two additional subjects.
  2. **Vocational secondary education**, which provides intensive vocational training and apprenticeship, and leads to the award of a Certificate (*not* the Tawjihi). This type of education is provided by the Vocational Training Corporation, under the control of the Ministry of Labour / Technical and Vocational Education and Training Higher Council.

## Foreign secondary education programs

After completing the 8 or 10 years of basic education, Jordanians are free to choose any foreign secondary education program instead of the Tawjihi examinations (8 for IGCSE, 10 for SAT and IB). Such programs are usually offered by private schools. These programs include:

- IGCSE
- SAT
- International Baccalaureate

Private schools in Jordan also used to offer GCSE examinations, but they have now been replaced by IGCSE examinations.

Upon graduation, the ministry of Higher Education, through a system similar to that of the UK tariff points, transforms the Grades/Marks of these foreign educational programs, into the same marks used in grading Tawjihi students. This system is controversial, both as to the conversion process and the number of places allocated to non-Tawjihi applicants.

Another source of trouble is the system used to transform exam results of foreign education programs into the Tawjihi scale, which is a percentage out of 100. Again, some see the system as fair and in fact over lenient with non-Tawjihi graduates, while others see it as unfair.

## Higher education

Access to higher education is open to holders of the General Secondary Education Certificate who can then apply to private community colleges, public community colleges or universities (public and private), the admission to public universities is very competitive. The credit-hour system, which entitles students to select courses according to a study plan, is implemented at universities. At present, there are eight public universities plus two newly-licensed ones, and thirteen private universities plus four newly-licensed ones. All post-secondary education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Ministry includes the Higher Education Council and the Accreditation Council.

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# Kuwait

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

The **State of Kuwait** (Arabic: دولة الكويت) is a sovereign emirate on the coast of the Persian Gulf, enclosed by Saudi Arabia to the south and Iraq to the north and west. The name is a diminutive of an Arabic word meaning "fortress built near water." It has a population of 3.1 million and an area of 17,818 km<sup>2</sup>. Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government and Kuwait City serves as its political and economic capital.

Kuwait has the world's fifth largest proven oil reserves and is the fourth richest country in the world per capita. Kuwait's oil fields were discovered and exploited in the 1930s and after it gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1961, the nation's oil industry saw unprecedented growth. Petroleum and petroleum products now account for nearly 95% of export revenues, and 80% of government income.

In 1990, Kuwait was invaded and annexed by neighboring Iraq. The seven month-long Iraqi occupation came to an end after a direct military intervention by United States-led forces. Nearly 700 Kuwaiti oil wells were set ablaze by the retreating Iraqi army resulting in a major environmental and economic catastrophe. Kuwait's infrastructure was badly damaged during the war and had to be rebuilt.

## History

The history of Kuwait goes back to the year 1612. Tribes from central Arabia settled in Kuwait under the suzerainty of the Banu Khaled in the 18th-century after experiencing a massive drought in their native land. These tribes came to be known as the *Utub of Qurain*. Qurain, as Kuwait was known before, became a major centre for spice trading between India and Europe. By late 18th-century, most of the local people made a living selling pearls. Because of internal conflicts and rivalry with the other rivaling dynasties of the Arabian Peninsula, Benu Khaled's influence over Kuwait gradually waned and the Utub gained greater independence. In 1756, the Utub elected Sabah I bin Jaber as the first emir of Kuwait. The current ruling family of Kuwait, al-Sabah, are descendants of Sabah I.

After the rule by the Al Sabah Kuwait progressively became a centre of trade and commerce. Serving as a hub of trade between the Indian sub-continent, Asia, the african horn and the inner arabian peninsula (

<p>دولة الكويت <i>Dawlat al-Kuwayt</i> State of Kuwait</p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>Al-Nasheed Al-Watani</i></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b>	Kuwait City
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Kuwaiti
<b>Government</b>	Constitutional hereditary emirate
- Emir	Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Nejd), Iraq and the Levant. Up until the beginning of the 20th century, and immediately before the advent of oil, Kuwait had the largest sea fleet in the gulf, including the fleets of Iran and Oman. Trade consisted mainly of pearls, wood, spices, dates and horses.

As the influence of the Ottoman Empire increased in the region, Kuwait was assigned the status of a *caza* of the Ottomans. After the signing of the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1913, then emir of Kuwait, Mubarak Al-Sabah, was diplomatically recognized by both the Ottomans and British as the ruler of the autonomous *caza* of the city of Kuwait and the hinterlands. The 1922 Treaty of Uqair set Kuwait's border with Saudi Arabia and also established the Saudi-Kuwaiti neutral zone, an area of about 5,180 km<sup>2</sup> adjoining Kuwait's southern border. Oil was first discovered in Kuwait in the 1930s and the government became more proactive in establishing internationally recognized boundaries. After World War I, the Ottoman Empire was financially crippled and the invading British forces invalidated the Anglo-Ottoman Convention, declaring Kuwait to be an "independent sheikdom under British protectorate".

On June 19, 1961, Kuwait became fully independent following an exchange of notes between the United Kingdom and the then emir of Kuwait, Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah. The Gulf rupee, issued by the Reserve Bank of India, was replaced by the Kuwaiti dinar. The discovery of large oil fields, such as the Burgan field, triggered a large influx of foreign investments into Kuwait. The massive growth of the petroleum industry transformed Kuwait into one of the richest countries in the Arabian Peninsula and by 1952, the country became the largest exporter of oil in the Persian Gulf region. This massive growth attracted many foreign workers, especially from Egypt and India. Kuwait settled its boundary disputes with Saudi Arabia and agreed on sharing equally the neutral zone's petroleum reserves, onshore and offshore. After a brief stand-off over boundary issues, Iraq formally recognized Kuwait's independence and its borders in October 1963. During the 1970s, the Kuwaiti government nationalized the Kuwait Oil Company, ending its partnership with Gulf Oil and British Petroleum. In 1982, Kuwait experienced a major economic crisis after the Souk Al-Manakh stock market crash and decrease in oil price. However, the crisis was short-lived as Kuwait's oil production increased steadily to fill the gap caused by decrease in Iraq's and Iran's oil production levels following the events of the Iran-Iraq War. In 1983, a series of six bomb explosions took place in Kuwait killing five people. The attack was carried out by Shiite Dawa Party to retaliate Kuwait's financial support to Iraq during its war with Iran.

- Prime Minister	Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah
<b>Independence</b>	
- from the UK	June 19, 1961
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	17,818 km <sup>2</sup> ( 157th) 6,880 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	3,399,637 ( n/a)
- Density	131/km <sup>2</sup> ( 210th) 339/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2010 estimate
- Total	US\$230.1 billion (CIA) ( 56th)
- Per capita	US\$100,000 (CIA) ( 4th)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.891 (high) ( 33rd)
<b>Currency</b>	Kuwaiti dinar ( <small>KWDT</small> )
<b>Time zone</b>	AST ( UTC+7)
- Summer ( DST)	(yes) ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.kw
<b>Calling code</b>	+965



USAF aircraft ( F-16, F-15C and F-15E) fly over Kuwaiti oil fires, set by the retreating Iraqi army during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

Kuwait had heavily funded Iraq's eight year-long war with Iran. After the war ended, Kuwait declined an Iraqi request to forgive its US\$65 billion debt. An economic warfare between the two countries followed after Kuwait increased its oil production by 40 percent. Tensions between the two countries increased further after Iraq alleged that Kuwait was slant drilling oil from its share of the Rumaila field.. On 2 August, 1990 Iraqi forces invaded and annexed Kuwait. Saddam Hussein, then President of Iraq, deposed the emir of Kuwait, Jaber Al-Sabah, and installed Ali Hassan al-Majid as the new governor of Kuwait. After a series of failed diplomatic negotiations, the United States-led coalition of thirty-four nations fought the Persian Gulf War to remove the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The coalition successfully liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation on February 26, 1991. Kuwait paid the coalition forces US\$17 billion for their war efforts.

During their retreat, the Iraqi armed forces carried out a scorched earth policy by damaging 700 oil wells in Kuwait, of which approximately 600 were set on fire. It was estimated that by the time Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation, about 5 to 6 million barrels (950,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil was being burned in a single day because of these fires. Oil and soot accumulation had affected the entire Persian Gulf region and large oil lakes were created holding approximately 25 to 50 million barrels (7,900,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil and covering 5% of Kuwait's land area. In total, about 11 million barrels (1,700,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil was released into the Persian Gulf and an additional 2% of Kuwait's 96 billion barrels ( $1.53 \times 10^{10}$  m<sup>3</sup>) of crude oil reserves were burned by the time the oil fires were brought under control. The fires took more than nine months to extinguish fully and it took Kuwait more than 2 years and US\$50 billion in infrastructure reconstruction to reach pre-invasion oil output. Kuwait has since largely recovered from the socio-economic, environmental, and public health effects of the Gulf war.

## Politics

Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy and has the oldest directly elected parliament in the Persian Gulf region. The head of state is the *Emir* or *Sheikh*, a hereditary office. The Emir appoints a Prime Minister, who until recently was also the *Crown Prince*. A council of ministers, also known as cabinet ministers, aids the Prime Minister in his task as the head of Government of Kuwait which must contain at least one elected member of the Kuwaiti parliament, known as Majlis Al-Umma (National Assembly). The National Assembly has the power to dismiss the Prime Minister or any member of cabinet through a series of constitutional procedures. All cabinet ministers are answerable to the National Assembly.

The National Assembly consists of fifty elected members, who are chosen in elections held every four years. Government ministers are also granted membership in the parliament and can number up to sixteen excluding the fifty elected members. According to the Constitution of Kuwait, nomination of a new Emir or Crown Prince by the ruling Al-Sabah family has to be approved by the National Assembly. If the nominee does not win the votes of the majority of the assembly, the royal family must submit the names of three other candidates to the National Assembly, and the Assembly must approve one of them to hold the post. Any amendment to the constitution can be proposed by the Emir but it needs to be approved by more than two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly before being implemented. There have been several conflicts between the Emir, the government and the National Assembly over various policies. The National Assembly was suspended from 1976 to 1981, from 1986 to 1991 and from May 1999 to July 1999 due to irresolvable conflicts between some members of the government



The Bayan Palace serves as the official residence of the Emir of Kuwait.

and the Assembly.

Two-thirds of Kuwait's population do not have citizenship and thus cannot vote in parliamentary elections. Additionally, prior to 2005, only 15% of the Kuwaiti citizen population was allowed to vote, with all women, "recently naturalized" citizens (i.e. those of less than thirty years' citizenship), and members of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces excluded. On May 16, 2005, Parliament permitted women's suffrage by a 35-23 vote, subject to official interpretation of Islamic law and effective for the 2006 parliamentary election. The decision raised Kuwait's eligible voter population from 139,000 to about 339,000. In 2006, Kuwaiti citizens were estimated to be more than 960,000. In 2005, the former Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah announced the appointment of first women, Massouma Mubarak, as a cabinet minister. She was designated the post of Planning Minister and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs. During the 2008 parliamentary elections, 27 of the 275 candidates were women. However, none of them won.

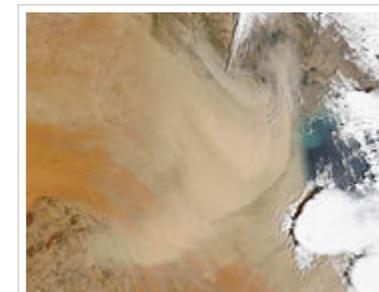
## Geography

Located in the north-east corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait is one of the smallest countries in the world in terms of land area. The flat, sandy Arabian Desert covers most of Kuwait. Kuwait is the only country in the world which has no natural lake or water reservoir. There is little difference in the country's altitude with the highest point in the country being 306 m above sea-level. It has nine islands, all of which with the exception of Failaka Island are uninhabited. With an area of 860 km<sup>2</sup>, the Bubiyan is the largest island in Kuwait and is connected to the rest of the country by a 2,380 m long bridge. Sparse vegetation is found along its 499 km long coastline. Kuwait City is located on Kuwait Bay, a natural deep-water harbour.

The land area is considered arable. Kuwait has some of the world's richest oil fields with the Burgan field having a total capacity of approximately 70 billion barrels ( $1.1 \times 10^{10}$  m<sup>3</sup>) of proven oil reserves. During the 1991 Kuwait oil fires, more than 500 oil lakes were created covering a combined surface area of about 35.7 km<sup>2</sup>. The resulting soil contamination due to oil and soot accumulation had made eastern and south-eastern parts of Kuwait uninhabitable. Sand and oil residue had reduced large parts of the Kuwaiti desert to semi-asphalt surfaces. The oil spills during the Gulf war also had drastically affected Kuwait's marine resources.

Kuwait has a warm tropical climate. Summer, which last from April to September, is extremely hot and dry with temperatures easily crossing 45 °C (113 °F) during daytime. Winter season, from November through February, is cool with some precipitation and average temperatures around 13 °C (56 °F) with extremes from -2 °C to 27 °C. Annual rainfall averages less than 127 mm and occurs chiefly between October and April. The spring season in March is warm and pleasant with occasional thunderstorms. The frequent winds from the northwest are cool in winter and spring and hot in summer. Southeasterly winds, usually hot and damp, spring up between July and October; hot and dry south winds prevail in spring and early summer. The shamal, a northwesterly wind common during June and July, causes dramatic sandstorms.

## Governorates



Sandstorm over Kuwait in April, 2003

Kuwait is divided into six governorates (*muhafazat*, sing. *muhafadhah*):

- Al Ahmadi
- Al Farwaniyah
- Al Asimah
- Al Jahra
- Hawalli
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer

The governorates are subdivided into districts.

The major cities are the capital Kuwait City and Jahrah (a thirty-minute drive northwest of Kuwait City). The main residential and business areas are Salmiya and Hawalli. The main industrial area is Shuwaikh within the Al Asimah Governorate. The main palace is the As-Seef Palace in the old part of Kuwait City where the Emir runs the daily matters of the country whilst the government headquarters are in the Bayan Palace and the Emir lives in Dar Salwa.



Map of Kuwait

## Economy

Kuwait is a highly industrialized country with a GDP ( PPP) of US\$138.6 billion and a per capita income of US\$39,300, making it the fourth richest country in the world. Kuwait's human development index (HDI) stands at 0.871, the second highest in Middle East, after Israel and the highest in the Arab world. With a GDP growth rate of 5.7%, Kuwait has one of the fastest growing economies in the region. According to the 2008 Index of Economic Freedom, Kuwait has the second-most free economy in the Middle East. In March 2007, Kuwait's foreign exchange reserves stood at US\$213 billion. The Kuwait Stock Exchange, which has about 200 firms listed, is the second-largest stock exchange in the Arab world with a total market capitalization of US\$235 billion. In 2007, the Kuwaiti government posted a budget surplus of US\$43 billion.



An oil refinery in Mina-Al-Ahmadi, Kuwait.

Kuwait has a proven crude oil reserves of 104 billion barrels (15 km<sup>3</sup>), estimated to be 10% of the world's reserves. According to the Kuwaiti constitution, all natural resources in the country and associated revenues are government property. Being a tax-free country, Kuwait's oil industry accounts for 80% of government revenue. Petroleum and petrochemicals accounts for nearly half of GDP and 95% of export revenues. Increases in oil price since 2003 has caused a surge in Kuwait's economy. Kuwait's current oil production of 2.8 million bpd is expected to increase to 4 million bpd by 2020. To realize this production target, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation plans to spend US\$51 billion between 2007 to 2012 to upgrade and expand the country's existing refineries. Other major industries include shipping, construction, cement, water desalination, construction materials and financial services. Kuwait's climate limits agricultural development. Consequently, with the exception of fish, it depends almost wholly on food imports. About 75% of potable water must be distilled or imported. The government is keen on decreasing Kuwait's dependence on oil to fuel its economy by transforming it into a regional trading and tourism hub. The planned US\$77 billion *City of Silk* is the largest real estate development project in the Middle East. The Central Bank of Kuwait issues Kuwait's currency, the Kuwaiti dinar. In December 2007, the dinar was the highest valued currency unit in the

world.

In 2007, estimated exports stood at US\$59.97 billion and imports were around US\$17.74 billion. Petroleum, petrochemical products, fertilizers and financial services are major export commodities. Kuwait imports a wide range of products ranging from food products and textiles to machinery. Kuwait's most important trading partners are Japan, South Korea, United States, China, European Union, Saudi Arabia and India.

## Demographics

As of 2007, Kuwait's population is estimated to be 3 to 3.5 million people which included approximately 2 million non-nationals. Kuwaiti citizens are therefore a minority of those who reside in Kuwait. The government rarely grants citizenship to foreigners to maintain status quo.

About 57% of Kuwaiti population is Arab, 39% Asian (including people from South Asia), and 4% are classified Bidoon. Bidoons are a group of stateless Arab residents of Kuwait. Other large groups of expatriates include Assyrians, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Filipinos. In 2003, more than 400,000 Indian nationals lived in Kuwait, making them the largest expatriate community there. After Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation, most of the 400,000 Palestinians living in Kuwait were expelled because of their government's open support for the Iraqi forces. Only a few thousand Palestinians remain in Kuwait. The population of ethnic Armenians in Kuwait also shrank drastically following the events of the Iraq-Kuwait war.

80% of Kuwait's population practices Islam. Despite Islam being a state religion, Kuwait has large communities of Christians (est. 300,000 to 400,000), Hindus (est. 300,000), Buddhists (est. 100,000), and Sikhs (est. 10,000). Of the Muslims in Kuwait, 70% are Sunni and 30% are Shia Muslims.. Kuwait's official language is Arabic, though English is widely spoken. Other important languages include Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Filipino, and Bengali.



Kuwait has one of the most cosmopolitan societies in the Middle East.

## Transportation

Kuwait has an extensive, modern and well-maintained network of highways. Roadways extended 5,749 km, of which 4,887 km is paved. In 2000, there were some 552,400 passenger cars, and 167,800 commercial taxis, trucks, and buses in use. Since there is no railway system in the country, most of the people travel by automobiles. The government plans to construct US\$11 billion rail network which will include a city metro for its capital. Bus services are provided by City Bus and state-owned Kuwait Public Transportation Corporation.

There are a total of seven airports in the country, of which four have paved runways. Kuwait International Airport serves as the principal hub for international air travel. State-owned Kuwait Airways is the largest airline in the country. In 2001, the airline carried 2,084,600 passengers on domestic and international flights. In 2004, the first private airline of Kuwait, Jazeera Airways, was launched.

Kuwait has one of the largest shipping industry in the Persian Gulf region. The Kuwait Ports Public Authority manages and operates ports across Kuwait. The country's principal commercial seaports are Shuwaikh and Shuaiba which handled combined cargo of 753,334 TEU in 2006. Mina Al-Ahmadi, the largest port in the country, handles most of Kuwait's oil exports. Construction of another major port located in Bubiyan island started in 2005. The port is expected to handle 1.3 million TEU when operation starts in 2008.

## Education

Oil revenues have allowed Kuwait to build an extensive educational system, yielding a literacy rate of 82.9 percent. There are many private schools in Kuwait, including The English School, which was the first private school to open in Kuwait. Other private schools include the Fahaheel Al-Watanieh Indian Private School ( Delhi Public School), Jabriya Indian School, Indian Community School, Al-Bayan Bilingual School, Dasman Model School (Bilingual), Gulf Indian School, Carmel School (Kuwait), The British School of Kuwait, Kuwait English School, The Gulf English School, The American School of Kuwait, American International School, universal American school, and The New English School. All private schools offer different and competitive programs, and whilst each school strives to be the best at private education, different parents and expatriates prefer different private schools naturally. Public schooling is free and compulsory from the age of 5 to 18, and several private schools also teach this age group. Kuwait University is Kuwait's only public university. The medical school in particular, provides up-to-date training for students. Both the extensive library system at Kuwait University and the collection at Kuwait National Museum (1957) were heavily damaged and looted during the Iraqi occupation in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Other universities in Kuwait include the American University of Kuwait, the Gulf University for Science and Technology, the Australian College of Kuwait, the Arab Open University (AOU) and the AUM.

The Gulf University for Science and Technology was the first private university established in Kuwait in 2002. It currently has two campuses in Hawalli and a third campus in Mishref where the Australian College of Kuwait is also located. The American University of Kuwait opened in 2004 with Dr. Shafeeq Al-Ghabra as founding president. The Australian College of Kuwait also opened in 2004 and there are more universities and colleges being discussed. Box Hill

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Shuwaikh Port is the largest commercial port in Kuwait.



A kindergarten school in Kuwait.

College Kuwait, an Australian women's college, opened its doors in September 2007 in Abu Halifa. It is an accredited extended campus of Box Hill TAFE, Australia, and offers internationally recognized qualifications.

In September 2008, the American University of the Middle East will open in the suburb of Egaila. This will be followed by a satellite campus of Algonquin College in 2009.

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# Oman

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

**Oman**, officially the **Sultanate of Oman** (Arabic: سلطنة عُمان, transliteration: **Sulṭanat ʿUmān**), is a country in southwest Asia on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the United Arab Emirates on the northwest, Saudi Arabia on the west and Yemen on the southwest. The coast is formed by the Arabian Sea on the south and east and the Gulf of Oman on the northeast. The country also contains Madha, an exclave enclosed by the United Arab Emirates, and Musandam, an exclave also separated by Emirati territory.

## Etymology

Oman is a very ancient word and appears on very old maps. Little information exists regarding the origin of the word Oman: opinions of Arab geographers and historians differ greatly as to the origin of the name, some sources ascribing it to the Qahtani tribe of Oman and others linking it linguistically to a word meaning "settling" or "staying". Ibn al-Qabi says that Oman means "those who occupy a place", as in the adjective *aamen* or *amoun* (settled man), and that the word "Oman" was derived from this.

Some say that Oman was named after Oman bin Ibrahim al Khalil who built the city of Oman. Others believe the name to be taken from that of Oman bin Loot. Yet another explanation is that the Azd, a tribe migrating from Yemen to Oman in pre-Islamic times, labeled Oman "Omana" because they came from a valley in Ma'rib in Yemen which went by the name of Oman, and they likened it to this place.

One of the earliest Roman historians to mention Oman is Yalainous, who lived from 23-79 AD. He presents in his writings a city which he names Omana. This name also recurs in Ptolemy. Some historians identify this Omana of Ptolemy as the city of Sohar, which was the pre-eminent trading centre of Arabia in the classical age of Islam.

## History

### Oman Before Islam

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<p>سلطنة عُمان</p> <p><b>Sultanate of Oman</b></p>	
 <p>Flag</p>	 <p>National Emblem</p>
<b>Motto:</b> none	
<b>Anthem:</b> <i>Nashid as-Salaam as-Sultani</i>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Muscat
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Omani
<b>Government</b>	Constitutional Monarchy

From the 6th century BC to the arrival of Islam in the 7th century AD, Oman was controlled and/or influenced by three Iranian dynasties, the Achaemenids, Parthians and Sassanids. Achaemenids in the 6th century BC controlled and influenced the Oman peninsula. This was most likely exerted from a coastal centre such as Sohar. By about 250 B.C. the Parthian dynasty brought the Persian Gulf under their control and extended their influence as far as Oman. Because they needed to control the Persian Gulf trade route, the Parthians established garrisons in Oman. In the third century A.D. the Sasanids succeeded the Parthians and held the area until the rise of Islam four centuries later.

## The Arrival of Islam

On the advent of Islam, the faith reached Oman within Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. The conversion of Omanis is usually ascribed to Amr ibn al-As, who visited the region. By the middle of the eighth century AD, Omanis were practicing a unique sect of the faith, Ibadhism, which remains a majority sect only in Oman. Ibadhism has been characterized as "moderate conservatism," with tenets that are a mixture of both austerity and peace.

## The Portuguese Settlement

The Portuguese occupied Muscat for a 140-year period 1508–1648, arriving a decade after Vasco da Gama discovered the seaway to India. In need of an outpost to protect their sea lanes, the Europeans built up and fortified the city, where remnants of their colonial architectural style still remain. Revolting tribes drove out the Portuguese, but were pushed out themselves about a century later 1741 by the leader of a Yemeni tribe leading a massive army from various other tribes, who began the current line of ruling sultans. A brief Persian invasion a few years later was the final time Oman would be ruled by a foreign power. Oman has been self governing ever since.

## Oman and East African Empire

In the 1690s Saif bin Sultan, the imam of Oman, pressed down the east African coast. A major obstacle was Fort Jesus, housing the garrison of a Portuguese settlement at Mombasa. After a two-year siege, it fell to Saif in 1698. Thereafter the Omanis easily ejected the Portuguese from Zanzibar and from all other coastal regions north of Mozambique. Zanzibar was a valuable property as the main slave market of the east African coast, and became an increasingly important part of the Omani empire, a fact reflected by the decision of the greatest 19th century sultan of Oman, Sa'id ibn Sultan, to make it from 1837 his main place of residence. Sa'id built impressive palaces and gardens in Zanzibar. He improved the island's economy by introducing cloves, sugar and indigo though at the same time he accepted a financial loss in

- Sultan	Qaboos ibn Said Al Said
- Chancellor	Fahad ibn Mahmood Al Said
<b>Independence</b>	
- From the Portuguese empire	1651
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	309,500 km <sup>2</sup> ( 70 <sup>th</sup> ) 119,498 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- mid 2006 estimate	3,204,897 ( 139 <sup>th</sup> )
- 2003 census	2,300,000
- Density	8.3/km <sup>2</sup> ( 182 <sup>th</sup> ) 21.5/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	
- Total	2007 estimate \$52.3 billion ( 81 <sup>th</sup> )
- Per capita	\$19,879 ( 44 <sup>th</sup> )
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	
- Total	2007 estimate \$40.992 billion ( 70 <sup>th</sup> )
- Per capita	\$15,584 ( 40 <sup>st</sup> )
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.814 (high) ( 58 <sup>th</sup> )
<b>Currency</b>	Rial ( OMR)
<b>Time zone</b>	
- Summer ( DST)	( UTC+4) ( UTC+4)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.om
<b>Calling code</b>	+968

cooperating with British attempts to end Zanzibar's slave trade. The link with Oman was broken after his death in 1856. Rivalry between his two sons was resolved, with the help of forceful British diplomacy, when one of them Majid succeeded to Zanzibar and to the many regions claimed by the family on the east African coast. The other Thuwaini inherited Muscat and Oman.

<sup>1</sup> Population estimate includes 693,000 non-nationals.

## Politics



The Sultan's Al Alam Palace in Muscat

Chief of state and government is the hereditary sultān, Qaboos Bin Said Al-Said who appoints a cabinet called the " Diwans" to assist him. In the early 1990s, the sultan instituted an elected advisory council, the *Majlis ash-Shura*, though few Omanis were eligible to vote. Universal suffrage for those over 21 was instituted on 4 October 2003. Over 190,000 people (74% of those registered) voted to elect the 84 seats. Two women were elected to seats. The country today has three women ministers Rawiyah bint Saud al Busaidiyah - Minister of Higher Education, Sharifa bint Khalfan al Yahya'eyah - Minister of Social Development and Rajiha bint Abdulmir bin Ali - Minister of Tourism. There are no legal political parties nor, at present, any active opposition movement. As more and more young Omanis return from education abroad, it seems likely that the traditional, tribal-based political system will have to be adjusted. A State Consultative Council, established in 1981, consisted of 55 appointed representatives of government, the private sector, and regional interests.

## Military

Oman's armed forces, including Royal Household troops foreign personnel numbered 41,700 in 2002. The army had 25,000 personnel equipped with over 100 main battle tanks and 37 Scorpion tanks. The air force of 4,100 operates 40 combat aircraft. The navy numbers 4,200 with 13 patrol and coastal combatants. Paramilitary includes the Tribal Home Guard (Firqats) of 4,000 organized in small tribal teams, a police coast guard of 400, and a small police air wing. The elite Royal Household brigade, naval unit, and air unit number 6,400, including 2 special forces regiments. In 2001 Oman spent \$2.4 billion on defense or 12.2% of GDP.

## Governorates and Regions of Oman

The Sultanate is divided into nine governorates and regions, each of which has states that has the same culture and habits and most of people speak the same dialects of Arabic and also share the same history and the same traditional clothes and most of them work in the past in similar jobs such as Regions in the coast where fishing is the main job and farming for regions where they are far from the coast.

Governorate of Muscat is the most densely populated region in the Sultanate with a population of more than half a million. It's Oman's political, economic, and administrative centre. Muscat is host to a balance between the



traditional heritage of Omani society and the modern contemporary features. This preserves Oman's historical and cultural identity as well as gives presents Muscat's embrace of modernity.

Governorate of Dhofar is in the far south of the Sultanate and borders on the Wusta Region the east, the Arabian Sea to the south, the Republic of Yemen to the west and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the north and north-west. It is not simply a place of historical interest. All of its ten States display the clear imprint of the Renaissance. No mountain, plain, stretch of coast or border post, even as far as the sands of the Rub' Al Khali, has been neglected.

Governorate of Musandam lies in extreme north of the Sultanate. It is separated from the rest of the Sultanate by a strip of United Arab Emirates land. its distinguished for its strategic location, with part of it known as Ras Musandam - overlooks the international water passage called the Strait of Hormuz. It is worth noting that not the whole of the Strait is good for navigation. The part suitable for sea navigation falls within the territorial waters of the Sultanate, which made Omanis shoulder a huge responsibility in organizing navigation in this Strait since the old ages. The strategic importance of this Strait has increased nowadays, as it turned to be a crossing point to 90% of the Gulf's oil shipped to all over the world.

[[Governorate of Buraimi which is situated in the North West corner of the Sultanate, adjacent to the borders with United Arab Emirates . It has a number of historic forts and houses. Its main forts are al Khandaq, which has been adopted as the emblem of the Governorate , and Al Hillah Fort. Both these forts have recently been restored by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture.

Batinah Region is a prime area for investment. It has achieved much over the years.occupy a coastal strip along the Gulf of Oman from the state of Barka in the south to Khatmat Malahah in the state of Shinas to the north. The wide strip is enclosed by the Gulf of Oman to the east and the foothills of the Western Hajar mountains to the west.

Ad DhahirahDahirah Region is a semi desert plain which slopes from the southern fool of Al Hajr Al Gharbi Mountains towards the Empty Quarter. It is separated from A'Dakhliyah Region by Al Kur Mountain to the East; it joins the Empty Quarter from the West and Wusta Region from the south. state of Ibri is distinguished for its unique location which joins the Sultanate with other areas in the Arabian Peninsula.

Dakhiliah Region is rich in economic and natural resources and has numerous tourist attractions including forts, castles, towers, old residential quarters and historic mosques. The state of Nizwa has a famous and imposing fort, several old mosques and a traditional souq, while Bahla Fort is one of the treasures of the human heritage. Misfah al Abriyeen in the state of al Hamra is a splendid example of a hanging village.

Sharqiyah Region is the north east front of Oman over looking the Arabian Sea from the east. It includes the internal side of Al Hajr Al sharqi mountains which join it from the north. It also joins Wahibah Sand frimoth the south and Dakhliah Region from the west. Sur is one of the regional centers and the most important of Sharqiyah cities. It played a historical rule in trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean. It was also known for ship building, as it was the most renowned city in the Arabian Peninsula in ship building in the last century. Besides, marine activity and ship building, Sur is famous for some historical touristic places such as caves. It is also known wood industries. textiles and produces a number of agricultural crops.

Wusta Region is situated to the south of both Dakhliah and Dhahirah Regions, at the east side it is linked to the Arabian Sea, at the west to the Empty Quarter and at the south to Governorate of Dhofar. It includes a large area of central parts of the Sultanate. It is distinguished for having a great number of oil wells.

## Geography

A vast gravel desert plain covers most of central Oman, with mountain ranges along the north ( al Jebel al Akhdar) and southeast coast, where the country's main cities are also located: the capital city Muscat, Matrah and Sur in the north, and Salalah in the south. Oman's climate is hot and dry in the interior and humid along the coast. During past epochs Oman was covered by ocean. Fossilized shells exist in great numbers in areas of the desert away from the modern coastline. The peninsula of Musandam (Musandem), which has a strategic location on the Strait of Hormuz, is separated from the rest of Oman by the United Arab Emirates and is thus an exclave. The series of small towns known collectively as Dibba are the gateway to the Musandam peninsula on land and the fishing villages of Musandam by sea. Boats may be hired at Khasab for trips into the Musandam peninsula by sea. Oman has one other exclave, inside UAE territory, known as Madha. It is located halfway between the Musandam Peninsula and the rest of Oman. Belonging to Musandam governorate, it covers approximately 75 km<sup>2</sup> (29 sq mi). The boundary was settled in 1969. The north-east corner of Madha is closest to the Fujairah road, barely 10 m (32.8 ft) away. Within the exclave is a UAE enclave called Nahwa, belonging to the Emirate of Sharjah. It is about 8 km (5 mi) on a dirt track west of the town of New Madha. It consists of about forty houses with its own clinic and telephone exchange.

<b>Geography of Oman</b>	
<b>Coastline</b>	2,092 km
<b>Bordering countries</b>	Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen

## Climate

Annual rainfall in Muscat averages 10 cm (4 in), falling mostly in January. Dhofar is subject to the southwest monsoon, and rainfall up to 64 cm (25 in) has been recorded in the rainy season from late June to October. While the mountain areas receive more plentiful rainfall, some parts of the coast, particularly near the island of Masirah, sometimes receive no rain at all within the course of a year. The climate generally is very hot, with temperatures reaching 54°C (129°F) in the hot season, from May to October.

## Flora and fauna

Desert shrub and desert grass, common to southern Arabia, are found. Vegetation is sparse in the interior plateau, which is largely gravel desert. The greater monsoon rainfall in Dhofar and the mountains makes the growth there more luxuriant during summer. Coconut palms grow plentifully in Dhofar and Frankincense grows in the hills. Oleander and varieties of Acacia abound.

Indigenous mammals include the Leopard, Hyena, Fox, Wolf, and Hare, Oryx, Ibex, Tahr. Birds include the Vulture, Eagle, Stork, Bustard, Arabian Partridge, Bee Eater, Falcon and Sunbird.

## Environment

Maintaining an adequate supply of water for agricultural and domestic use is Oman's most pressing environmental problem. The nation has limited renewable water resources, with 94% used in farming and 2% for industrial activity. Drinking water is available throughout the country, either piped or delivered. Both

drought and limited rainfall contribute to shortages in the nation's water supply. The nation's soil has shown increased levels of salinity. Pollution of beaches and other coastal areas by oil tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman is also a persistent problem. In 2001, the nation had nine endangered species of mammals and five endangered types of bird. Nineteen plant species are also threatened with extinction. Decrees have been passed to protect endangered species, which include the Arabian Leopard leopard, Arabian oryx, mountain gazelle, goitered gazelle, Arabian tahr, green sea turtle, hawksbill turtle and olive ridley turtle.

## Demographics

The Ministry of Economy estimates that in mid 2006 the total population was 2.577 million. Of those, 1.844 million were Omanis. The population has grown from 2.018 million in the 1993 census to 2.340 million in the 2003 census. In **Oman**, about 50% of the population lives in Muscat and the Batinah coastal plain northwest of the capital; about 200,000 live in the Dhofar (southern) region, and about 30,000 live in the remote Musandam Peninsula on the Strait of Hormuz. Some 600,000 expatriates live in Oman, most of whom are guest workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, India and the Philippines.

Demographics of Oman	
<b>Languages</b>	Arabic, Swahili, Urdu and English
<b>Religions</b>	Islam
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	Arab, South Asian and African
<b>Life expectancy</b>	73.13 years

Of total population, about 55% are Ibadi Muslims who are related to the early Kharajites. Sunnis account for 38% of the population while Shia Jaffaris are 4%. The remaining 3% of the population are Hindus, Christians and other minorities, most of whom are expatriates.

## Economy

Omani citizens enjoy good living standards, but the future is uncertain with Oman's limited oil reserves. The other sources of income, agriculture and local industries, are small in comparison and count for less than 1% of the country's exports. Agriculture, often subsistence in its character, produces Dates, Limes, Grains and vegetables. Less than 1% of the country is under cultivation but, in general, food has to be imported. Industries contribute only with 4%, but there are governmental plans to increase this.

Oil production is extracted and processed by Petroleum Development. Oil reserves are limited though and the proven reserves will run out in few years time. Oman has other mineral resources including Copper, Asbestos and Marble, but this is little exploited.

Historical populations		
Year	Pop.	Change
<b>1910</b>	249,000	16.4%
<b>1920</b>	290,000	16.5%
<b>1930</b>	337,000	16.2%
<b>1940</b>	392,000	16.3%
<b>1950</b>	413,000	5.4%
<b>1960</b>	505,000	22.3%
<b>1970</b>	654,000	29.5%
<b>1980</b>	1,060,000	62.1%
<b>1990</b>	1,625,000	53.3%
<b>2000</b>	2,402,000	47.8%
<b>Est. 2008</b>	3,204,000	33.4%

## Oil and Gas

Commercial export of oil began in 1967 and since Sultan Qaboos' accession to the throne in 1970, many more oil fields have been found and developed. In June 1999, PDO discovered a new oil field in southern Oman after drilling and testing three wells which demonstrated the commercial viability of the reservoir. This is the

Economy of Oman
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most significant find in five years. Work is continuing on the RO 503.876 million ( US\$1,300 million ) oil refinery project in Sohar, which was due to go into operation in 2006 with a 116,400 barrels a day refining capacity. In 2004, Oman Oil Refinery was supplied with about 78,200 barrels a day for refining, while PDO began using steam injection technology in several wells to increase their productivity.

Since the slump in oil prices in 1998, Oman has made active plans to diversify its economy and is placing a greater emphasis on other areas of industry, such as tourism and natural gas. Oman's Basic Statute of the State expresses in Article 11 that, "The National Economy is based on justice and the principles of a free economy."

## Industry

The industrial sector is a cornerstone of the Sultanate's long-term (1996-2020) development strategy. Industry is not only one of the main sectors involved in diversifying the sources of national income and reducing dependence on oil; it is also capable of helping to meet Oman's social development needs and generate greater added value for national resources by processing them into manufactured products.

The Seventh Five-Year Development Plan creates the conditions for an attractive investment climate. Under its strategy for the industrial sector the government also aims to develop the information technology and telecommunications industries. The Knowledge Oasis Muscat complex has been set up and expanded, and Omani companies are developing their technological potential through collaboration with various Japanese and German institutions.

There is also an industrial estate in Sohar - where the Sultanate's heavy industries are based - as well as other estates in Sur, Salalah, Nizwa and Buraimi. Natural gas is transported to the industrial estates in Sohar and Salalah, helping to promote expansion of those industries that depend on natural gas; the government grants these industries tax exemptions, as an incentive to encourage their expansion and development. By 2020 the industrial sector is expected to contribute 15% to the country's GDP.

## Development Plans

The Omani economy has been radically transformed over a series of development plans beginning with the First Five-year Plan (1976-1980). At Sultan Qaboos's instruction, a vision of Oman's economic future up to the year 2020 was set out at the end of the first phase of the country's development 1970-1995. Vision 2020, outlined the country's economic and social goals over the 25 years of the second phase of the development process (1996-2020).

Oman 2020, held in June 1995, has developed the following aims with regard to securing Oman's future prosperity and growth:

- To have economic and financial stability
- To reshape the role of the Government in the economy and to broaden private sector participation

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<b>Currency</b>	Omani Riyal (R\$, OMR)
<b>Fiscal year</b>	Calendar year
<b>Central Bank</b>	Central Bank of Oman
<b>Stock Market</b>	Muscat Stock Market

- To diversify the economic base and sources of national income
- To globalise the Omani economy
- To upgrade the skills of the Omani workforce and develop human resources

## Tourism



Al-Bustan Palace Hotel

Oman is known for its popular tourist attractions. Wadis, deserts, beaches, and mountains are areas which make Oman unique to its neighboring GCC nations (Wadis in particular). Jebel Shams is Oman's tallest mountain, highest point, and is a popular destination for camping. Most of the major malls are located in Muscat, the capital. The largest mall in the country is the Muscat City Centre which was built by Majid hFuttaim, an Emirati business man. Other popular tourist activities include sand skiing in the desert, mountain-climbing, camel racing, and camping.

The Muscat Festival is usually held at the beginning of every year. During this event, traditional dances are held, temporary theme parks open, and concerts take place. Another popular event is the Khareef Festival, which is similar to Muscat Festival; however it is held in August in Salalah, Dhofar. During this latter event, mountains are packed as a result of the cool breeze weather during that period of time which rarely occurs in Muscat.

## Labor

The estimated workforce was 920,000 in 2002. A large proportion of the population were still engaged in subsistence agriculture or fishing. The skilled local labor force is small, and many of the larger industries depend on foreign workers from India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka — foreign laborers constituted over 80% of the modern-sector workforce in 1996.

Omani law does not provide the right of union formation. The law forbids a strike for any reason. Collective bargaining is not permitted, however there exist labor-management committees in firms with more than 50 workers. These committees are not authorized to discuss conditions of employment, including hours and wages. The Labor Welfare Board provides a venue for grievances.

The minimum working age is 13, but this provision is not enforced against the employment of children in family businesses or on family farms. The minimum wage for non-professional workers was \$260 per month in 2002. However, many classes of workers (domestic servants, farmers, government employees) are not required to receive the minimum wage and the government is not consistent in its enforcement of the minimum wage law. The private sector working week is 40 to 45 hours long, while government officials have a 35-hour working week.

## Inflation

As oil prices have risen to a record high, so has inflation. The government depends mostly on oil revenue, more than on tax returns from companies and other government-owned companies. The government is also Oman's largest employer, so the high interest that government gets increases the prices of food and construction equipment. The government did support the fuel prices so it doesn't increase the inflation and to make the price suitable for people on low wages.

In 2006, government employee salaries were increased by 15%, placing Oman in the category of high-medium income countries. and a year after increase employees' were also increased in salaries so, employees with low wages have a higher increase that may go up to 48% and employees who earn more get a lesser increase in their salaries which end at 5%. The minimum wage has been changed from 120 Rial a month to 140 Rials because of high records of inflation driven by high prices of oil.

## Education

Before 1970, only three formal schools existed in the whole country with less than 1000 students receiving education in them. Since Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, the government has given high priority to education to develop a domestic work force, which the government considers a vital factor in the country's economic and social progress. Today there are over 1000 state schools and about 650,000 students. In 1986, Oman's first university, Sultan Qaboos University, opened. Other post secondary institutions include a law school, technical college, banking institute, teachers training college, and health sciences institute. Some 200 scholarships are awarded each year for study abroad.

Pre-university education in Oman has three stages: primary, preparatory, and secondary. Six years of primary schooling are followed by preparatory school. Academic results of the preparatory exams determine the type of secondary education the student will receive.

Nine private colleges exist, providing 2-year post secondary diplomas. Since 1999, the government has embarked on reforms in higher education designed to meet the needs of a growing population, only a small percentage of which are currently admitted to higher education institutions. Under the reformed system, four public regional universities will be created, and incentives are provided by the government to promote the upgrading of the existing nine private colleges and the creation of other degree-granting private colleges.

The adult illiteracy rate was estimated at 28.1% for the year 2000 (males, 19.6%; females, 38.3%). In 1998, there were 411 primary schools with 313,516 students and 12,052 teachers. Student-to-teacher ratio stood at 26 to 1. In secondary schools in 1998, there were 12,436 teachers and 217,246 students. As of 1999, 65% of primary-school-age children were enrolled in school, while 59% of those eligible attended secondary school. In the same year, public expenditure on education was estimated at 3.9% of GDP. In 1993, there were 252 literacy centers and 176 adult education centers. Three teachers' colleges were functioning as of 1986. The Institute of Agriculture at Nazwa became a full college by 1985. Sultan Qaboos University opened in 1986. In 1998, all higher-level institutions had 1,307 teachers and 16,032 students.

## Science and technology

Most research conducted in Oman has been done at the behest of the government; agriculture, minerals, water resources, and marine sciences have drawn the most attention. Sultan Qaboos University, founded in 1985, has colleges of science, medicine, engineering, and agriculture. In 1987–97, science and engineering

students accounted for 13% of college and university enrollments. The Institute of Health Sciences, under the Ministry of Health, was founded in 1982. Muscat Technical Industrial College, founded in 1984, has departments of computing and mathematics, laboratory science, and electrical, construction, and mechanical engineering. The Oman Natural History Museum, founded in 1983, includes the national herbarium and the national shell collection. All of these organizations are located in Muscat.

## Health

As of 1999, there were an estimated 1.3 physicians and 2.2 hospital beds per 1,000 people. In 1993, 89% of the population had access to health care services. In 2000, 39% of the population had access to safe drinking water and 92% had adequate sanitation. Average life expectancy in 2000 was 74 years. Infant mortality was 17 per 1,000 live births. As of 2002, the crude birth rate and overall mortality rate were estimated at, respectively, 37.8 and 4 per 1,000 people. About 24% of married women (ages 15 to 49) were using contraception in 2000. The fertility rate was 4.3 children per woman living through her childbearing years. In 1995, children up to one year old were vaccinated against tuberculosis, 96%; diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus, 99%; polio, 99%; measles, 98%; and hepatitis B, 99%. As of 1999, the rates for DPT and measles were, respectively, 86% and 99%. About 12% of children under five were malnourished as of 1999 and goiter was prevalent in 10% of school-age children. There were only 59 AIDS cases reported in 1996. The HIV-1 prevalence rate was 0.1 per 100 adults in 1999.

## Challenges

Oman's political challenges are primarily around succession plans. The democratic institutions and processes are still in early development and have not experienced real power. There is some risk of destabilization by radicals backed by militant groups or rogue states.

Oman's Musandam peninsula is a strategic asset which may become contested in future. Strong military ties with the United States and the GCC countries helps maintain stability. The growing power of Iran is a concern.

The demographic challenges are, like in other GCC countries, that a large proportion of the population are non-citizens.

The economic challenge is over-dependence on oil. While this is a benefit during oil price spikes, it is a risk during downturns. Oman's economy has not diversified to the extent neighboring UAE has.

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# Palestinian territories

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SOS Children helps children in the Palestinian Territories. For more information see SOS Children in Palestine

The **Palestinian territories** is one of a number of designations for those portions of the British Mandate of Palestine captured and administered by Jordan and by Egypt in the late 1940's, and later by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War.

Today, the designation typically refers to the territories governed in varying degrees by the Palestinian Authority (42% of the West Bank plus all of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip), or includes all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It does not include the Golan Heights captured from Syria during the Six Day War, or the Sinai Peninsula, captured from Egypt at that time but later returned by Israel to Egypt after a peace accord was signed between the two countries in 1979. Israel does not consider East Jerusalem nor the former Israeli - Jordanian no man's land (both annexed in 1967) to be parts of the West Bank. Both in fact fall under full Israeli law and jurisdiction as opposed to the 58% of the Israeli-defined West Bank which is ruled by the Israeli 'Judea and Samaria Civil Administration'.

## Name

Other terms used to describe these areas collectively are "the disputed territories", "Israeli-occupied territories", and "the occupied territories". Further terms include "Yesha" (Judea-Samaria-Gaza), "liberated territories", "1967 territories", and simply "the territories".

The United Nations generally uses the term "Occupied Palestinian Territory", with the "Palestinian" label having gained use since the 1970s. Previous UNSC resolutions (such as 242 and 338) use the term "territories occupied by Israel", whereas in the UN General Assembly Resolution 181 passed on November 29, 1947, the term "Samaria and Judea" was used. Many Jews object to the term "Palestinian territories", which they perceive as a rejection of what is in their view legitimate Jewish land according to written history of the Mediterranean including Greek and Roman writings, the Hebrew Bible and indigenous Jewish history (and current settlements) in the area. Additionally, the term "Palestinian" had also been applied for many years to Palestinian Jews in the same region.

## Political status

The political status of these territories has been the subject of negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation



Map of the West Bank.

Organization (PLO) and of numerous statements and resolutions by the United Nations. See List of United Nations resolutions concerning Israel for further details.

The current and future political status of the territories is highly controversial. Specific issues include the legality of Israeli's policy of encouraging settlement, whether it is legitimate for Israel to annex portions of the territories, whether Israel is legally an occupying power according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, and whether an independent Arab state will be created in the territories.

Since 1994, the autonomous Palestinian Authority has exercised various degrees of control in large parts of the territories, pursuant to the Oslo Accords.

Since the Battle of Gaza (2007), the territories have split into two administrative entities, with Hamas leading the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian National Authority (with Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah in leadership) continuing to administer the West Bank despite the election (in January, 2006) of Hamas to the majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Neither group recognize the other one as the official Palestinian leadership.



## Boundaries

The boundaries between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the State of Israel, known as the Green Line, are a result of the 1949 Armistice Agreements after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, while their boundaries with Jordan and Egypt follow the international border negotiated in the Israel-Egypt peace treaty and Israel-Jordan peace treaty. The natural geographic boundaries for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, respectively.

Between 1949 and 1967, these territories were occupied by Jordan and Egypt respectively, but the term "Palestinian territories" or "Occupied Palestinian Territories" gained wide usage after Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, about the same time as the term "Palestinian" first started to be used exclusively in respect to Arab population of Palestine. Since then, the United Nations and most foreign governments regard the territories as being under Israeli military occupation.

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## The Term "Occupied Palestinian Territories"

Generally, the term "Occupied Palestinian Territories" is used by:

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- International Community, consisting of all members of the United Nations with the exception of seven states, since 1967-present.
- International Court of Justice, since 1967-present.
- journalists, since 1967-present, to indicate lands where Arab Palestinians presently dwell, outside the *Green Line*, or the 1949 Armistice lines;

The term is often used interchangeably with the term *Occupied territories*, although the latter refers to an inclusive set of both the "Palestinian territories" and the Golan Heights. The Golan is not settled by Palestinians nor claimed by them, but rather by Syria, though the tiny Shebaa Farms area is also claimed by Lebanon. The confusion stems from the fact that all these territories were captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War and are regarded by the United Nations as being illegally occupied by Israel.

The term "Occupied Palestinian Territories" is challenged by some Israelis because it may either disregard Israeli claims to the territories or possible border change after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Israeli right-wing politician Shmuel Katz, in a preliminary brief, whose arguments were analysed and dismissed later by the International Court of Justice to which it was directed, rejects the rulings of that Court and, with it, resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, asserting that the standard term in international law, "occupied Palestinian lands" is "the common language of Arab anti-Israel propaganda, a part of the Arabs' fictional history, which it has succeeded in disseminating throughout the whole wide world". Katz further claimed that "Impartial groups should not be blind to the fact that there are two sides to the dispute in Palestine, and that Israel rejects absolutely the notion that it is illegally holding 'Palestinian lands'." Similarly, the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs has written: "It would be far more accurate to describe the West Bank and Gaza Strip as "disputed territories" to which both Israelis and Palestinians have claims"

In 1922 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that ruled Palestine for four centuries (1517-1917), the British Mandate for Palestine was established. Large-scale Jewish immigration from abroad, mainly from Eastern Europe took place during the British Mandate. The future of Palestine was hotly disputed between Arabs and Jews. In 1947, the total Jewish ownership of land in Palestine was 1,850,000 dunums or 1,850 square kilometers, which is 7.04% of the total land of Palestine. Public property or "crown lands", the bulk of which was in the Negev, belonging to the government of Palestine may have made up as much as 70% of the total land; with the Arabs, Christians and others owning the rest.

The 1947 United Nations Partition Plan proposed a division of the mandated territory between an Arab and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem and the surrounding area to be a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime. The regions allotted to the proposed Arab state included what would become the Gaza Strip and almost all of what would become the West Bank, as well as other areas.

The Partition Plan was passed by the UN General Assembly on November 1947. Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, one day before the expiration of the British Mandate for Palestine. US President Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel de facto the following day, and the United States recognized it de jure on January 31, 1949. (<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/us-israel/>) The Arab countries responded by declaring war on the newly formed State of Israel, which ended in Israel's victory.

## History of the Levant

### Stone Age

Kebaran · Natufian culture ·  
Halafian culture · Jericho

### Ancient History

Sumerians · Ebla · Akkadian Empire ·  
Canaan · Phoenicians  
Amorites · Aramaeans · Edomites · Hittites  
Nabataeans · Palmyra · Philistines · Israel and Judah  
Assyrian Empire · Babylonian Empire  
Persian Empire · Seleucid Empire ·  
Hasmonean kingdom  
Roman Empire · Byzantine Empire

### The Middle Ages

Umayyad · Abbasid · Fatimid  
Mamluks · Ottoman Empire

### Modern Times

After the war, Israel controlled many of the areas designated for the Arab state, and the negotiated agreements established Armistice Demarcation Lines (ADLs), which did not have the status of recognised international borders.

<p>British Mandate of Palestine          Syria · Lebanon · Jordan          Israel · Palestinian territories</p>
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Thus the areas held by Jordanian and Iraqi forces (with minor adjustments) came under Jordanian control, and became known as the West Bank (of the Jordan River, by contrast with the East Bank, or Jordan proper); the area held by Egyptian forces, along the Mediterranean coast in the vicinity of the city of Gaza and south to the international border, remained under Egyptian control and became known as the Gaza Strip.

For nineteen years following the 1949 Armistice Agreements until the 1967 Six Day War, Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip and Jordan occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and no Arab state was created. In 1950, Jordan annexed the territories it occupied; this annexation was not officially recognized by other countries, with the sole exception of the United Kingdom (but not, as is often said, Pakistan).

Article 24 of the Palestinian National Charter of 1964 stated: "This Organization does not exercise any territorial sovereignty over the West Bank in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, on the Gaza Strip or in the Himmah Area."

Israel captured both territories in the 1967 Six-Day War; since then they have been under Israeli control. Immediately after the war, on June 19, 1967, the Israeli government offered to return the Golan Heights to Syria, the Sinai to Egypt and most of the West Bank to Jordan in exchange for peace. At the Khartoum Summit in September, the Arabs responded to this overture by declaring "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel." (<http://www.mideastweb.org/khartoum.htm>)

UN Security Council Resolution 242 introduced the "Land for Peace" formula for normalizing relations between Israel and its neighbors. This formula was used when Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1979 in exchange for a peace treaty. While that treaty mentioned a "linkage" between Israeli-Egyptian peace and Palestinian autonomy, the formerly Egyptian-occupied territory in Gaza was excluded from the agreement, and remained under Israeli control.

The Oslo Accords of the early 1990s between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority. This was an interim organization created to administer a limited form of Palestinian self-governance in the territories for a period of five years during which final-status negotiations would take place. The Palestinian Authority carried civil responsibility in some rural areas, as well as security responsibility in the major cities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Although the five-year interim period expired in 1999, the final status agreement has yet to be concluded despite attempts such as the 2000 Camp David Summit, the Taba summit, and the unofficial Geneva Accords.

In 2005, Israeli forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip, ceding full effective internal control of the territory to the Palestinian Authority.

Since the Battle of Gaza (2007) the two separate territories, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, are divided into a Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip and a Fatah civil leadership in the autonomous areas of the West Bank. Each sees itself as the administrator of all Palestinian territories and does not acknowledge the other one as the official government of the territories. The Palestinian territories have therefore *de facto* split into two entities.

## Legal status

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The final status of the "Palestinian territories" as becoming (wholly or largely) an independent state for "Arabs" is supported by the countries that back the Quartet's "Road map for peace". The government of Israel also accepted the road map but with 14 reservations .

Although Israeli settlements were not part of the Oslo Accords negotiations, the Arab position is that the creation and the presence of Israeli settlements in those areas is a violation of international law. This has also been affirmed by a majority of members of the Geneva convention: "12. The participating High Contracting Parties call upon the Occupying Power to fully and effectively respect the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to refrain from perpetrating any violation of the Convention. They reaffirm the illegality of the settlements in the said territories and of the extension thereof. They recall the need to safeguard and guarantee the rights and access of all inhabitants to the Holy Places."

East Jerusalem, captured in 1967, was unilaterally annexed by Israel. The UN Security Council Resolution 478 condemned the Jerusalem Law as "a violation of international law". This annexation has not been recognized by other nations, although the United States Congress has declared its intention to recognize the annexation (a proposal that has been condemned by other states and organizations). Because of the question of Jerusalem's status, some states refuse to accept Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and treat Tel Aviv as the capital, basing their diplomatic missions there. Israel asserts that these territories are not currently claimed by any other state, and that Israel has the right to control them.

Israel's position has not been officially accepted by most countries and international bodies. The West Bank, and the Gaza Strip have been referred to as occupied territories (with Israel as the occupying power) by Palestinian Arabs , the rest of the Arab bloc, the UK , the EU, (usually) the USA ( , ), both the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations , the International Court of Justice, and the Israeli Supreme Court (see Israeli West Bank barrier). The United Nations did not declare any change in the status of the territories as of the creation of the Palestinian National Authority between 1993 and 2000. Although a 1999 U.N. document (see the link above) implied that the chance for a change in that status was slim at that period, most observers agreed that the Palestinian territories' classification as occupied was losing substantiality, and would be withdrawn after the signing of a permanent peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (see also Proposals for a Palestinian state).

During the period between the 1993 Oslo Accords and the Second Intifada beginning in 2000, Israeli officials claimed that the term "occupation" did not accurately reflect the state of affairs in the territories. During this time, the Palestinian population in large parts of the territories had a large degree of autonomy and only limited exposure to the IDF except when seeking to move between different areas. Following the events of the Second Intifada, and in particular, Operation Defensive Shield, most territories, including Palestinian cities (Area A), are back under effective Israeli military control, so the discussion along those lines is largely moot.

<b>Palestinians</b> 

<b>Demographics &amp; geography</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Definitions · Palestine</li> <li>People · Diaspora</li> <li><b>Territories</b> · Refugee camps</li> <li>Geography of the Gaza Strip</li> <li>Geography of the West Bank</li> <li>Electoral Districts · Governorates ·</li> <li>Palestinian cities</li> <li>Arab localities in Israel ·</li> <li>Arab citizens of Israel ·</li> <li>East Jerusalem ·</li> </ul>
<b>Politics</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hamas · PLO · PNC · PLC · PFLP</li> <li>PNA · PNA political parties</li> <li>Palestinian flag</li> <li>Politics of Palestine</li> </ul>
<b>Religion &amp; religious sites</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christianity · Islam</li> <li>History of the Levant</li> <li>Houses of worship:</li> <li>Church of the Nativity · Church of the Holy Sepulchre</li> <li>· Church of the Annunciation · Rachel's Tomb</li> <li>Al-Aqsa Mosque · Dome of the Rock · Mosque of Omar</li> <li>Cave of the Patriarchs</li> </ul>
<b>Culture</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Art · Costume &amp; embroidery <sup>+</sup></li> <li>Cinema · Cuisine <sup>+</sup> · Dance · Pottery</li> <li>Handicrafts · Language · Literature</li> <li>Music</li> </ul>
<b>Notable Palestinians</b>

In the summer of 2005, Israel implemented its unilateral disengagement plan; about 8500 Israeli citizens living in the Gaza Strip were forcibly removed from the territory; some received alternative homes and a sum of money. The Israeli Defence Forces vacated Gaza in 2005, but invaded it again in 2006 in response to rocket attacks and the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by Hamas.

The Palestinian territories have been assigned a country code of PS in ISO 3166-1 alpha-2, and accordingly, the Palestinian Authority was granted control of the corresponding Internet country code top-level domain **.ps**.

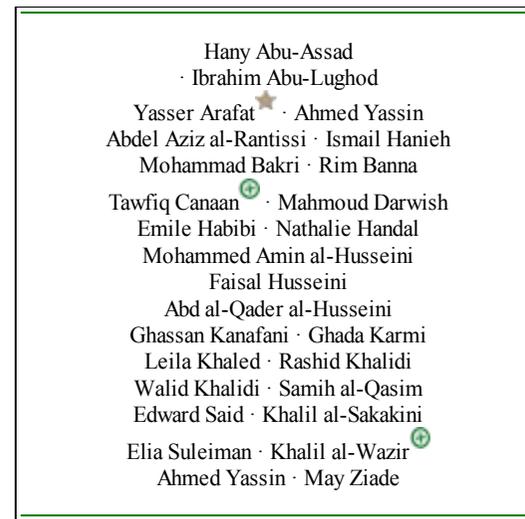
## United Nations Security Council Resolution 242

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (S/RES/242), one of the most commonly referenced UN resolutions in Middle Eastern politics, was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 22, 1967 in the aftermath of the Six Day War. It was adopted under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter, and was reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 338, adopted after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The resolution calls for the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" (there has been some disagreement about whether this means *all* the territories: see UN Security Council Resolution 242: semantic dispute) and the "[t]ermination of all claims or states of belligerency". It also calls for the mutual recognition by the belligerent parties (Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan) of each other's established states and calls for the establishment of secure and recognized boundaries for all parties.

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# Qatar

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

**Qatar** (Arabic: قطر; IPA: [ˈqɑtˤɑr], local pronunciation: ɡiṭar), officially the **State of Qatar** (Arabic: دولة قطر transliterated as *Dawlat Qatar*), is an Arab emirate in Southwest Asia, occupying the small Qatar Peninsula on the northeasterly coast of the larger Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south; otherwise the Persian Gulf surrounds the state.

## Etymology

The name "Qatar" may derive from the same Arabic root as *qatura*, which means "to exude." The word *Qatura* traces to the Arabic *qatran* meaning "tar" or "resin", which relates to the country's rich resources in petroleum and natural gas.

Other sources say the name may derive from "Qatara", believed to refer to the Qatari town of Zubara, an important trading port and town in the region in ancient times. The word "Qatara" first appeared on Ptolemy's map of the Arabian Peninsula.

In Standard Arabic, the name is pronounced IPA: [ˈqɑtˤɑr], while the local dialect pronounces it ɡiṭar. In English-language broadcast media within Qatar—for example, television commercials for Qatar Airways and advertisements concerning economic development in Qatar—the name is pronounced "KA-tar", with a distinct differentiation between the syllables from the forming of the 't' sound.

## History

<p>دولة قطر <i>Dawlat al-Qaṭar</i> State of Qatar</p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>As Salam al Amiri</i></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Doha
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Qatari
<b>Government</b> - Emir	Constitutional Monarchy Hamad bin Khalifa



Zubara fort, in northeastern Qatar

During the pre-Islamic era, the peninsula was often dominated by various Persian dynasties, the last of which (the Sasanians) included the Qatar peninsula, which they called *Meshmahig* ("Big Island"), in their province of *Bahran/Bahrain* with its capital at *Shirin* (probably, the modern Qatif). This province included the island of Bahrain and the coastal regions of modern Saudi Arabia.

In the Islamic era, Qatar was one of the earliest locales occupied by the Muslims. Qarmatians arrived in the area very early during the Islamic era and spread their influence widely, as they did in the neighboring Hasa region. In

medieval times, Qatar was more often than not independent and a participant in the great Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean commerce. Many races and ideas were introduced into the peninsula from Africa, South and Southeast Asia, as well as the Malay archipelago. Today, the traces of these early interactions with the oceanic world of the Indian Ocean survive in the small minorities of races, peoples, languages and religions, such as the presence of Africans and Shihus.

After centuries-long domination by the Ottoman and British empires, Qatar became an independent state on September 3, 1971.

Although the peninsular land mass that makes up Qatar has sustained humans for thousands of years, for the bulk of its history the arid climate fostered only short-term settlements by nomadic tribes. Clans such as the Al Khalifa and the Al Saud (which would later ascend thrones of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia respectively) swept through the Arabian peninsula and camped on the coasts within small fishing and pearling villages.

The British initially sought out Qatar and the Persian Gulf as an intermediary vantage point *en route* to their colonial interests in India, although the discovery of oil and other hydrocarbons in the early twentieth century would re-invigorate their interest. During the nineteenth century, the time of Britain's formative ventures into the region, the Al Khalifa clan reigned over the Northern Qatari peninsula from the nearby island of Bahrain to the west.

Although Qatar had the legal status of a dependency, resentment festered against the Bahraini Al Khalifas along the eastern seaboard of the Qatari peninsula. In 1867, the Al Khalifas launched a successful effort to quash the Qatari rebels, sending a massive naval force to Wakrah. However, the Bahraini aggression was in violation on the 1820 Anglo-Bahraini Treaty. The diplomatic response of the British to this violation set into motion the political

- Prime Minister	Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al Thani
<b>Independence</b> <sup>1</sup>	
- from the United Kingdom	September 3, 1971
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	11,437 km <sup>2</sup> ( 164th) 4,416 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- May 2008 estimate	1,307,229 ( 148th)
- 2004 census	744,029 ( 159th)
- Density	74/km <sup>2</sup> ( 121st) 192/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$75.224 billion ( 69th)
- Per capita	\$80,870 ( 1st)
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$67.763 billion ( 60th)
- Per capita	\$70,754 ( 3rd)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.875 (high) ( 35th)
<b>Currency</b>	Riyal ( QAR)
<b>Time zone</b>	AST ( UTC+3)
- Summer ( DST)	(not observed) ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.qa
<b>Calling code</b>	+974
<sup>1</sup> Ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-1800s.	

forces that would eventuate in the founding of the state of Qatar. In addition to censuring Bahrain for its breach of agreement, the British Protectorate (per Colonel Lewis Pelly) asked to negotiate with a representative from Qatar. The request carried with it a tacit recognition of Qatar's status as distinct from Bahrain. The Qataris chose as their negotiator the respected entrepreneur and long-time resident of Doha, Muhammed bin Thani. His clan, the Al Thanis, had taken relatively little part in Gulf politics, but the diplomatic foray ensured their participation in the movement towards independence and their hegemony as the future ruling family, a dynasty that continues to this day. The results of the negotiations left Qatar with a new-found sense of political selfhood, although it did not gain official standing as a British protectorate until 1916.

The reach of the British Empire diminished after the Second World War, especially following Indian independence in 1947. Pressure for a British withdrawal from the Arab emirates in the Persian Gulf increased during the 1950s, and the British welcomed Kuwait's declaration of independence in 1961. When Britain officially announced in 1968 that it would disengage politically (though not economically) from the Persian Gulf in three years' time, Qatar joined Bahrain and seven other Trucial States in a federation. Regional disputes, however, quickly compelled Qatar to resign and declare independence from the coalition that would evolve into the seven- emirate United Arab Emirates. On September 3, 1971, Qatar became an independent sovereign state.

In 1991, Qatar played a significant role in the Gulf War, particularly during the Battle of Khafji in which Qatari tanks rolled through the streets of the town providing fire support for Saudi Arabian National Guard units which were fighting with units of the Iraqi Army. Qatar also allowed Coalition troops from Canada to use the country as an airbase to launch aircraft on CAP duty.

Since 1995, Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani has ruled Qatar, seizing control of the country from his father Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani while the latter vacationed in Switzerland. Under Emir Hamad, Qatar has experienced a notable amount of sociopolitical liberalization, including the endorsement of women's suffrage or right to vote, drafting a new constitution, and the launch of Al Jazeera, a leading English and Arabic news source which operates a website and satellite television news channel.

The International Monetary Fund states that Qatar has the highest GDP per capita in the world, followed by Luxembourg. The World Factbook ranks Qatar at second, following Luxembourg.

Qatar served as the headquarters and one of the main launching sites of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In 2005, a suicide-bombing killed a British teacher at the Doha Players Theatre, shocking a country that had not previously experienced acts of terrorism. It is not clear if the bombing was committed by an organised terrorist group, and although the investigation is ongoing there are indications that the attack was the work of an individual, not a group.

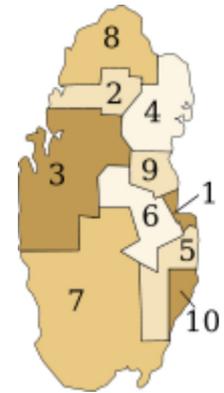
## Administrative divisions



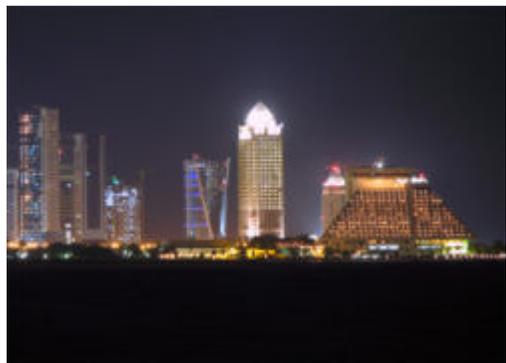
The Emiri Diwan.

Qatar is divided into ten *municipalities* (Arabic: *baladiyah*), also occasionally or rarely translated as *governorates* or *provinces*:

1. Ad Dawhah
2. Al Ghuwariyah
3. Al Jumaliyah
4. Al Khawr
5. Al Wakrah
6. Ar Rayyan
7. Jariyan al Batnah
8. Ash Shamal
9. Umm Salal
10. Mesaieed



## Economy



Qatar's capital, Doha.

Before the discovery of oil, the economy of the Qatari region focused on fishing and pearling. After the introduction of the Japanese cultured pearl onto the world market in the 1920s and 1930s, Qatar's pearling industry faltered. However, the discovery of oil, beginning in the 1940s, completely transformed the state's economy. Now the country has a high standard of living, with many social services offered to its citizens and all the amenities of any modern state.

Qatar's national income primarily derives from oil and natural gas exports. The country has oil estimated at 15 billion barrels (2.4 km<sup>3</sup>), while gas reserves in the giant north field ( South Pars for Iran) which straddles the border with Iran and are almost as large as the peninsula itself are estimated to be between 800 trillion cubic feet (23,000 km<sup>3</sup>) to 80 trillion cubic feet (2,300 km<sup>3</sup>) (1 trillion cubic foot is equivalent to about 80 million barrels (13,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil). Qatar is sometimes referred to as the Saudi Arabia of natural gas. Qataris' wealth and standard of living compare well with those of Western European states; Qatar has the highest GDP per capita in the Arab World according to the International Monetary Fund (2006) and the highest GDP per capita in the world

according to the CIA (2007), though it was previously the United Arab Emirates that was the wealthiest Arab country according to the University of Pennsylvania (2003). With no income tax, Qatar is also one of the two least-taxed sovereign states in the world (the other is Bahrain).



Doha's bay

The Aspire Tower, built for the Asian Games, is visible across Doha, and is now a hotel. While oil and gas will probably remain the backbone of Qatar's economy for some time to come, the country seeks to stimulate the private sector and develop a "knowledge economy". In 2004, it established the Qatar Science & Technology Park to attract and serve technology-based companies and entrepreneurs, from overseas and within Qatar. Qatar also established Education City, which consists of international colleges. For the 15<sup>th</sup> Asian Games in Doha, it established Sports City, consisting of Khalifa stadium, the Aspire Sports Academy, aquatic centres, exhibition centres and many other sports related buildings and centres. Following the success of the Asian Games, Doha kicked off its official bid to host the 2016 Summer Olympics in October of 2007.



Aspire Tower, located in the Doha Sports City.

Qatar also plans to build an "entertainment city" in the future.

Qatar is aiming to become a role model for economic and social transformation in the region. Large scale investment in all social and economic sectors will also lead to the development of a strong financial market.

The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) provides financial institutions with a world class financial services platform situated in an economy founded on the development of its hydrocarbons resources. It has been created with a long term perspective to support the development of Qatar and the wider region, develop local and regional markets, and strengthen the links between the energy based economies and global financial markets.

Apart from Qatar itself, which needs to raise the capacity of its financial services to support more than \$130 billion worth of projects, the QFC also provides a conduit for financial services providers to access nearly \$1 trillion of investment across the GCC as a whole over the next decade.

The largest project ever in Qatar, the new town of Lusail, is under construction.

## Geography



Desert in Qatar

The Qatari peninsula juts 100 miles (161 km) north into the Persian Gulf from Saudi Arabia and is slightly smaller than Connecticut. Much of the country consists of a low, barren plain, covered with sand. To the southeast lies the spectacular *Khor al Adaid* (“Inland Sea”), an area of rolling sand dunes surrounding an inlet of the Gulf. There are mild winters and very hot, humid summers.

The highest point in Qatar is Qurayn Abu al Bawl at 103 metres (340 ft) in the Jebel Dukhan to the west, a range of low limestone outcrops running north-south from Zikrit through Umm Bab to the southern border. The Jebel Dukhan area also contains Qatar’s main onshore oil deposits, while the natural gas fields lie offshore, to the northwest of the peninsula.

## Population

Nearly all Qataris profess Islam. Besides ethnic Arabs, much of the population migrated from various nations to work in the country’s oil industry. Arabic serves as the official language. However, English as well as many other languages are spoken.

Expatriates form the majority of Qatar’s residents. The petrochemical industry has attracted people from all around the world. Most of the expatriates come from South Asia and from non-oil-rich Arab states. Because a large percentage of the expatriates are male, Qatar has a heavily skewed sex ratio, with 1.8528 males per female.

In July 2007, the country had a growing population of approximately 907,229 people, of whom approximately 350,000 were believed to be citizens. Of the citizen population, Sunni Muslims form a majority, while the Shi'a Muslims count up to 20-23% of the population. The Wahhabi Muslims form the third group in size, probably no more than 10% of the population, to include the ruling dynasty and a large number of the elite families. The ancient Shia community of Qatar are historically related to the Shia majority in Bahrain and the al-Hasa coastal province of Saudi Arabia, while the Wahhabis arrived from Najd only in the 19th century.

The majority of the estimated 800,000 non-citizens are individuals from South and South East Asian and Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts in most cases without their accompanying family members. They are of the following faiths: Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Bahá'ís. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country but in 2008 the government allowed some churches to conduct mass. In March 2008 the Roman Catholic church “Our Lady of the Rosary” was consecrated in Doha.



Map of Qatar

Year	Month	Population
1908 est.		26,000 - 27,000
1939 est.		28,000
late 1960s		70,000
1986		369,079
1997		522,023
2000		744,483
2001		769,152
2002		793,341
2003		817,052
2004		840,290
2005		863,051
2006		885,359
2007		907,229
2008		1,035,118
2008	May	>1,400,000

references:

## Culture

Qatari culture (Music, Art, Dress, Cuisine) is extremely similar to that of other Gulf Arab countries. Arab tribes from Saudi Arabia migrated to Qatar, and other places in the Gulf, therefore, the culture in the Gulf region varies little from country to country.

Qatar explicitly uses Sunni law as the basis of its government, and the vast majority of its citizens follow Hanbali Madhhab. Hanbali (Arabic: حنبلى) is one of the four schools (Madhhabs) of Fiqh or religious law within Sunni Islam (The other three are Hanafi, Maliki and Shafii). Sunni Muslims believe that all four schools have "correct guidance", and the differences between them lie not in the fundamentals of faith, but in finer judgments and jurisprudence, which are a result of the independent reasoning of the imams and the scholars who followed them. Because their individual methodologies of interpretation and extraction from the

primary sources (rusul) were different, they came to different judgments on particular matters. Shi'as comprise 10% of the Muslim population in Qatar.

## Qatari law

When contrasted with other Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, for instance, Qatar has comparatively liberal laws, but is still not as liberal as some of its neighbours like UAE or Bahrain. Qatar is a civil law jurisdiction. However, Shari'a or Islamic law is applied to aspects of family law, inheritance and certain criminal acts. Women can legally drive in Qatar, whereas they may not in Saudi Arabia and there is a strong emphasis in equality and human rights brought by the HRA.

The country has undergone a period of liberalization and modernisation during the reign of the current Emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who came to power in 1995. Under his rule, Qatar became the first Arab country in the Persian Gulf where women gained the right to vote as well as holding senior positions in government. Also, women can dress mostly as they please in public (although in practice local Qatari women generally don the black abaya). Before the liberalisation, it was taboo for men to wear shorts in public. The laws of Qatar tolerate alcohol to a certain extent. However, public bars and nightclubs in Qatar operate only in expensive hotels and clubs, much like in the UAE, though the number of establishments has yet to equal that of UAE. Expatriates resident in Qatar are eligible to receive liquor permits permitting them to purchase alcohol for personal use through Qatar Distribution Company, the exclusive importer and retailer for alcohol in Qatar. Qatar has further been liberalised due to the 15th Asian Games, but is cautious of becoming too liberal in their law making the country a viable weekend immigration from their western neighbour. Overall Qatar has yet to reach the more western laws of UAE or Bahrain, and though plans are being made for more development, the government is cautious.

## Education



The Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar

In recent years Qatar has placed great emphasis on education. Along with the country's free healthcare, citizens enjoy free education from kindergarten through to university. Qatar University was founded in 1973. More recently, with the support of the Qatar Foundation, some major American universities have opened branch campuses in Education City, Qatar. These include Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Cornell University's Weill Medical College. In addition, Northwestern University will offer undergraduate programs in communication and journalism starting in fall 2008. In 2004, Qatar established the Qatar Science & Technology Park at Education City to link those universities with industry. Education City is also home to a fully accredited International Baccalaureate school, Qatar Academy. Two Canadian institutions, the College of the North Atlantic and the University of Calgary, also operate campuses in Doha.

Hamad Medical Corporation is the primary, publicly funded healthcare provider for the State of Qatar. It has formed partnerships with Western healthcare concerns, including University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre and Toronto's Sick Children's Hospital.

In November 2002, the Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani created the Supreme Education Council. The Council directs and controls education for all ages from the pre-school level through the university level, including the “Education for a New Era” reform initiative.

The Emir’s second wife, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, has been instrumental in new education initiatives in Qatar. She chairs the Qatar Foundation, sits on the board of Qatar’s Supreme Education Council, and is a major driving force behind the importation of western expertise into the education system, particularly at the college level.

## Communications

Qatar has a modern Telecommunication system centered in Doha. Tropospheric scatter to Bahrain; microwave radio relay to Saudi Arabia and UAE; submarine cable to Bahrain and UAE; satellite earth stations - 2 Intelsat (1 Atlantic Ocean and 1 Indian Ocean) and 1 Arabsat. People can call to Qatar using their submarine cable, satellite or using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol); however, Qtel has interfered with VoIP systems in the past, and Skype's website has been blocked before. Following complaints from individuals, the website has been unblocked; and Paltalk has been permanently blocked.

Qtel’s ISP branch, Internet Qatar, uses SmartFilter to block websites they deem inappropriate to Qatari interests and morality.

Vodafone, in partnership with Qatar Foundation, has been announced to be opening in Qatar in mid 2008.

Al Jazeera (Arabic: الجزيرة, al-ğazīrā, [al.dʒa'ziː.ra], meaning “The Island”) is a television network headquartered in Doha, Qatar. Al Jazeera initially launched as an Arabic news and current affairs satellite TV channel of the same name, but has since expanded into a network of several specialty TV channels. Print media is going through expansion, with over 3 English dailies and Arabic titles. The magazine segment is dominated by Qatar Today, which is the country's only news, business monthly magazine. It is published by Oryx Advertising Co, which is the largest magazine publisher of the country. The group also brings out several titles like Qatar Al Youm, Qatar's only Arabic monthly business magazine, Woman Today, the only working women's magazine and GLAM, the only fashion title.

## Human rights and labour

According to the US State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report, men and women who are lured into Qatar by promises of high wages are often forced into underpaid labor. The report states that Qatari laws against forced labor are rarely enforced and that labor laws often result in the detention of victims in deportation centers pending the completion of legal proceedings. The report ranks Qatar at Tier-3, which groups countries that neither satisfy the minimum standards nor demonstrate a significant effort to come into compliance.

The Government of Qatar maintains that it is the setting the benchmark when it comes to Human Rights and treatment of labourers.

Despite the progress made by the government of Qatar, allegations of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment continue to be reported, albeit sporadically, and there are not adequate systems in place, in practice, to ensure prompt, independent investigation of allegations

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of torture or ill-treatment and adequate remedy or redress for victims.

There are indications that the police in Qatar are reluctant to treat violence against women, particularly violence within the family, as a criminal matter although such violence constitutes an assault under strict application of the law. This police reluctance to address the issue using the criminal law, it is suggested, tends to deter women from coming forward to report violence to which they are subject within the home.

Qatari contracting agency Barwa is constructing a residential area for laborers known as Barwa Al Baraha (also called Workers City). The project was launched after a recent scandal in Dubai's Labour 'Slave' camps. The project aims to provide a reasonable standard of living as defined by the new Human Rights Legislation. The Barwa Al Baraha will cost around \$1.1 billion and will be a completely integrated city in the Industrial area of Doha. Along with 4.25 square metres of living space per person, the residential project will provide parks, recreational areas, malls, and shops for labourers. Phase one of the project is set to be completed at the end of 2008 while all phases will be complete by mid 2010.

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar>"

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# Saudi Arabia

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

The **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** or **KSA** (Arabic: *المملكة العربية السعودية*, *al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya as-Su'ūdiyya*) is the largest country of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Jordan on the northwest, Iraq on the north and northeast, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates on the east, Oman on the southeast, and Yemen on the south. The Persian Gulf lies to the northeast and the Red Sea to its west. It has an estimated population of 27.6 million, and its size is approximately 2,150,000 square km (830,000 square miles).

The Kingdom is sometimes called "The Land of The Two Holy Mosques" in reference to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest places in Islam. In English, it is most commonly referred to as **Saudi Arabia** (pronounced /ˈsɑːdi/ or /ˈsaʊdi əˈreɪbiə/). The Kingdom was founded by Abdul-Aziz bin Saud, whose efforts began in 1902 when he captured the Al-Saud's ancestral home of Riyadh, and culminated in 1932 with the proclamation, and recognition of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is the world's leading petroleum exporter and petroleum exports fuel the Saudi economy. Oil accounts for more than 90 percent of exports and nearly 75 percent of government revenues, facilitating the creation of a welfare state, which the government has found difficult to fund during periods of low oil prices. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have repeatedly expressed concern about the state of human rights in Saudi Arabia, although these concerns have been dismissed by the Saudi government.

## History

<p>المملكة العربية السعودية <i>al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya as-Su'ūdiyya</i> <b>Kingdom of Saudi Arabia</b></p>	
	
<p><b>Motto:</b> "There is no god but God; Muhammad is His messenger" (the Kalima)</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> " Aash Al Maleek" "Long live the King"</p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Riyadh
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Saudi, Saudi Arabian



The founder of modern Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz, converses with U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on board a ship returning from the Yalta Conference in 1945

Although the region in which the country stands today has an ancient history, the emergence of the Saudi dynasty began in central Arabia in 1744. That year, Muhammad ibn Saud, the ruler of the town of Ad-Dir'iyyah near Riyadh, joined forces with a cleric, Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, to create a new political entity. This alliance formed in the 18th century remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today. Over the next 150 years, the fortunes of the Saud family rose and fell several times as Saudi rulers contended with Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and other Arabian families for control on the peninsula (see First Saudi State and Second Saudi State). The third and current Saudi state was founded in the early 20th century by King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud (known internationally as *Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud*).

In 1902 at the age of only 22, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud re-captured Riyadh, the Al-Saud dynasty's ancestral capital, from the rival Al Rashid family. Continuing his conquests, Abdul Aziz subdued Al-Hasa, Al-Qatif, the rest of Nejd, and Hejaz between 1913 and 1926. On 8 January 1926 Abdul Aziz bin Saud became the King of Hejaz. On 29 January 1927 he took the title King of Nejd (his previous Nejd title was Sultan). By the Treaty of Jeddah, signed on 20 May 1927, the United Kingdom recognized the independence of Abdul Aziz's realm, then known as the **Kingdom of Nejd and Hejaz**. In 1932, the principal regions of Al-Hasa, Qatif, Nejd and Hejaz were unified to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abdul Aziz's military and political successes were not mirrored economically until vast reserves of oil were discovered in March 1938. Development programmes, which were delayed due to the onset of the Second World War in 1939, began in earnest in 1946 and by 1949 production was in full swing. Oil has provided Saudi Arabia with economic prosperity and a great deal of leverage in the international community.

Prior to his death in 1953 Abdul Aziz, aware of the difficulties facing other regional absolute rulers reliant on extended family networks, attempted to regulate the succession.

Saud succeeded to the throne on his father's death in 1953. However, by the early 1960s the Kingdom was in jeopardy due to Saud's economic mismanagement and failure to deal effectively with a regional challenge from Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. As a consequence Saud was deposed in favour of Faisal

<b>Government</b>	Absolute monarchy
- King	Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz
- Crown Prince	Sultan bin Abdul Aziz
<b>Establishment</b>	
- Kingdom declared	January 8, 1926
- Recognized	May 20, 1927
- Unified	September 23, 1932
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	2,149,690 km <sup>2</sup> ( 14th) 829,996 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	27,601,038 ( 46th)
- Density	11/km <sup>2</sup> ( 205th) 29/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$446 billion ( 27th)
- Per capita	\$21,200 ( 41st)
<b>HDI (2004)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.812 ( <b>high</b> ) ( 61)
<b>Currency</b>	Riyal ( SAR)
<b>Time zone</b>	AST ( UTC+3)
- Summer ( DST)	(not observed) ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.sa
<b>Calling code</b>	+966
<small><sup>1</sup> Population estimate includes 5,576,076 non-nationals.</small>	

in 1964.

Intra-family rivalry was one of the factors that led to the assassination of Faisal by his nephew, Prince Faisal bin Musa'id, in 1975. He was succeeded by King Khalid until 1982 and then by King Fahd. When Fahd died in 2005, his half-brother Abdullah ascended to the throne.

## Geography

The kingdom occupies about 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula. In 2000 Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed an agreement to settle their long-running border dispute. A significant length of the country's southern borders with the United Arab Emirates, and Oman, are not precisely defined or marked, so the exact size of the country remains unknown. The Saudi government's estimate is 2,217,949 km<sup>2</sup> (856,356 miles<sup>2</sup>). Other reputable estimates vary between 1,960,582 km<sup>2</sup> (756,934 mi<sup>2</sup>) and 2,240,000 km<sup>2</sup> (864,869 mi<sup>2</sup>). The kingdom is commonly listed as the world's 14th largest state.

Saudi Arabia's geography is varied. From the western coastal region ( Tihamah), the land rises from sea level to a peninsula-long mountain range (Jabal al- Hejaz) beyond which lies the plateau of Nejd in the centre. The southwestern 'Asir region has mountains as high as 3,000 m (9,840 ft) and is known for having the greenest and freshest climate in all of the country, one that attracts many Saudis to resorts such as Abha in the summer months. The east is primarily rocky or sandy lowland continuing to the shores of the Persian Gulf. The geographically hostile Rub' al Khali ("Empty Quarter") desert along the country's imprecisely defined southern borders contains almost no life.



Mostly uninhabited, much of the nation's landmass consists of desert and semi-arid regions, with a dwindling traditional Bedouin population. In these parts of the country, vegetation is limited to weeds, xerophytic herbs and shrubs. Less than two percent of the kingdom's total area is arable land. Population centers are mainly located along the eastern and western coasts and densely populated interior oases such as Hofuf and Buraydah. In some extended areas, primarily the Rub' al-Khali and the Arabian Desert, there is no population whatsoever, although the petroleum industry is constructing a few planned communities there. Saudi Arabia has no permanent year-round rivers or lakes; however, its coastline extends for 2640 km (1640 miles) and, on the Red Sea side, offers world-class coral reefs, including those in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Native animals include the ibex, wildcats, baboons, wolves, and hyenas in the mountainous highlands. Small birds are found in the oases. The coastal area on the Red Sea with its coral reefs has a rich marine life.

## Climate

Extreme heat and aridity are characteristic of most of Saudi Arabia. It is one of the few places in the world where summer temperatures above 50 °C (122 °F) have been recorded, 51.7 °C (124 °F) being the highest ever recorded temperature. In winter, frost or snow can occur in the interior and the higher mountains, although this only occurs once or twice in a decade. Lowest ever recorded temperature is -12.0 °C recorded at Turaif. The average winter temperature range is 8° to 20 °C (47° to 68 °F) in January in interior cities such as Riyadh and 19° to 29 °C (66° to 83 °F) in Jeddah on the Red Sea coast. The average summer range

in July is 27° to 43 °C (81° to 109 °F) in Riyadh and 27° to 38 °C (80° to 100 °F) in Jeddah. Nighttime temperatures in the central deserts can be famously chilly even in summer, as the sand gives up daytime heat rapidly once the sun has set. Annual precipitation is usually sparse (up to 100 mm or 4 inches in most regions), although sudden downpours can lead to violent flash floods in wadis. Annual rainfall in Riyadh averages 100 mm (4 inches) and falls almost exclusively between January and May; the average in Jeddah is 54 mm (2.1 inches) and occurs between November and January.

## Government



King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia

The central institution of the Saudi Arabian government is the Saudi monarchy. The *Basic Law of Government* adopted in 1992 declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the sons and grandsons of the first king, Abd Al Aziz Al Saud. It also claims that the Qur'an is the constitution of the country, which is governed on the basis of the Sharia (Islamic Law). According to The Economist's Democracy Index, the Saudi government is the ninth most authoritarian regime in the world.

There are no recognized political parties or national elections, except the local elections which were held in the year 2005 when participation was reserved for male citizens only. The king's powers are theoretically limited within the bounds of Shari'a and other Saudi traditions. He also must retain a consensus of the Saudi royal family, religious leaders (*ulema*), and other important elements in Saudi society. The Saudi government spreads Islam by funding construction of mosques and Qur'an schools around the world. The leading members of the royal family choose the king from among themselves with the subsequent approval of the ulema.

Saudi kings have gradually developed a central government. Since 1953, the Council of Ministers, appointed by the king, has advised on the formulation of general policy and directed the activities of the growing bureaucracy. This council consists of a prime minister, the first prime minister and twenty ministers.

Legislation is by resolution of the Council of Ministers, ratified by royal decree, and must be compatible with the Shari'a. A 150-member Consultative Assembly, appointed by the King, has limited legislative rights. Justice is administered according to the Shari'a by a system of religious courts whose judges are appointed by the king on the recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council, composed of twelve senior jurists. Independence of the judiciary is protected by law. The king acts as the highest court of appeal and has the power to pardon. Access to high officials (usually at a *majlis*; a public audience) and the right to petition them directly are well-established traditions.

The combination of relatively high oil prices and exports led to a revenues windfall for Saudi Arabia during 2004 and early 2005. For 2004 as a whole, Saudi Arabia earned about \$116 billion in net oil export revenues, up 35 percent from 2003 revenue levels. Saudi net oil export revenues are forecast to increase in 2005 and 2006, to \$150 billion and \$154 billion, respectively, mainly due to higher oil prices. Increased oil prices and consequent revenues since the price collapse of 1998 have significantly improved Saudi Arabia's economic situation, with real GDP growth of 5.2 percent in 2004, and forecasts of 5.7% and 4.8% growth for 2005 and 2006, respectively.

For fiscal year 2004, Saudi Arabia originally had been expecting a budget deficit. However, this was based on an extremely conservative price assumption of

\$19 per barrel for Saudi oil and an assumed production of 7.7 Mbbl/d (1,220,000 m<sup>3</sup>/d). Both of these estimates turned out to be far below actual levels. As a result, as of mid-December 2004, the Saudi Finance Ministry was expecting a huge budget surplus of \$26.1 billion, on budget revenues of \$104.8 billion (nearly double the country's original estimate) and expenditures of \$78.6 billion (28 percent above the approved budget levels). This surplus is being used for several purposes, including: paying down the Kingdom's public debt (to \$164 billion from \$176 billion at the start of 2004); extra spending on education and development projects; increased security expenditures (possibly an additional \$2.5 billion dollars in 2004; see below) due to threats from terrorists; and higher payments to Saudi citizens through subsidies (for housing, education, health care, etc.). For 2005, Saudi Arabia is assuming a balanced budget, with revenues and expenditures of \$74.6 billion each.

In spite of the recent surge in its oil income, Saudi Arabia continues to face serious long-term economic challenges, including high rates of unemployment (12 percent of Saudi nationals), one of the world's fastest population growth rates, and the consequent need for increased government spending. All of these place pressures on Saudi oil revenues. The Kingdom also is facing serious security threats, including a number of terrorist attacks (on foreign workers, primarily) in 2003 and 2004. In response, the Saudis reportedly have ramped up spending in the security area (reportedly by 50 percent in 2004, from \$5.5 billion in 2003). Saudi Arabia's per capita oil export revenues remain far below high levels reached during the 1970s and early 1980s. In 2007, Saudi Arabia's citizens earned around \$20,700 per person, versus \$22,589 in 1980, but it is catching up. This 80 percent decline in real per capita oil export revenues since 1980 is in large part because Saudi Arabia's young population has nearly tripled since 1980, while oil export revenues in real terms have fallen by over 40 percent (despite recent increases). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has faced nearly two decades of heavy budget and trade deficits, the expensive 1990-1991 war with Iraq, and total public debt of around \$175 billion. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia does have extensive foreign assets (around \$110 billion) which provide a substantial fiscal "cushion."

Saudi municipal elections took place in 2005 and some commentators saw this as a first tentative step towards the introduction of democratic processes in the Kingdom, including the legalization of political parties. Other analysts of the Saudi political scene were more skeptical.

## Law

The Basic Law, in 1992, declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the progeny of King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud. It also declared the Qur'an as the constitution of the country, governed on the basis of Islamic law.

Criminal cases are tried under Sharia courts in the country. These courts exercise authority over the entire population including foreigners (regardless of religion). Cases involving small penalties are tried in Shari'a summary courts. More serious crimes are adjudicated in Shari'a courts of common pleas. Courts of appeal handle appeals from Shari'a courts.

Civil cases may also be tried under Sharia courts with one exception: Shia may try such cases in their own courts. Other civil proceedings, including those involving claims against the Government and enforcement of foreign judgments, are held before specialized administrative tribunals, such as the Commission for the Settlement of Labor Disputes and the Board of Grievances.

Main sources of Saudi law are Hanbali fiqh as set out in a number of specified scholarly treatises by authoritative jurists, other schools of law, state regulations

and royal decrees (where these are relevant), and custom and practice.

The Saudi legal system prescribes capital punishment or corporal punishment, including amputations of hands and feet for certain crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, drug smuggling, homosexual activity, and adultery. The courts may impose less severe punishments, such as floggings, for less serious crimes against public morality such as drunkenness. Murder, accidental death and bodily harm are open to punishment from the victim's family. Retribution may be sought in kind or through blood money. The blood money payable for a woman's accidental death is half as much as that for a man. The main reason for this is that, according to Islamic law, men are expected to be providers for their families and therefore are expected to earn more money in their lifetimes. The blood money from a man would be expected to sustain his family, for at least a short time. Honor killings are also not punished as severely as murder. This generally stems from the fact that honour killings are within a family, and done to compensate for some dishonorable act committed. Slavery was abolished in 1962.

## Human rights

Several international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Committee have issued reports critical of the Saudi legal system and its human rights record in various political, legal, and social areas, especially its severe limitations on the rights of women. The Saudi government typically dismisses such reports as being outright lies or asserts that its actions are based on its adherence to Islamic law.

In 2002, the United Nations Committee against Torture criticized Saudi Arabia over the amputations and floggings it carries out under the Shari'a. The Saudi delegation responded defending its legal traditions held since the inception of Islam in the region 1300 years ago and rejected "interference" in its legal system.

Saudi Arabia is also the only country in the world where women are banned from driving on public roads. (Women may drive off-road and in private housing compounds - some of which extend to many square miles.) The ban may be lifted soon.

The Government views its interpretation of Islamic law as its sole source of guidance on human rights. In 2000, the Government approved the October legislation, which the Government claimed would address some of its obligations under the Convention Against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

"The state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah."

– Basic Law, Chapter 5, Article 26.

The first independent human rights organization, the National Society for Human Rights was established in 2004. The Saudi Government is an active censor of Internet reception within its borders. A Saudi blogger, Fouad al-Farhan, was jailed for five months in solitary confinement in December, 2007, without charges,

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after criticizing Saudi religious, business and media figures.

## Economy

Saudi Arabia's economy is Petroleum-based; roughly 75% of budget revenues and 90% of export earnings come from the oil industry. The oil industry comprises about 45% of Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product, compared with 40% from the private sector (see below). Saudi Arabia officially has about 260 billion barrels ( $4.1 \times 10^{10}$  m<sup>3</sup>) of oil reserves, comprising about 24% of the world's proven total petroleum reserves.

The government is attempting to promote growth in the private sector by privatizing industries such as power and telecom. Saudi Arabia announced plans to begin privatizing the electricity companies in 1999, which followed the ongoing privatization of the telecommunications company. Shortages of water and rapid population growth may constrain government efforts to increase self-sufficiency in agricultural products.

In the 1990s, Saudi Arabia experienced a significant contraction of oil revenues combined with a high rate of population growth. Per capita income fell from a high of \$11,700 at the height of the oil boom in 1981 to \$6,300 with in 1998. Recent oil price increases have helped boost per capita GDP to \$17,000 in 2007 dollars, or about \$7,400 adjusted for inflation.

Recent oil price increases have triggered a second oil boom, pushing Saudi Arabia's budget surplus to \$28 billion (110SR billion) in 2005. Tadawul (the Saudi stock market Index) finished 2004 with a massive 76.23% to close at 4437.58 points. Market capitalization was up 110.14% from a year earlier to stand at \$157.3 billion (589.93SR billion), which makes it the biggest stock market in the Middle East.

OPEC limits its member's oil production based on its "proven reserves." The higher their reserves, the more OPEC allows them to produce. Saudi Arabia's published reserves have shown little change since 1980, with the main exception being an increase of about 100 billion barrels ( $1.6 \times 10^{10}$  m<sup>3</sup>) between 1987 and 1988. Some have suggested that Saudi Arabia is greatly exaggerating its reserves and may soon show production declines (see peak oil).

To diversify the economy, Saudi Arabia launched a new city on the western coast with investments exceeding 26.6 billion dollars. The city which is named " King Abdullah Economic City" will be built near al-Rabegh industrial city north to Jeddah. The new city, where construction work started in December 2005, includes a port which is the largest port of the kingdom. Extending along a coastline of 35 km, the city will also include petrochemical, pharmaceutical, tourism, finance and education and research areas.

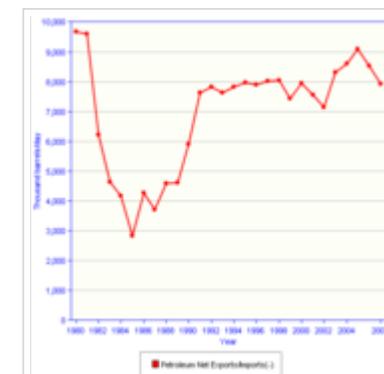
Saudi Arabia officially became a World Trade Organization member in December 2005.

## Development

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Aramco, the Saudi national oil company, whose main offices are in Dhahran



Saudi Arabia is the largest exporter of petroleum in the world

Saudi Arabia is one of the few fastest growing countries in the world with a high per capita income of \$20,700 (2007), Saudi Arabia will be launching six economic cities ( King Abdullah Economic City) which will be completed by the year 2020. These six new industrialized cities will diversify the economy of Saudi Arabia, and will also increase the per capita income to a high level. The King of Saudi Arabia has announced that the per capita income is forecast, to rise from \$ 15,000 in 2006 to \$33,500 in 2020. The cities will be spread around Saudi Arabia to promote diversification for each region and their economy, and the cities will contribute \$ 150 billion to the GDP.

However the urban areas of Riyadh and Jeddah will contribute \$287 billion dollars by the year 2020.

## Foreign labour

Despite the government's efforts to promote Saudization, many men and women from South, South East (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka), East Asia, East Africa (Egypt) and the Middle East continue to seek work in Saudi Arabia. There are also some people from North America, South America, and Europe. Hundreds of thousands of low- skilled workers and skilled workers from regions of the developing world migrate to Saudi Arabia, sometimes only for a short period of time, to work. Although exact figures are not known, skilled experts in the banking and services professions seek work in the Kingdom.

## Demographics

Saudi Arabia's population as of July 2006 is estimated to be about 27,019,731, including about 5,576,076 resident foreigners. Until the 1960s, a majority of the population was nomadic; but presently more than 95% of the population is settled, due to rapid economic and urban growth. As recently as the 1950s, the Saudi Arabia's slave population was estimated at 450,000 — 20% of the population. Slavery was finally abolished in 1962. The birth rate is 29.56 births per 1,000 people. The death rate is 2.62 deaths per 1,000 people. Some cities and oases have densities of more than 1,000 people per square kilometer (2,600/sq mi).

Around 85 percent of Saudis are ethnically Arab. Approximately 12% of the population is South Asian or of South Asian ancestry, including Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. In addition, there are some citizens of Asian and sub-Saharan/East African ancestry. Many Arabs from nearby countries are employed in the kingdom. There are over seven million migrants from countries all around the world, including (including non-Muslims): Indian: 1.4 million, Bangladeshi: 1 million, Filipino: 950,000, Pakistani: 900,000, Egyptian: 900,000, Yemeni: 800,000, Indonesian: 500,000, Sri Lankan: 350,000, Sudanese: 250,000, Syrian: 100,000 and Turkish: 80,000. There are around 100,000 Westerners in Saudi Arabia, most of whom live in compounds or gated communities.

Saudi Arabia expelled 800,000 Yemenis in 1990 and 1991 to punish Yemen for its opposition to the war against Iraq. An estimated 240,000 Palestinians are living in Saudi Arabia. They are not allowed to hold or even apply for Saudi citizenship, as the new law passed by Saudi Arabia's Council of Ministers in October 2004 (which entitles expatriates of all nationalities who have resided in the kingdom for ten years to apply for citizenship, with priority being given to holders of degrees in various scientific fields) has one glaring exception: Palestinians will not be allowed to benefit from the new law because of Arab League instructions barring the Arab states from granting them citizenship in order "to avoid dissolution of their identity and protect their right to return to their homeland."

The majority of the population adheres to a theological interpretation within Islam most commonly known as Salafism or Wahhabism. The Shia population of the country is estimated at around 15-25 percent, primarily in the eastern provinces on the Gulf, southwestern provinces bordering Yemen, Makkah and particularly, Medina, as well as other larger cities in the Kingdom.

## Education

When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, education was not accessible to everyone and limited to individualized instruction at religious schools in mosques in urban areas. These schools taught Islamic law and basic literacy skills. By the end of the century, Saudi Arabia had a nationwide educational system providing free training from preschool through university to all citizens. The modern Saudi educational system provides quality instruction in diverse fields of modern and traditional arts and sciences. This diversity helps meet the Kingdom's growing need for highly-educated citizens to build on its rapid progress.

The primary education system began in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. By 1945, King Abdulaziz bin Abdelrahman Al-Saud, the country's founder, had initiated an extensive program to establish schools in the Kingdom. Six years later, in 1951, the country had 226 schools with 29,887 students. In 1954, the Ministry of Education was established, headed by then Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz as the first Minister of Education. The first university, now known as King Saud University, was founded in Riyadh in 1957.

Today, Saudi Arabia's nationwide public educational system comprises twenty universities, more than 24,000 schools, and a large number of colleges and other educational and training institutions. The system provides students with free education, books and health services and is open to every Saudi. Over 25 percent of the annual State budget is for education including vocational training. The Kingdom has also worked on scholarship programs to send students overseas to the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Malaysia and other nations. Currently thousands of students are being sent to higher-educations programs every year.

The study of Islam remains at the core of the Saudi educational system. The Islamic aspect of the Saudi national curriculum is examined in a recent report by Freedom House. The report found that in religious education classes (in any religious school), children are taught to deprecate other religions, in addition to other branches of Islam. The Saudi religious studies curriculum is taught outside the Kingdom in madrasah throughout the world.

## Sports

Men can often be found playing sports. Women rarely participate in sports, and always away from the presence of men; this often leads to indoor gyms. Even though football is the most popular sport, Saudi Arabia has recently participated in the Summer Olympic Games and in international competitions in volleyball and other sports. The Saudi Arabian national youth baseball team has also participated in the Little League World Series. The Saudi Arabia national football team is often most known for being in four consecutive times in the FIFA World Cup and six times in the AFC Asian Cup, which the team won three times and was runner-up three times. Some popular football players include Majed Abdullah, Mohamed Al-Deayea, Sami Al-Jaber, and Saeed Al-Owairan.

## Culture

Saudi Arabian culture mainly revolves around the religion of Islam. Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, are located in the country. Five times every day, Muslims are called to prayer from the minarets of mosques which are scattered around the country. The weekend begins on Thursday due to Friday being the holiest day for Muslims. All Muslim countries have a Thursday-Friday or Friday-Saturday weekend. The public practice of any religion other than Islam, including Christianity and Judaism, the presence of churches, and possession of non-Islamic religious materials is not allowed except in Aramco compounds in which many expatriates attend church services. Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage is celebrated at the annual Jenadriyah cultural festival.

However, secret negotiations are rumored to be taking place between the Vatican and Saudi Arabia regarding authorization to build Catholic Churches in the Kingdom.

## Music and dance

One of Saudi Arabia's most compelling folk rituals is the Al Ardha, the country's national dance. This sword dance is based on ancient Bedouin traditions: drummers beat out a rhythm and a poet chants verses while sword-carrying men dance shoulder to shoulder. Al-sihba folk music, from the Hejaz, has its origins in al-Andalus. In Mecca, Medina and Jeddah, dance and song incorporate the sound of the mizmar, an oboe-like woodwind instrument in the performance of the mizmar dance. The drum is also an important instrument according to traditional and tribal customs. Samri is popular traditional form of music and dance in which poetry is sung.

## Dress

Saudi Arabian dress follows strictly the principles of hijab (the Islamic principle of modesty, especially in dress). The predominantly loose and flowing but covering garments are helpful in Saudi Arabia's desert climate. Traditionally, men usually wear an ankle-length shirt woven from wool or cotton (known as a thawb), with a keffiyeh (a large checkered square of cotton held in place by a cord coil) or a ghutra (a plain white square made of finer cotton, also held in place by a cord coil) worn on the head. For rare chilly days, Saudi men wear a camel-hair cloak ( bisht) over the top. Women's clothes are decorated with tribal motifs, coins, sequins, metallic thread, and appliques. Women are required to wear an abaya or modest clothing when in public.

## Food

Islamic dietary laws forbid the eating of pork and the drinking of alcohol, and this law is enforced strictly throughout Saudi Arabia. Arabic unleavened bread, or khobz, is eaten with almost all meals. Other staples include lamb, grilled chicken, falafel (deep-fried chickpea balls), shawarma (spit-cooked sliced lamb), and Ful medames (a paste of fava beans, garlic and lemon). Traditional coffeehouses used to be ubiquitous, but are now being displaced by food-hall style cafes.



Street view of Mecca



A recreation park in Riyadh

Arabic tea is also a famous custom, which is used in both casual and formal meetings between friends, family and even strangers. The tea is black (without milk) and has herbal flavoring that comes in many variations.

## Film and theatre

Public theatres and cinemas are prohibited, as Wahhabi tradition deems those institutions to be incompatible with Islam. However, an IMAX theatre is available, and in private compounds such as Dhahran and Ras Tanura public theaters can be found, but often are more popular for local music, arts, and theatre productions rather than the exhibition of motion pictures. Recently, plans for some cinemas that will be allowed to feature Arabic cartoons for women and children were announced. DVDs, including American and British movies, are legal and widely available.

## Literature

Some Saudi novelists have had their books published in Beirut, Lebanon, because of censorship in Saudi Arabia. Despite signs of increasing openness, Saudi novelists and artists in film, theatre, and the visual arts face greater restrictions on their freedom of expression than in the West. Contemporary Saudi novelists include:

- Abdul Rahman Munif (exiled, now deceased)
- Yousef Al-Mohaimed
- Abdu Khal
- Turki al-Hamad (subject of a fatwā and death threats)
- Ali al-Domaini (in jail)
- Ahmed Abodehman (now writes in French)
- Raja'a Alem
- Abdullah Al-Qasemi
- Rajaa Al Sanie, author of best-selling novel Girls of Riyadh

## Foreign relations

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest contributors of development aid, both in term of volume of aid and in the ratio of aid volume to GDP.

Much of Saudi Arabia's aid has gone to poorer Islamic countries or Islamic communities in non-Islamic countries. This "aid" has contributed to the spreading of a uniform and puritanical form of Islam, disregarding the needs and traditions of the different ethnic groups. Therefore Saudi Arabia has spearheaded the erosion of formerly mellow and colorful Islamic cultures through rigid standardization. Examples of the acculturizing effect of Saudi aid can be seen among the Minangkabau and the Acehnese in Indonesia, as well as among the people of the Maldives.

## International rankings

Organization	Survey	Ranking
Heritage Foundation/ <i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	Index of Economic Freedom	62 out of 157
<i>The Economist</i>	Worldwide Quality-of-life Index, 2005	72 out of 111
Reporters Without Borders	Worldwide Press Freedom Index	161 out of 167
Transparency International	Corruption Perceptions Index	70 out of 163
United Nations Development Programme	Human Development Index	61 out of 177
A. T. Kearney/ Foreign Policy Magazine	Globalization Index 2005	45 out of 62

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# Seychelles

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**Seychelles** (pronounced /serˈʃɛl/ or /serˈʃɛlz/ in English and IPA: [seʃɛl] in French), officially the **Republic of Seychelles** (French: *République des Seychelles*; Creole: *Repiblik Sesel*), is an archipelago nation of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, some 1,500 kilometres (930 mi) east of mainland Africa, northeast of the island of Madagascar. Other nearby island countries and territories include Zanzibar to the west, Mauritius and Réunion to the south, Comoros and Mayotte to the southwest, and the Suvadives of the Maldives to the northeast. Seychelles has the smallest population of any sovereign state of Africa.

## History



Colonial Governor of the Seychelles inspecting police guard of honour in 1972

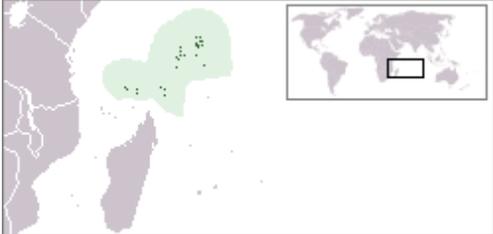
While Austronesian seafarers or Arab traders may have been the first to visit the uninhabited Seychelles, the first recorded sighting of them took place in 1502, by the Portuguese Admiral Vasco da Gama, who passed through the Amirantes and named them after himself (islands of the Admiral). The first recorded landing and first written account was by the crew of the English East Indiaman *Ascension* in 1609. As a transit point for trading between Africa and Asia, they were occasionally used by pirates until the French began to take control of the islands starting in 1756 when a Stone of Possession was laid by Captain Nicholas Morphey. The islands were named after Jean Moreau de Séchelles, Louis XV's Minister of Finance.

The British contested control over the islands with the French between 1794 and 1812. Jean Baptiste Quéau de Quincy, French administrator of Seychelles during the years of war with the United Kingdom, declined to

resist when armed enemy warships arrived. Instead, he successfully negotiated the status of capitulation to Britain, which gave the settlers a privileged position of neutrality.

Britain eventually assumed full control upon the surrender of Mauritius in 1812 and this was formalised in 1814 at the Treaty of Paris. The Seychelles became a crown colony separate from Mauritius in 1903 and independence was granted in 1976, as a republic within the Commonwealth. In 1977, a coup d'état ousted

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<i>Repiblik Sesel</i> <i>République des Seychelles</i> Republic of Seychelles	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<b>Motto:</b> "Finis Coronat Opus" (Latin) "The End Crowns the Work"	
<b>Anthem:</b> <i>Koste Seselwa</i>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Victoria
<b>Official languages</b>	English, French, Seychellois Creole
<b>Demonym</b>	Seychellois

the first president of the republic, James Mancham, replacing him with France Albert René. The 1979 constitution declared a socialist one-party state, which lasted until 1991. The first draft of a new constitution failed to receive the requisite 60 percent of voters in 1992, but in 1993 an amended version was approved.

## Politics

The Seychelles president, who is both head of state and head of government, is elected by popular vote for a five-year term of office. The previous president, France Albert René, first came to power in a coup d'état in 1977, one year after independence. He was democratically elected after the constitutional reforms of 1992. He stood down in 2004 in favour of his vice-president, James Michel, who was re-elected in 2006. The cabinet is presided over and appointed by the president, subject to the approval of a majority of the legislature.

The unicameral Seychellois parliament, the National Assembly or *Assemblée Nationale*, consists of 34 members, of whom 25 are elected directly by popular vote, while the remaining 9 seats are appointed proportionally according to the percentage of votes received by each party. All members serve five-year terms.

Politics is a topic of hot debate in the country - The main rival parties are the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) and the Seychelles National Party (SNP). Since the inception of politics in the early sixties, politics has been an integral part of the Seychellois lives. The range of opinion spans socialist and liberal democrat ideology.

The Seychelles are part of the Indian Ocean Commission(IOC), La Francophonie (the union of French Speaking countries) SADEC and Commonwealth organisation.

## Administrative divisions

<b>Government</b>	Republic
- President	James Michel
<b>Independence</b>	from the United Kingdom
- Date	29 June 1976
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	451 km <sup>2</sup> ( 197th) 176 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- 2005 estimate	80,699 ( 205th)
- Density	178/km <sup>2</sup> ( 60th) 458/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2006 estimate
- Total	\$1404 million ( 165th)
- Per capita	\$17829 (IMF) ( 39th)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.843 (high) ( 50th)
<b>Currency</b>	Seychellois rupee ( SCR)
<b>Time zone</b>	SCT ( UTC+4)
- Summer ( DST)	<i>not observed</i> ( UTC+4)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.sc
<b>Calling code</b>	+248



State House, Victoria - the seat of the President

Seychelles is divided into twenty-five administrative regions, called districts:

- |                    |                         |                 |                |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| ■ Anse aux Pins    | ■ Beau Vallon           | ■ La Digue      | ■ Port Glaud   |
| ■ Anse Boileau     | ■ Bel Air               | ■ English River | ■ Roche Caiman |
| ■ Anse Etoile      | ■ Bel Ombre             | ■ Les Mamelles  | ■ Saint Louis  |
| ■ Anse Royale      | ■ Cascade               | ■ Mont Buxton   | ■ Takamaka     |
| ■ Au Cap           | ■ Glacis                | ■ Mont Fleuri   |                |
| ■ Baie Lazare      | ■ Grand' Anse (Mahe)    | ■ Plaisance     |                |
| ■ Baie Sainte Anne | ■ Grand' Anse (Praslin) | ■ Pointe La Rue |                |



The famous clock tower in the centre of Victoria, capital of Seychelles.

## Geography



Beau Vallon Beach

An island nation, the Seychelles is located in the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar and about 1,600 km (1,000 mi) east of Kenya. The number of islands in the archipelago is often given as 115 but the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles lists 155. The islands as per the Constitution are divided into various groups as follows.

There are 42 granitic islands, in descending order of size: Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette, La Digue, Curieuse, Félicité, Frégate, St. Anne, North, Cerf, Marianne, Grand Sœur, Thérèse, Aride, Conception, Petite Sœur, Cousin, Cousine, Long, Récif, Round (Praslin), Anonyme, Mamelles, Moyenne, Ile aux Vaches Marines, L'Islette, Beacon (Ile Sèche), Cachée, Cocos, Round (Mahé), L'Ilot Frégate, Booby, Chauve Souris (Mahé), Chauve Souris (Praslin), Ile La Fouche, Hodoul, L'Ilot, Rat, Souris, St. Pierre (Praslin), Zavé, Harrison Rocks (Grand Rocher).

There are two coral sand cays north of the granitics: Denis, Bird.

There are two coral islands south of the granitics: Coëtivy, Platte.

There are 29 coral islands in the Amirantes group, west of the granitics: Desroches, Poivre Atoll (comprising 3 islands : Poivre, Florentin and South Island), Alphonse, D'Arros, St. Joseph Atoll (comprising 14 islands: St. Joseph Ile aux Fouquets, Ressource, Petit Carcassaye, Grand Carcassaye, Benjamin, Bancs Ferrari, Chiens, Pélicans, Vars, Ile Paul, Banc de Sable, Banc aux Cocos and Ile aux Poules), Marie Louise, Desnoeuvs, African Banks (comprising 2 islands: African Banks and South Island), Rémire, St. François, Boudeuse, Etoile, Bijoutier.

There are 13 coral islands in the Farquhar Group, south-south west of the Amirantes: Farquhar Atoll (comprising 10 islands: Bancs de Sable Déposés Ile aux Goëlettes Lapins Ile du Milieu North Manaha South Manaha Middle Manaha North Island and South Island), Providence Atoll (comprising two islands: Providence and Bancs Providence) and St Pierre.

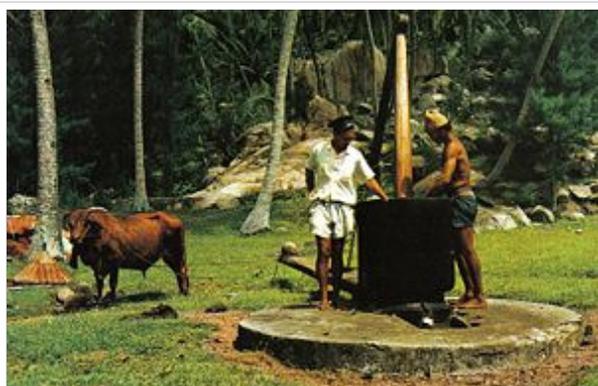


Berjaja Mahé Beach

There are 67 raised coral islands in the Aldabra Group, west of the Farquhar Group: Aldabra Atoll (comprising 46 islands: Grande Terre, Picard, Polymnie, Malabar, Ile Michel, Ile Esprit, Ile aux Moustiques, Ilot Parc, Ilot Emile, Ilot Yangue, Ilot Magnan, Ile Lanier, Champignon des Os, Euphrate, Grand Mentor, Grand Ilot, Gros Ilot Gionnet, Gros Ilot Sésame, Heron Rock, Hide Island, Ile aux Aigrettes, Ile aux Cèdres, Iles Chalands, Ile Fangame, Ile Héron, Ile Michel, Ile Squacco, Ile Sylvestre, Ile Verte, Ilot Déder, Ilot du Sud, Ilot du Milieu, Ilot du Nord, Ilot Dubois, Ilot Macoa, Ilot Marquoix, Ilots Niçois, Ilot Salade, Middle Row Island, Noddy Rock, North Row Island, Petit Mentor, Petit Mentor Endans, Petits Ilots, Pink Rock and Table Ronde), Assumption, Astove and Cosmoledo Atoll (comprising 19 islands: Menai, Ile du Nord (West North), Ile Nord-Est (East North), Ile du Trou, Goëlettes, Grand Polyte, Petit Polyte, Grand Ile (Wizard), Pagode, Ile du Sud-Ouest (South), Ile aux Moustiques, Ile Baleine, Ile aux Chauve-Souris, Ile aux Macaques, Ile aux Rats, Ile du Nord-Ouest, Ile Observation, Ile Sud-Est and Ilot la Croix).

## Economy

Since independence in 1976, per capita output has expanded to roughly seven times the old near-subsistence level. Growth has been led by the tourist sector, which employs about 30% of the labour force and provides more than 70% of hard currency earnings, and by tuna fishing. In recent years the government has encouraged foreign investment in order to upgrade hotels and other services. These incentives have given rise to an enormous amount of investment in real estate projects and new (mostly 5 star) resort properties. Hilton, Four Seasons and Banyan Tree are all new entrants to Seychelles. Development projects projected in the hundreds of millions of dollars each are in the beginning stages for Emirates Airlines, Qatar Airlines, Raffles, Shangri-La, etc. Other private developments such as Ile Aurore, Per Aquam and Eden Island are projected at over \$2 billion.



Coconut oil making in the early 1970s

At the same time, the government has moved to reduce the dependence on tourism by promoting the development of farming, fishing, small-scale manufacturing and most recently the offshore sector. The vulnerability of the tourist sector was illustrated by the sharp drop in 1991-1992 due largely to the country's significantly overvalued exchange rate and the Gulf War, and once again following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Other issues facing the government are the curbing of the budget deficit, including the containment of social welfare costs, and further privatisation of public enterprises. The government has a pervasive presence in economic activity, with public enterprises active in petroleum product distribution, insurance (has now been privatized), banking (is being privatized very soon), imports of basic products (now being privatized), telecommunications (4 private ISP/telecom companies), and a wide range of other businesses. Beginning at the turn of the millennium the Seychelles Petroleum Company (SEPEC) started to develop the first fleet of modern Petroleum double-hull tankers (five vessels), which was completed by late 2007/early 2008 with the possibility to build more in the near future. The Seychelles President claims that this has opened the door to a new industry for his country and encourage economic growth by further removing over-reliance on traditional trades like fisheries and tourism which is now falling

rapidly as the country's main income but nevertheless, has experienced significant growth in recent years.

Growth slowed in 1998–2001, due to sluggish tourist and tuna sectors. Also, tight controls on exchange rates and the scarcity of foreign exchange have impaired short-term economic prospects. The black market value of the Seychellois rupee is anywhere from two thirds to one half the official exchange rate. The next few years were also a bit slow due to the worldwide economic downturn and the fear of flying brought on by September 11, 2001. More recently though, tourism has roared back at a record pace setting successive records in 2006 and again in 2007 for number of visitors. The increased availability of flights to and from the archipelago due in part to new entrants Emirates and Qatar airlines is also beginning to show. New 5 star properties and the devaluation of the currency by nearly 33% by the Seychelles Government is having a positive influence on the tourism sector as well.

Both at official exchange rates and at purchasing power parity (PPP), Seychelles remains the second-richest territory in Africa in terms of GDP per capita (US\$8,551 at real exchange rates and US\$13,887 at PPP as of 2005), behind Réunion (US\$19,233 at real exchange rates).. However, in real terms it can be considered the richest independent African/Indian Ocean country as Reunion is a French dependent territory which is part of the EU and uses the Euro currency. Because of economic contraction (the economy declined by about 2% in 2004 and 2005 and lost another 1.4% in 2006 according to the IMF) the country was moving downwards in terms of per capita income; however, the economy came roaring back in 2007 growing by 5.3% due in part to the record tourism numbers, but also the booming building and offshore industries which also continue to set records.

It is important to note that Seychelles is, per capita, the most highly indebted country in the world according to the World Bank, with total public debt around 122.8% of GDP. Approximately two thirds of this debt is owed domestically, with the balance due to multilaterals, bilaterals, and commercial banks. Current external debt is estimated at 35.5% according to the IMF (2007). The country is in arrears to most of its international creditors and has had to resort to pledged commercial debt to continue to be able to borrow. This high debt burden is a direct consequence of the overvalued exchange rate — in essence, the country is living beyond its means, and financing its lifestyle by borrowing domestically and internationally.

New detailed studies and exploration show that the Seychelles potentially have large off-shore petroleum reservoirs which is yet to be discovered.

Seychelles is the smallest nation in the world issuing its own currency (i.e., not pegged to a foreign currency and not shared with any other country).

## Demographics

As the islands of the Seychelles had no indigenous population, the current Seychellois are composed of people who have immigrated to the island. The largest ethnic groups are those of French, African, Indian, and Chinese descent. French and English are official languages along with Seychellois Creole, which is primarily based upon French. Most Seychellois are Christians; the Roman Catholic Church is the main denomination.

## Flora and fauna

In common with many fragile island ecosystems, the early human history of Seychelles saw the loss of biodiversity including the disappearance of most of the giant tortoises from the granitic islands, felling of coastal and mid-level forests and extinction of species such as the chestnut flanked white eye, the Seychelles Parakeet and the saltwater crocodile. However, extinctions were far fewer than on other islands such as Mauritius or Hawaii, partly due to a shorter period of human occupation (since 1770). The Seychelles today is known for success stories in protecting its flora and fauna.

The granitic islands of Seychelles are home to about 75 endemic plant species, with a further 25 or so species in the Aldabra group. Particularly well-known is the Coco de mer, a species of palm that grows only on the islands of Praslin and neighbouring Curieuse. Sometimes nicknamed the 'love nut' because of its suggestive shape, the coco-de-mer is the world's largest seed. The jellyfish tree is to be found in only a few locations today. This strange and ancient plant has resisted all efforts to propagate it. Other unique plant species include the Wrights Gardenia found only on Aride Island Special Reserve.



Victoria, Seychelles.



The giant tortoises from Aldabra now populate many of the islands of the Seychelles. The Aldabra population is the largest in the world. These unique reptiles can be found even in captive herds. It has been reported that the granitic islands of Seychelles supported distinct species of Seychelles giant tortoises, the status of the different populations is currently unclear.

Seychelles hosts some of the largest seabird colonies in the world. Islands such as Bird, Aride Island, Cousin, Aldabra and Cosmoledo host many species of seabirds including the sooty tern, fairy tern, white-tailed tropicbird, noddies and frigatebirds. Aride Island has more species of seabird and greater numbers than the other 40 granite islands combined including the world's largest colony of Audubon's Shearwater and Lesser Noddy.

The marine life around the islands, especially the more remote coral islands, can be spectacular. More than 1000 species of fish have been recorded. Since the use of spearguns and dynamite for fishing was banned through efforts of local conservationists in the 1960s, the wildlife is unafraid of snorkelers and divers. Coral bleaching in 1998 has unfortunately damaged most reefs, but some reefs show healthy recovery (e.g. Silhouette Island). The reefs comprise a vast selection of soft corals and hard corals alike. There is great diving and snorkeling opportunity. The taking of marine turtles was completely stopped in 1994, turtle populations are now recovering on several protected islands, most notably Cousin Island, Aride Island, Silhouette Island and Aldabra. However, they continue to decline at unprotected sites. The use of gill nets for shark fishing as well as the practice of shark finning are now banned.

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Giant Tortoise (*Dipsochelys hololissa*)

# Syria

**2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Africa; African Countries; Middle Eastern Countries**

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الجمهورية العربية السورية  
*Al-Jumhūriyyah al-‘Arabiyyah  
 as-Sūriyyah*  
 Syrian Arab Republic



Flag



Coat of arms

**Anthem:** *Homat el Diyar*  
*Guardians of the Land*



<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	Damascus
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Syrian
<b>Government</b>	Presidential republic Single party state
- President	Bashar al-Assad
- Prime Minister	Muhammad Najji al-Otari
<b>Independence</b>	from France
- First declaration	September 1936 <sup>1</sup>

- Second declaration	January 1, 1944
- Recognized	April 17, 1946
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	185,180 km <sup>2</sup> ( 88th) 71,479 sq mi
- Water (%)	0.06
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	19,405,000 ( 55th)
- Density	103/km <sup>2</sup> ( 110th) 267/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2005 estimate
- Total	\$71.74 billion ( 65th)
- Per capita	\$5,348 ( 101st)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.724 (medium) ( 109th)
<b>Currency</b>	Syrian pound ( <span style="font-variant: small-caps;">syp</span> )
<b>Time zone</b>	EET ( UTC+2)
- Summer ( DST)	EEST ( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.sy
<b>Calling code</b>	+963
<p><sup>1</sup> The Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence (1936), not ratified by France.</p>	

**Syria** (Arabic: سوريا *Sūriyā* or سورية *Sūriyah*), officially the **Syrian Arab Republic** (Arabic: الجمهورية العربية السورية), is a country in Southwest Asia, bordering Lebanon, the Mediterranean Sea and the island of Cyprus to the west, Israel to the southwest, Jordan to the south, Iraq to the east, and Turkey to the north. The modern state of Syria was formerly a French mandate and attained independence in 1946, but can trace its roots to the fourth millennium BC. Its capital city, Damascus, was the seat of the Umayyad Empire and a provincial capital of the Mamluk Empire.

Syria gained independence in April 1946. Officially a Republic, Syria is under Emergency Law since 1963 and governed by the Baath Party; the head of state since 1970 has been a member of the Assad family. Syria's current president is Bashar al-Assad, son of Hafez al-Assad, who held office from 1970 until his death in 2000. With the appointment of Bashar al-Assad in 2000 interest in political reform surged, leading to the so called "Damascus Spring" (July 2000-February 2001). Asad appointed pro-reform candidates to formal and less formal positions, but the 2001 arrest and long-term detention of the two reformist parliamentarians signals slow political reform.

## Etymology

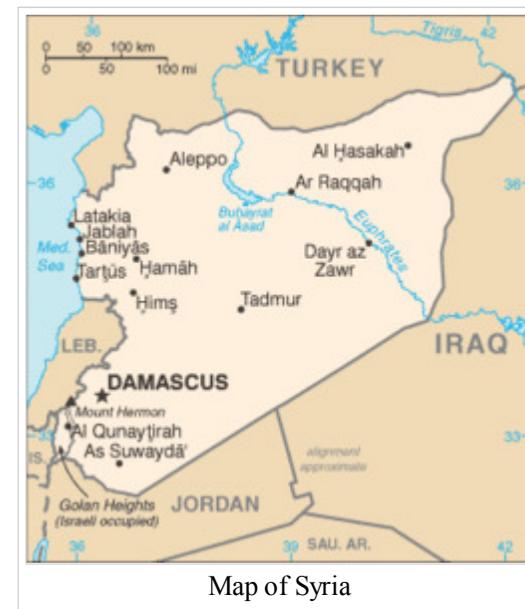
The name *Syria* derives from the ancient Greek name for Syrians, Σύριοι *Syrioi*, which the Greeks applied without distinction to various Assyrian people. Modern scholarship confirms the Greek word traces back to the cognate Ἀσσυρία, *Assyria*, ultimately derived from the Akkadian *Aššur*,

The area designated by the word has changed over time. Classically, Syria lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, between Egypt and Arabia to the south and Cilicia to the north, stretching inland to include Mesopotamia, and having an uncertain border to the northeast that Pliny the Elder describes as including, from west to east, Commagene, Sophene, and Adiabene, "formerly known as Assyria". By Pliny's time, however, this larger Syria had been divided into a number of provinces under the Roman Empire (but politically independent from each other): Judaea, later renamed Palaestina in AD 135 (the region corresponding to modern day Palestine and Israel, and Jordan) in the extreme southwest, Phoenicia corresponding to Lebanon, with Damascena to the inland side of Phoenicia, Coele-Syria (or "Hollow Syria") south of the Eleutheris river, and Mesopotamia.

## Politics

Syria has the following executive branches of government: the president, two vice presidents, prime minister, Council of Ministers (cabinet). Syria's legislative branch is the unicameral People's Council.

Syria's judicial branches include the Supreme Constitutional Court, the High Judicial Council, the Court of Cassation, and the State Security Courts. Islamic



Map of Syria

jurisprudence is a main source of legislation and Syria's judicial system has elements of Ottoman, French, and Islamic laws. Syria has three levels of courts: courts of first instance, courts of appeals, and the constitutional court, the highest tribunal. Religious courts handle questions of personal and family law.

Political parties: the Arab Socialist Resurrection (Baath) Party (Baath Party), Syrian Arab Socialist Party, Arab Socialist Union, Syrian Communist Party, Arab Socialist Unionist Movement, Democratic Socialist Union Party, and around 15 very small tolerated political parties.

Suffrage: Universal at the age of 18.

## **Constitution and Regime**

Syria's constitution was adopted March 13, 1973. It vests the Baath Party with leadership functions in the state and society. The president is approved by referendum for a 7-year term. The president also serves as Secretary General of the Baath Party and leader of the National Progressive Front. The National Progressive Front is a coalition of 10 political parties authorized by the regime.

The Constitution requires the president to be a Muslim, but does not make Islam the state religion. The Constitution gives the president the right to appoint ministers, to declare war and states of emergency, to issue laws (which, except in the case of emergency, require ratification by the People's Council), to declare amnesty, to amend the constitution, and to appoint civil servants and military personnel.

## **Emergency Law**

Since 1963 Emergency Law has been in effect, effectively suspending most constitutional protections for Syrians. Syrian governments have justified the state of emergency in the light of the continuing war with Israel and the threats posed by terrorist. Syrian citizens vote for the President in a referendum (unopposed), citizens do not have the right to elect their government in multi-party elections.

# **History**

## **Eblan civilization**

Around the excavated city of Ebla in northern Syria, discovered in 1975, a great Semitic empire spread from the Red Sea north to Turkey and east to Mesopotamia from 2500 to 2400 B.C. Ebla appears to have been founded around 3000 BC, and gradually built its empire through trade with the cities of Sumer and Akkad, as well as with peoples to the northwest. Gifts from Pharaohs, found during excavations, confirm Ebla's contact with Egypt. Scholars believe the language of Ebla to be among the oldest known written Semitic languages, designated as Paleo-Canaanite. However, more recent classifications of the Eblaite language has shown that it was an East Semitic language, closely related to the Akkadian language. The Eblan civilization was likely conquered by Sargon of Akkad around 2260 BC; the city was restored, as the nation of the Amorites, a few centuries later, and flourished through the early second millennium BC until

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conquered by the Hittites.

## Syria in antiquity



Roman theatre in Bosra.

During the second millennium BC, Syria was occupied successively by Canaanites, Phoenicians, and Arameans as part of the general disruptions and exchanges associated with the Sea Peoples. The Hebrews eventually settled south of Damascus, in the areas later known as Israel and Judah; the Phoenicians settled along the coast of Palestine, as well as in the west (Lebanon), which was already known for its towering cedars. Egyptians, Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Hittites variously occupied the strategic ground of Syria during this period; the land between their various empires being marsh. Eventually, the Persians took Syria as part of their hegemony of Southwest Asia; this dominion was transferred to the Ancient Macedonians after Alexander the Great's conquests and, thence, to the Romans and the Byzantines.

In the Roman Empire period, the city of Antioch was capital of Syria and was the third largest city in the empire after Rome and Alexandria. With estimated population of 500,000 at its peak, Antioch was one of the major centres of trade and industry in the ancient world. The population of Syria during the heyday of the empire was probably not exceeded again until the 19th century. Syria's large and prosperous population made Syria one of the most important of the Roman provinces, particularly during the 2nd and 3rd centuries (A.D.). The Roman Emperor Alexander Severus, who was emperor from 222 to 235, was Syrian. His cousin Elagabalus, who was emperor from 218 to 222, was also Syrian and his family held hereditary rights to the high priesthood of the sun god El-Gabal at Emesa (modern Homs) in Syria. Another Roman emperor who was a Syrian was Marcus Julius Philippus, emperor from 244 to 249.



Philippus Arabs,  
Roman Emperor  
-detail of Syrian 100  
pound note.



The famous desert city of Palmyra, whose ruins are now a United Nations World Heritage site, grew large in the Syrian desert in the 1st and 2nd centuries (A.D.).



St.Simon (Samaan) church in Aleppo is considered to be one of the oldest remaining churches in the world.



The Umayyad Mosque courtyard, Damascus.

## Early Christian and Islamic history

Syria is significant in the history of Christianity; Saul of Tarsus was converted on the Road to Damascus, thereafter being known as the Apostle Paul, and established the first organized Christian Church at Antioch in ancient Syria, from which he left on many of his missionary journeys.

In the 7th century, Syria was conquered by Muslims, resulting in the area becoming part of the Islamic empire. In the mid 7th century, the Umayyad dynasty, then rulers of the empire, placed the capital in Damascus. However, rival factions within the empire disputed the Umayyad right to rule, based on their place in the line of succession from Mohammad. This resulted in a civil war and their overthrow by the Abbasid dynasty, who moved the capital

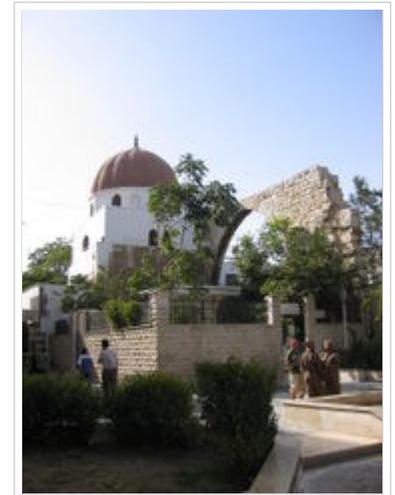
to Baghdad.

Sections of the coastline of Syria were briefly held by Frankish overlords during the Crusades of the 12th century, and were known as the Crusader state of the Principality of Antioch. The area was also threatened by Shiite extremists known as Assassins (*Hashshashin*). In 1260, the Mongols arrived, led by Hulegu with an army 100,000 strong, destroying cities and irrigation works. Aleppo fell in January 1260, and Damascus in March, but then Hulegu needed to break off his attack to return to China to deal with a succession dispute. The command of the remaining Mongol troops was placed under Kitbugha, a Christian Mongol. A few months later, the Mamluks arrived with an army from Egypt, and defeated the Mongols in the Battle of Ayn Jalut, in Galilee. The Mamluk leader, Baybars, made his capitals in Cairo and Damascus, linked by a mail service that traveled by both horses and carrier pigeons. When Baybars died, his successor was overthrown, and power was taken by a Turk named Qalawun. In the meantime, an emir named Sunqur al-Ashqar had tried to declare himself ruler of Damascus, but he was defeated by Qalawun on June 21, 1280, and fled to northern Syria. Al-Ashqar, who had married a Mongol woman, appealed for help from the Mongols, and in 1281, they arrived with an army of 50,000 Mongols, and 30,000 Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish auxiliaries, along with Al-Ashqar's rebel force. The Mongols of the Ilkhanate took the city, but Qalawun arrived with a Mamluk force, persuaded Al-Ashqar to switch sides and join him, and they fought against the Mongols on October 29, 1281, in the Second Battle of Homs, a close battle which resulted in the death of the majority of the combatants, but was finally won by the Mamluks.

In 1400, Timur Lenk, or Tamerlane, invaded Syria, sacked Aleppo and captured Damascus after defeating the Mamluk army. The city's inhabitants were massacred, except for the artisans, who were deported to Samarkand. It was during the conquests of Timur that the indigenous Christian population of Syria began to suffer under greater persecutions.

By the end of the 15th century, the discovery of a sea route from Europe to the Far East ended the need for an overland trade route through Syria. Shattered by the Mongols, Syria was easily absorbed into the Ottoman Empire from the 16th through 20th centuries, and found itself largely apart from, and ignored by, world affairs. *see also* Ottoman Syria

Fighting on the side of Germany during World War I, plans by the Entente powers to dissolve this great Ottoman territory could now begin. Two allied diplomats (Frenchman François Georges-Picot and Briton Mark Sykes) secretly agreed, long before the end of the war, how to split the Ottoman Empire into several zones of influence. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 set the fate of modern Southwest Asia for the coming century; providing France with the northern zone (Syria, with later the upcoming Lebanon), and the United Kingdom with the southern one (Jordan, Iraq and later, after renegotiations in 1917, Palestine - 'to secure daily transportation of troops from Haifa to Baghdad' - agreement n° 7). The two territories were only separated with a straight border line from Jordan to Iran. But early discoveries of oil in the region of Mosul just before to end of the war led to yet another negotiation with France in 1918 to cede this region to 'Zone B', or the British zone of influence. The borders between the 'Zone A' and 'Zone B' have not changed from 1918 to this date. In 1920, the two sides have been recognized internationally under mandate of the League of Nations by the two dominant countries; France and the United Kingdom.



Saladin's grave in Damascus.

## French Mandate

In 1920, an independent Arab Kingdom of Syria was established under Faisal I of the Hashemite family, who later became the King of Iraq. However, his rule over Syria ended after only a few months, following the clash between his Syrian Arab forces and regular French forces at the Battle of Maysalun. French troops occupied Syria later that year after the League of Nations put Syria under French mandate. Syria and France negotiated a treaty of independence in September of 1936, and Hashim al-Atassi, who was Prime Minister under King Faisal's brief reign, was the first president to be elected under a new constitution, effectively the first incarnation of the modern republic of Syria. However, the treaty never came into force because the French Legislature refused to ratify it. With the fall of France in 1940 during World War II, Syria came under the control of the Vichy Government until the British and Free French occupied the country in July 1941. Syria proclaimed its independence again in 1941 but it wasn't until January 1, 1944 that it was recognised as an independent republic. Continuing pressure from Syrian nationalist groups and British pressure forced the French to evacuate their troops in April 1946, leaving the country in the hands of a republican government that had been formed during the mandate.



The National Bloc signing the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence in Paris in 1936. From left to right: Saadallah al-Jabiri, Jamil Mardam Bey, Hashim al-Atassi (signing), and French Prime Minister Léon Blum.

## Instability and foreign relations: independence to 1967

Although rapid economic development followed the declaration of independence, Syrian politics from independence through

the late 1960s were marked by upheaval. Between 1946 and 1956, Syria had 20 different cabinets and drafted four separate constitutions. In 1948, Syria was involved in the Arab-Israeli War, intervening on the side of the Palestinians and attempting to prevent the establishment of Israel. The Syrian army was pressed out of most of the Israel area, but fortified their strongholds on the Golan Heights and managed to keep their old borders and some additional territory (this was converted into demilitarized zones under UN supervision, but then gradually seized by Israel in the inter-war years; the status of these territories have proved a stumbling-block for Syrian-Israeli negotiations). However, the economy was strained by the influx of more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees.

The humiliating defeat suffered by the army was one of several trigger factors for Col. Husni al-Za'im's seizure of power in 1949, in what has been described as the first military coup d'état of the Arab world. This was soon followed by a new coup, by Col. Sami al-Hinnawi, who was then himself quickly deposed by Col. Adib Shishakli, all within the same year. After exercising influence behind the scenes for some time, dominating the ravaged parliamentary scene, Shishakli launched a second coup in 1951, entrenching his rule and eventually abolishing multipartyism altogether. Only when president Shishakli was himself overthrown in a 1954 coup, was the parliamentary system restored, but it was fundamentally undermined by continued political maneuvering supported by competing factions in the military. By this time, civilian politics had been largely gutted of meaning, and power was increasingly concentrated in the military and security establishment, which had now proven itself to be the only force capable of seizing and -- perhaps -- keeping power. Parliamentary institutions remained weak and ineffectual, dominated by competing parties representing the landowning elites and various Sunni urban notables, while economy and politics were mismanaged, and little done to better the role of Syria's peasant majority. This, as well as the influence of Nasserism and other anti-colonial ideologies, created fertile ground for various Arab nationalist, Syrian nationalist and socialist movements, who represented disaffected elements of society, notably including the religious minorities, and demanded radical reform.

During the Suez Crisis of 1956, after the invasion of the Sinai Peninsula by Israeli troops, and the intervention of British and French troops, martial law was declared in Syria. The November 1956 attacks on Iraqi pipelines were in retaliation for Iraq's acceptance into the Baghdad Pact. In early 1957 Iraq advised Egypt and Syria against a conceivable takeover of Jordan.

In November 1956 Syria signed a pact with the Soviet Union, providing a foothold for Communist influence within the government in exchange for planes, tanks, and other military equipment being sent to Syria. With this increase in the strength of Syrian military technology worried Turkey, as it seemed feasible that Syria might attempt to retake Iskenderun, a matter of dispute between Syria and Turkey. On the other hand, Syria and the U.S.S.R. accused Turkey of massing its troops at the Syrian border. During this standoff, Communists gained more control over the Syrian government and military. Only heated debates in the United Nations (of which Syria was an original member) lessened the threat of war.

Syria's political instability during the years after the 1954 coup, the parallelism of Syrian and Egyptian policies, and the appeal of Egyptian President Gamal Abdal Nasser's leadership in the wake of the Suez crisis created support in Syria for union with Egypt. On February 1, 1958, Syrian president Shukri al-Quwatli and Nasser announced the merging of the two countries, creating the United Arab Republic, and all Syrian political parties, as well as the Communists therein, ceased overt activities.

The union was not a success, however. Following a military coup on September 28, 1961, Syria seceded, reestablishing itself as the Syrian Arab Republic. Instability characterised the next 18 months, with various coups culminating on March 8, 1963, in the installation by leftist Syrian Army officers of the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC), a group of military and civilian officials who assumed control of all executive and legislative authority. The takeover was engineered by members of the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Baath Party), which had been active in Syria and other Arab countries since the

late 1940s. The new cabinet was dominated by Baath members.

The Baath takeover in Syria followed a Baath coup in Iraq the previous month. The new Syrian Government explored the possibility of federation with Egypt and with Baath-controlled Iraq. An agreement was concluded in Cairo on April 17, 1963, for a referendum on unity to be held in September 1963. However, serious disagreements among the parties soon developed, and the tripartite federation failed to materialize. Thereafter, the Baath regimes in Syria and Iraq began to work for bilateral unity. These plans foundered in November 1963, when the Baath regime in Iraq was overthrown. In May 1964, President Amin Hafiz of the NCRC promulgated a provisional constitution providing for a National Council of the Revolution (NCR), an appointed legislature composed of representatives of mass organizations—labour, peasant, and professional unions—a presidential council, in which executive power was vested, and a cabinet. On February 23, 1966, a group of army officers carried out a successful, intra-party coup, imprisoned President Hafiz, dissolved the cabinet and the NCR, abrogated the provisional constitution, and designated a regionalist, civilian Baath government on March 1. The coup leaders described it as a "rectification" of Baath Party principles.

## **Six Day War and Aftermath**

The new government generally aligned itself with the hawkish Nasser in intra-Arab conflicts over how hard of a line to take against Israel. When Nasser closed the Gulf of Aqaba to Eilat-bound ships, the Baath regime supported the Egyptian leader, amassed troops in the strategic Golan Heights, and joined the clamor for the elimination of the Jewish state. Despite these aggressive moves, the Syrian regime was largely inactive when Israel launched a preemptive strike on Egypt to begin the June 1967 war. In the final days of the war, after having captured the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, as well as the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, Israel turned its attention to Syria. With a U.N. mandated cease-fire fast approaching, Israel invaded and captured the entire Golan Heights in under 48 hours. The war was widely viewed as a humiliating defeat for the radical socialist regime established by the 1966 coup.

Conflict developed between an extremist military wing and a more moderate civilian wing of the Baath Party. The 1970 retreat of Syrian forces sent to aid the PLO during the "Black September" hostilities with Jordan reflected this political disagreement within the ruling Baath leadership. By November 13, 1970, Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad was solidly established as the strongman of the regime, when he effected a bloodless military coup ("The Corrective Movement") which ousted his rival, Salah Jadid.

## **Baath Party rule under Hafez al-Assad, 1970–2000**

Upon assuming power, Hafez al-Assad moved quickly to create an organizational infrastructure for his government and to consolidate control. The Provisional Regional Command of Assad's Arab Baath Socialist Party nominated a 173-member legislature, the People's Council, in which the Baath Party took 87 seats. The remaining seats were divided among "popular organizations" and other minor parties. In March 1971, the party held its regional congress and elected a new 21-member Regional Command headed by Assad. In the same month, a national referendum was held to confirm Assad as President for a 7-year term. In March 1972, to broaden the base of his government, Assad formed the National Progressive Front, a coalition of parties led by the Baath Party, and elections were held to establish local councils in each of Syria's 14 governorates. In March 1973, a new Syrian constitution went into effect followed shortly thereafter by parliamentary elections for the People's Council, the first such elections since 1962.



Hafez al-Assad, former president of Syria.

On October 6 1973, Syria and Egypt began the Yom Kippur War by staging a surprise attack against Israel (Arabs call it the "Ramadan War" or "October War" because Syria and Egypt attacked during Ramadan in the month of October). But despite the element of surprise, the Israeli army had recovered, pushed the Syrian army out of the Golan and invaded into Syrian territory further from the 1967 border. As a result, Israel continued to occupy the Golan Heights as part of the Israeli-occupied territories. In early 1976, the Lebanese civil war was going poorly for the Maronite Christians. Syria sent 40,000 troops into the country to prevent them from being overrun, but soon became embroiled in the Lebanese Civil War, beginning the 30-year Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Many crimes in Lebanon were associated to the Syrian forces and intelligences: Kamal Jumblat, Bachir Gemayel, Moufti Hassan Khaled, Rene Mouawad,... Over the following 15 years of civil war, Syria fought both for control over Lebanon, and as an attempt to undermine Israel in southern Lebanon, through extensive use of Lebanese allies as proxy fighters. Many see the Syrian Army's presence in Lebanon as an occupation, especially following the end of the civil war in 1990, after the Syrian-sponsored Taif Agreement. Syria then remained in Lebanon until 2005, exerting a heavy-handed influence over Lebanese politics, that was deeply resented by many..

About one million Syrian workers came into Lebanon after the war ended to find jobs in the reconstruction of the country. Syrian workers were preferred over Palestinian and Lebanese workers because they could be paid lower wages, but some have argued that the Syrian government's encouragement of citizens entering its small and militarily dominated neighbour in search of work, was in fact an attempt at Syrian colonization of Lebanon. Now, the economies of Syria and Lebanon are completely interdependent. In 1994, under pressure from Damascus, the Lebanese government controversially granted citizenship to over 200,000 Syrian residents in the country. (For more on these issues, see Demographics of Lebanon)

The authoritarian regime was not without its critics, though most were quickly murdered. A serious challenge arose in the late 1970s, however, from fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, who reject the basic values of the secular Baath program and object to rule by the Alawis, whom they consider heretical. From 1976 until its suppression in 1982, the arch-conservative Muslim Brotherhood led an armed insurgency against the regime. In response to an attempted uprising by the brotherhood in February 1982, the government crushed the fundamentalist opposition centered in the city of Hama, leveling parts of the city with artillery fire and causing between 10,000 and 25,000 of dead and wounded. Since then, public manifestations of anti-regime activity have been very limited.

Syria's 1990 participation in the U.S.-led multinational coalition aligned against Saddam Hussein marked a dramatic watershed in Syria's relations both with other Arab states and with the Western world. Syria participated in the multilateral Southwest Asia Peace Conference in Madrid in October 1991, and during the

1990s engaged in direct, face-to-face negotiations with Israel. These negotiations failed, and there have been no further Syrian-Israeli talks since President Hafiz al-Assad's meeting with then President Bill Clinton in Geneva in March 2000.

## 21st century

Hafiz al-Assad died on June 10, 2000, after 30 years in power. Immediately following al-Assad's death, the Parliament amended the constitution, reducing the mandatory minimum age of the President from 40 to 34. This allowed his son, Bashar al-Assad, to become legally eligible for nomination by the ruling Baath party. On July 10, 2000, Bashar al-Assad was elected President by referendum in which he ran unopposed, garnering 97.29% of the vote, according to Syrian Government statistics. He was inaugurated into office on July 17, 2000 for a 7-year term.



Billboard with portrait of Assad and the text *God protects Syria* on the old city wall of Damascus 2006.

Under Bashar al-Assadhundreds of political prisoners were released and a steps were taken towards easing media restrictions. However, Bashar al-Assad has made it clear that his priority is economic rather than political reform.

On October 5, 2003, Israel bombed a site near Damascus, charging it was a terrorist training facility for members of Islamic Jihad. The raid was in retaliation for the bombing of a restaurant in the Israeli town of Haifa that killed 19. Islamic Jihad said the camp was not in use; Syria said the attack was on a civilian area.

The German Chancellor said that the attack "cannot be accepted" and the French Foreign Ministry said "The Israeli operation... constituted an unacceptable violation of international law and sovereignty rules." The Spanish UN Ambassador Inocencio Arias called it an attack of "extreme gravity" and "a clear violation of international law." However, the United States

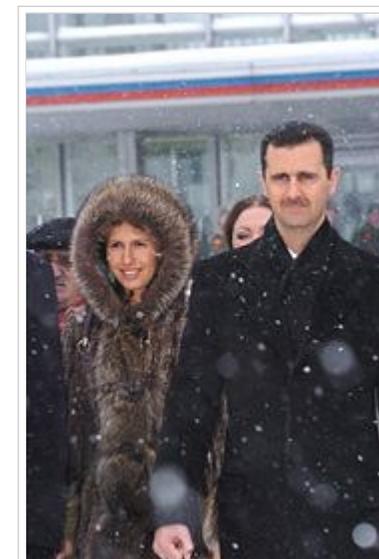
moved closer to imposing sanctions on Syria, following the adoption of the Syria Accountability Act by the House of Representatives International Relations committee. Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, all included in what the EU and the U.S view as terrorist groups, all take refuge and enjoy strong relationships with the Syrian regime.

Syrian Kurds protest in Brussels, Geneva, in Germany at the US and UK embassies and in Turkey, against violence in north-east Syria starting Friday, March 12, and reportedly extending over the weekend resulting in several deaths, according to reports. The Kurds allege the Syrian government encouraged and armed the attackers. Signs of rioting were seen in the towns of Qameshli and Hassakeh.

On September 6, 2007, Israeli jet fighters carried out an air strike in the Deir ez-Zor Governorate, known as Operation Orchard, on a target claimed to be a nuclear reactor under construction by North Korean technicians. Reportedly a number of the technicians were killed.

## 2008 Israeli Peace Talks

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President Bashar al-Assad of Syria & his wife Asma al-Assad in Moscow.

In April, 2008, President Assad told a Qatari newspaper that Syria and Israel had been discussing a peace treaty for a year, with Turkey as a go-between. This was confirmed in May, 2008, by a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. As well as a peace treaty, the future of the Golan Heights is being discussed. President Assad was quoted in the The Guardian as telling the Qatari paper:

*...there would be no direct negotiations with Israel until a new US president takes office. The US was the only party qualified to sponsor any direct talks, [President Assad] told the paper, but added that the Bush administration does not have the vision or will for the peace process. It does not have anything."*

## Governorates and districts



Syria has fourteen governorates, or *muhafazat* (singular: *muhafazah*). The governorates are divided into sixty districts, or *manatiq* (sing. *mintaqah*), which are further divided into sub-districts, or *nawahi* (sing. *nahia*).

A governor, whose appointment is proposed by the minister of the interior, approved by the cabinet, and announced by executive decree, heads each governorate. The governor is assisted by an elected provincial council. Note that parts that used to be under the Quneitra governorate are under Israeli control since 1967 (see Golan Heights).

## Major cities

Damascus - Aleppo - Latakia - Homs - Hama

## Minor cities

Al-Hasakah - Deir ez-Zor - Ar-Raqqah - Idlib - Daraa - As-Suwayda - Tartus.

## Towns

Al Qamishli - Nawa - Ar-Rastan - Masyaf - Safita - Jableh - Ath-Thawrah - Duma - Baniyas - An-Nabk- Qusair - Maaloula - Zabadani - Bosra - Jaramana - At-Tall - Salamieh- Saidnaya.

## Major villages

Kafr Buhum - Albaida - Marmarita - Mashta Al helou - Haba - Rhablee - Sirghaya - Fairouzeh - Zaidal - Jaibool - Qunaya - al-Hwash - Oum Walad - Yabroud - Sadad.

## Geography

Syria consists mostly of arid plateau, although the northwest part of the country bordering the Mediterranean is fairly green. The Northeast of the country "Al Jazira" and the South "Hawran" are important agricultural areas. The Euphrates, Syria's most important river, crosses the country in the east. It is considered to be one of the fifteen states that comprise the so-called "Cradle of Civilization".

Major cities include the capital Damascus in the southwest, Aleppo in the north, and Homs. Most of the other important cities are located along the coast line (see List of cities in Syria).

The climate in Syria is dry and hot, and winters are mild. Because of the country's elevation, snowfall does occasionally occur during winter. Petroleum in commercial quantities was first discovered in the northeast in 1956. The most important oil fields are those of Suwaydiyah, Qaratshui, Rumayian, and Tayyem, near Dayr az-Zawr. The fields are a natural extension of the Iraqi fields of Mosul and Kirkuk. Petroleum became Syria's leading natural resource and chief export after 1974. Natural gas was discovered at the field of Jbessa in 1940.



Satellite image of Syria (border lines added).

## Demographics

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Most people live in the Euphrates River valley and along the coastal plain, a fertile strip between the coastal mountains and the desert. Overall population density in Syria is about 258 per square mile (99/km<sup>2</sup>). According to the *World Refugee Survey 2008*, published by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Syria hosted a population of refugees and asylum seekers number approximately 1,852,300. The vast majority of this population was from Iraq (1,300,00), but sizeable populations from the former Palestine (543,400) and Somalia (5,200) also lived in the country. Education is free and compulsory from ages 6 to 11. Schooling consists of 6 years of primary education followed by a 3-year general or vocational training period and a 3-year academic or vocational program. The second 3-year period of academic training is required for university admission. Total enrollment at post-secondary schools is over 150,000. The literacy rate of Syrians aged 15 and older is 86% for males and 73.6% for females.

## Ethnic groups

- Arabs (including some 400,000 Palestinian refugees). Arabs make up over 90% of the population.
- Kurds. Kurds constitute the one of the largest ethnic minorities in Syria, making up about 9% of the population (1,800,000 people). Most Kurds reside in the north-east corner of Syria and many still speak the Kurdish language. Sizeable Kurdish communities live in most major Syrian cities as well.
- Turks. Also known as Syrian Turkmen - majority live in Aleppo, Damascus and Latakia.
- Assyrian- Syriacs Christians. Assyrian-Syriac Christians are a notable minority that live in north and north-east Syria ( Al-Qamishli, Al-Hasakah) around 800,000 in total. Although their numbers have been boosted by many Iraqi refugees since the Iraq War. The Assyrian Democratic Organization, is also banned in Syria by the current Syrian government.
- Armenians. Syria holds the 7th largest Armenian population in the world. They number approximately 190,000 .
- In addition, approximately 1,300,000 Iraqi refugees were estimated to live in Syria in 2007. Roughly 50 percent of these refugees were Sunni Muslim, 24 percent Shi'a Muslim, and 20 percent Christian.



Three Syrian men, 1873.

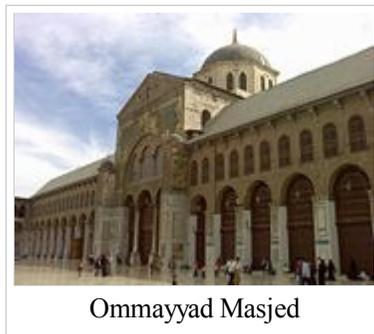
Syrians today are an overall indigenous Levantine people, closely related to their immediate neighbours, like the Palestinians, Lebanese and Jordanians. While modern-day Syrians are commonly described as Arabs by virtue of their modern-day language and bonds to Arab culture and history — they are in fact largely a blend of the various Christian Aramaic speaking groups indigenous to the region who were Arabized when Muslim Arabs from South Arabia arrived and settled following the Arab expansion.

Syrians have also migrated heavily to the Americas, most notably to Brazil and Argentina.

## Religion



Hama, Syria - a minaret of Al Nouri mosque.



Omayyad Masjed

Arabic: الروم الارثوذكس, *ar-Rūmu 'l-Urṭūduks*) make up 50–55% of the Christian population; the Catholics ( Melkite, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Maronite, Chaldean and Latin) make up 18%; the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Nestorian Assyrians and several smaller Christian denominations account for the remainder. A lot of christian monasteries also exist. Many Christian Syrians belong to a high socio-economic class..

Syria's population is approximately 90% Muslim and 10% Christian, though due to the high stream of refugees from Iraq the percentage of Christians has risen to slightly less than 12% (Muslim refugees are numerous as well). Among Muslims, 74% are from the Sunni; branch, and are ethnic Arabs, Turks, Kurds, while the rest are divided among other Muslim sects, mainly Alawis (accounting for 10% of the total population) and Druze (6%). There is also a small number of non-Druze Isma'ili and Twelver Shi'a, whose numbers have increased dramatically due to the influx of Iraqi refugees, and are now 10% of the population.

Christians, a sizable number of which are also found among Syrian Palestinians, are divided into several groups. Chalcedonian Antiochian Orthodox ("Greek Orthodox";



Armenian Church in Kasab, near Latakia

Syria also has a tiny population of Jews, confined mainly to Damascus, a remnant of a formerly 40,000 strong community. After the 1947 UN Partition plan, pogroms against the Jews erupted in Damascus and Aleppo, and Jewish property was confiscated or burned. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, many Syrian Jews sought refuge there. Of the remaining 5,000 Jews, 4,000 left in the 1990s, in the wake of an agreement with the United States. As of 2007, the Jewish community has dwindled to less than 70 Jews, most of them elderly.

## Languages

Arabic is the official and most widely spoken language. Kurdish is widely spoken in the Kurdish regions of Syria. Many educated Syrians also speak English and French. Armenian and Turkmen are spoken among the Armenian and Turkmen minorities. Aramaic, the lingua franca of the region before the advent of Islam and Arabic, is spoken among certain ethnic groups: as Syriac, it is used as the liturgical language of various Syriac denominations; modern Aramaic (particularly, Turoyo language and Assyrian Neo-Aramaic) is spoken in Al-Jazira region. Most remarkably, Western Neo-Aramaic is still spoken in the village of Ma'loula, and two neighbouring villages, 35 miles (56 km) northeast of Damascus.



Shrine of Zaynab bint Ali at Damascus, Syria.

## Education in Syria

The educational system in Syria was based on the old French system. Education is free in all public schools and obligatory up to the 9th grade. Schools are

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divided into three levels:

- 1st to 4th grade: Basic Education Level I (Arabic: تعليم أساسي حلقة أولى)
- 5th to 9th grade: Basic Education Level II (Arabic: تعليم أساسي حلقة ثانية)
- 10th to 12th grade: Secondary Education (Arabic: التعليم الثانوي), which is the equivalent of High School.

Final exams of the 9th grade are carried out nationally at the same time. The result of these exams determines if the student goes to the "general" secondary schools or the technical secondary schools. Technical secondary schools include industrial and agricultural schools for male students, crafts school for female students, and commercial and computer science schools for both.

At the beginning of the 11th grade, those who go to "general" secondary school have to choose to continue their study in either the "literary branch" or the "scientific branch".

The final exams of the 12th grade (the baccalaureate) are also carried out nationally and at the same time. The result of these exams determines which university, college and specialization the student goes to. To do that the student has to apply through a complicated system called *Mufadalah*.

Colleges charge modest fees (\$10–20 a year) if the student achieves the sufficient marks in his Baccalaureate exams. If not, the student may opt to pay higher fees (\$1500–3000) to enroll. There are some private schools and colleges but their fees are much higher.

Most universities in Syria follow the French model of the high education, the university stages and the academic degrees are:

- First stage: the Licence awarded after 4 years to 6 years depending on the field.
- Second stage: the DEA or DESS 1-2 years postgraduate degree equivalent to the Master's degree in the American-English systems.
- Third stage: the doctorat 3-5 years after the DEA or an equivalent degree.

Since 1967, all schools, colleges, and universities have been under close government supervision by the Baath Party.

## Economy

Syria is a middle-income, developing country with an economy based on agriculture, oil, industry, and tourism. However, Syria's economy faces serious problems and challenges and impediments to growth, including: a large and poorly performing public sector; declining rates of oil production; widening non-oil deficit; wide scale corruption; weak financial and capital markets; and high rates of unemployment tied to a high population growth rate.

As a result of an inefficient and corrupt centrally planned economy, Syria has low rates of investment, and low levels of industrial and agricultural productivity. Its GDP growth rate was approximately 2.9% in 2005, according to IMF statistics. The two main pillars of the Syrian economy have been agriculture and oil. Agriculture, for instance, accounts for 25% of GDP and employs 42% of the total labor force. The government hopes to attract new investment in the tourism, natural gas, and service sectors to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil and agriculture. The government has begun to institute economic

reforms aimed at liberalizing most markets, but reform thus far has been slow and ad hoc. For ideological reasons, privatization of government enterprises is explicitly rejected. Therefore major sectors of the economy including refining, ports operation, air transportation, power generation, and water distribution, remain firmly controlled by the government.

Syria has produced heavy-grade oil from fields located in the northeast since the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, light-grade, low-sulphur oil was discovered near Dayr al-Zur in eastern Syria. Syria's rate of oil production has been decreasing steadily, from a peak close to 600,000 barrels per day (95,000 m<sup>3</sup>/d) (bpd) in 1995 down to approximately 425,000 bbl/d (67,600 m<sup>3</sup>/d) in 2005. Experts generally agree that Syria will become a net importer of petroleum not later than 2012. Syria exported roughly 200,000 bbl/d (32,000 m<sup>3</sup>/d) in 2005, and oil still accounts for a majority of the country's export income. Syria also produces 22 million cubic meters of gas per day, with estimated reserves around 8.5 trillion cubic feet (240 km<sup>3</sup>). While the government has begun to work with international energy companies in the hopes of eventually becoming a gas exporter, all gas currently produced is consumed domestically.

Some basic commodities, such as diesel, continue to be heavily subsidized, and social services are provided for nominal charges. The subsidies are becoming harder to sustain as the gap between consumption and production continues to increase. Syria has a population of approximately 19 million people, and Syrian Government figures place the population growth rate at 2.45%, with 75% of the population under the age of 35 and more than 40% under the age of 15. Approximately 200,000 people enter the labor market every year. According to Syrian Government statistics, the unemployment rate is 7.5%, however, more accurate independent sources place it closer to 20%. Government and public sector employees constitute over one quarter of the total labor force and are paid very low salaries and wages. Government officials acknowledge that the economy is not growing at a pace sufficient to create enough new jobs annually to match population growth. The UNDP announced in 2005 that 30% of the Syrian population lives in poverty and 11.4% live below the subsistence level.

## **Foreign Trade**

Given the policies adopted from the 1960s through the late 1980s, which included nationalization of companies and private assets, Syria failed to join an increasingly interconnected global economy. Syria withdrew from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1951 because of Israel's accession. It is not a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), although it submitted a request to begin the accession process in 2001. Syria is developing regional free trade agreements. As of January 1, 2005, the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) came into effect and customs duties were eliminated between Syria and all other members of GAFTA. In addition, Syria has signed a free trade agreement with Turkey, which came into force in January 2007, and initialed an Association Agreement with the European Union, which has yet to be signed. Although Syria claims a recent boom in non-oil exports, its trade numbers are notoriously inaccurate and out-of-date. Syria's main exports include crude oil, refined products, raw cotton, clothing, fruits, and grains. The bulk of Syrian imports are raw materials essential for industry, vehicles, agricultural equipment, and heavy machinery. Earnings from oil exports as well as remittances from Syrian workers are the government's most important sources of foreign exchange.

## **Syrian territorial problems**

### **Turkish-Syrian dispute over Iskandaron (Hatay) Province**

There is a deep rooted disagreement between Turkey and **Syria** over the Iskandaroun ( Hatay) Province.

At present Syrians hold the view that this land was illegally ceded in the late 1930s to Turkey by France - the mandatory occupying power of Syria (between 1920 and 1946). The Turks remember Syria as a former Ottoman Turkish vilayet with embitterment. Contemporary Syria and Syrians still consider this land as integral Syrian territory. Syrians call this land *Liwaaa aliskenderuna* rather than the Turkish name of Hatay.

## **Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights**

The Golan Heights are located in the southwestern part of the Syrian Arab Republic. The region is 1,850 square kilometres (714 sq mi), and includes mountains reaching an altitude of 2,880 metres (9,449 ft) above sea level. The heights dominate the plains below. The Jordan River, Lake Tiberias and the Hula Valley border the region on the west. To the east is the Raqqad Valley and the south is Yarmok River and valley. The northern boundary of the region is the mountain Jabal al-Sheikh ( Mount Hermon), one of the highest in the Southwest Asia. It is a rich agricultural area, traditionally farmed by an Arab society encompassing 108 private farms and 163 villages and towns. An agreement to establish a demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria was signed on July 20, 1949, but border clashes continued. Syria used the Golan Heights to launch attacks on Israeli farmers and fishing boats, prompting retaliatory attacks by Israel. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Six Day War. Between 80,000 and 109,000 of the inhabitants - most of the population with the exception of Druze and Circassians - fled during the war. In 1973, Syria tried to regain control of the Golan Heights in a surprise attack on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. Despite initial Syrian advances and heavy Israeli losses, the Golan Heights remained in Israeli hands after a successful Israeli counter attack. Syria and Israel signed an armistice agreement in 1974, and a United Nations observer force was stationed there. Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981, although the Syrian government continues to demand the return of this territory, possibly in the context of a peace treaty.

After the Six-Day War, a population of 20,000 Syrians remained in the Golan Heights, most of them Druze. Since 2005, Israel has allowed Druze apple farmers in the Golan to sell their produce to Syria. In 2006, the export total reached 8,000 tons of apples. Syrian residents of the Golan are also permitted to study at universities in Syria, where they are entitled to free tuition, books and lodging.

## **Culture**

The scribes of the city of Ugarit created a cuneiform alphabet in the fourteenth century BCE. The alphabet was written in the familiar order we use today.

Archaeologists have discovered extensive writings and evidence of a culture rivaling those of Mesopotamia and Egypt in and around the ancient city of Ebla. Later Syrian scholars and artists contributed to Hellenistic and Roman thought and culture. Cicero was a pupil of Antiochus of Ascalon at Athens; and the writings of Posidonius of Apamea influenced Livy and Plutarch.

Philip Hitti claimed, "the scholars consider Syria as the teacher for the human characteristics," and Andrea Parrot writes, "each civilized person in the world should admit that he has two home countries: the one he was born in, and Syria."

Syria is a traditional society with a long cultural history. Importance is placed on family, religion, education and self discipline and respect. The Syrian's taste for the traditional arts is expressed in dances such as the al-Samah, the Dabkes in all their variations and the sword dance. Marriage ceremonies and the birth of children are occasions for the lively demonstration of folk customs.

Traditional Houses of the Old Cities in Damascus, Aleppo and the other Syrian cities are preserved and traditionally the living quarters are arranged around one or more courtyards, typically with a fountain in the middle supplied by spring water, and decorated with citrus trees, grape vines, and flowers.

Outside of larger city areas such as Damascus, Aleppo or Homs, residential areas are often clustered in smaller villages. The buildings themselves are often quite old (perhaps a few hundred years old), passed down to family members over several generations. Residential construction of rough concrete and blockwork is usually unpainted, and the palette of a Syrian village is therefore simple tones of greys and browns.

Syrians have contributed to Arabic literature and music and have a proud tradition of oral and written poetry. Syrian writers, many of whom immigrated to Egypt, played a crucial role in the nahda or Arab literary and cultural revival of the nineteenth century. Prominent contemporary Syrian writers include, among others, Adonis, Muhammad Maghout, Haidar Haidar, Ghada al-Samman, Nizar Qabbani and Zakariyya Tamer.

There was a private sector presence in the Syrian cinema industry until the end of the 1970s, but private investment has since preferred the more lucrative television serial business. Syrian soap operas, in a variety of styles (all melodramatic, however), have considerable market penetration throughout the eastern Arab world.

Although declining, Syria's world-famous handicraft industry still employs thousands.

Syrian food mostly consists of Southern Mediterranean, Greek, and Southwest Asian dishes. Some Syrian dishes also evolved from Turkish and French cooking. Dishes like shish kebab, stuffed zucchini, yabra' (stuffed grape leaves, the word yapra' derives from the Turkish word 'yaprak' meaning leaf), shawarma, and falafel are very popular in Syria as the food there is diverse in taste and type. Restaurants are usually open (food is served outdoors).



Eggelin Tomb Tower in Palmyra.

## Fairs and festivals

<b>Festival/Fair</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Month</b>
Flower Festival	Latakia	April
Traditional Festival	Palmyra	May
International Flower Fair	Damascus	May
Syrian Song Festival	Aleppo	July
Marmarita Festival	Marmarita	August
Vine Festival	As Suwayda	September
Cotton Festival	Aleppo	September
Damascus International Fair	Damascus	September
Festival of Love and Peace	Lattakia	2 - 12 August
Bosra Festival	Bosra	September
Film and Theatre Festival	Damascus	November
Jasmine Festival	Damascus	April

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# United Arab Emirates

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

The **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) (Arabic: دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة, transliteration: **Dowlat Al-Imārāt al-‘Arabīyah al-Muttaḥidah**) is a Middle Eastern federation of seven states situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia on the Persian Gulf, bordering Oman and Saudi Arabia. The seven states, termed emirates, are Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain.

The UAE, rich in oil and natural gas, has become highly prosperous after gaining foreign direct investment funding in the 1970s. The country has a relatively high Human Development Index for the Asian continent and ranked 39th globally.

Before 1971, the UAE were known as the Trucial States or Trucial Oman, in reference to a nineteenth-century truce between Britain and several Arab Sheikhs. The name Pirate Coast was also used in reference to the area's emirates in the 18th to early 20th century.

## History

The United Arab Emirates was formed from tribally organized Arabian Peninsula sheikhdoms along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf and the northwestern coast of the Gulf of Oman. The area became Islamic in the 7th century.

Later, portions of the nation came under the direct influence of the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century. Thereafter the region was known as the Pirate Coast, as raiders based there harassed the shipping industry despite both European and Arab navies patrolling the area from the 17th century into the 19th century. British expeditions to protect the Indian trade from raiders at Ras al-Khaimah led to campaigns against that headquarters and other harbors along the coast in 1819. The next year, a peace treaty was signed to which all the sheikhs of the coast adhered. Raids continued intermittently until 1835, when the sheikhs agreed not to engage in hostilities at sea. In 1853, they signed a treaty with the United Kingdom, under which the sheikhs (the "Trucial Sheikhdoms") agreed to a "perpetual maritime truce." It was enforced by the United Kingdom, and disputes among sheikhs were referred to the British for

<p>دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة  <i>Dowlat Al-Imārāt al-‘Arabīya al-Muttaḥida</i>  <b>United Arab Emirates</b></p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Motto:</b> "God, Nation, President"</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>Ishy Bilady</i></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b>	Abu Dhabi
<b>Largest city</b>	Dubai
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Emirati

settlement.



Primarily in reaction to the ambitions of other European countries, the United Kingdom and the Trucial Sheikdoms established closer bonds in an 1892 treaty, similar to treaties entered into by the UK with other Persian Gulf principalities. The sheikhs agreed not to dispose of any territory except to the United Kingdom and not to enter into relationships with any foreign government other than the United Kingdom without its consent. In return, the British promised to protect the Trucial Coast from all aggression by sea and to help in case of land attack.

In 1955, the United Kingdom sided with Abu Dhabi in the latter's dispute with Oman over the Buraimi Oasis and other territory to the south. A 1974 agreement between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia would have settled the Abu Dhabi-Saudi border dispute; however, the agreement has yet to be ratified by the UAE Government and is not recognized by the Saudi Government. The border with Oman also remains officially unsettled, but the two governments agreed to delineate the border in May 1999.

In the early 1960s Dubai was ahead of all the other states even though oil was not yet discovered in its territories. Abu Dhabi was behind until His Highness Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan became ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1967, and instated Dr. Mana Alotaiba as Minister of Petroleum, who used his extensive knowledge about economics to build up the petroleum industry. Dr. Mana Alotaiba was also elected as president of OPEC a record of six times.

The British had earlier started a development office that helped in some small developments in the Emirates. The sheikhs of the Emirates decided then to form a council to coordinate matters between them and took over the development office. They formed the Trucial States Council, and appointed Adi Bitar, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum's Legal Advisor, as Secretary General and Legal Advisor to the Council. The Council was terminated once the United Arab Emirates was formed.

In 1968, the UK announced its decision, reaffirmed in March 1971, to end the treaty relationships with the seven Trucial Sheikdoms which had been, together with Bahrain and Qatar, under British protection. The nine attempted to form a union of Arab Emirates, but by mid-1971 they were unable to agree on terms of union, even though the termination date of the British treaty relationship was the end of 1971.

Bahrain became independent in August and Qatar in September 1971. When the British-Trucial Shaikdoms treaty expired on December 1, 1971, they became fully independent.

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<b>Government</b>	Federal constitutional monarchy
- President	Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
- Prime Minister	Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
<b>Establishment</b>	December 2, 1971
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	83,600 km <sup>2</sup> ( 116th) 32,278 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- 2007 estimate	4,621,399 ( 119th)
- 2006 census	4,588,697
- Density	64/km <sup>2</sup> ( 150rd) 139/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$159.3 billion ( 54th)
- Per capita	\$55,200 (CIA) ( 5th)
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$192 billion ( 38th)
- Per capita	\$42,934 ( 16th)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.868 (high) ( 39th)
<b>Currency</b>	UAE dirham ( <span style="font-size: small;">AED</span> )
<b>Time zone</b>	GMT+4 ( UTC+4)
- Summer ( DST)	not observed ( UTC+4)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.ae
<b>Calling code</b>	+971

The rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai decided to form a union between their two Emirates independently, prepare a constitution, then call the Rulers of the other five emirates to a meeting and offer them to join. It was also agreed between both of them that Adi Bitar write the constitution and have it ready by 2 December 1971.

On December 2, 1971, at the Dubai Guesthouse Palace four other Emirates agreed to join and enter into a union of six Emirates called the United Arab Emirates. Ras al-Khaimah joined later, in early 1972.

The UAE sent forces into Kuwait during the 1990–91 Gulf War.

The UAE supports military operations from the United States and other Coalition nations that are engaged in the invasions of Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2002) as well as Operations supporting the Global War on Terrorism for the Horn of Africa at the al-Dhafra Air Base located outside of Abu Dhabi. The al-Dhafra Air Base also supported American and Allied Operations during the 1991 Persian Gulf War and Operation Northern Watch.

On November 2, 2004, the UAE's first president, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, died. His eldest son, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, succeeded him as ruler of Abu Dhabi. In accordance with the Constitution, the UAE's Supreme Council of Rulers elected Khalifa as president. Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan succeeded Khalifa as Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

## Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is a federation which consists of seven emirates. The largest emirate is Abu Dhabi which contains the nation's capital city Abu Dhabi. Five emirates have one or more exclaves, in addition to the main territory. The seven emirates:

- Abu Dhabi
- Ajman: 1 exclave
- Dubai: 1 exclave
- Fujairah: 2 exclaves
- Ras al-Khaimah: 1 exclave
- Sharjah: 3 exclaves
- Umm al-Quwain

There are two areas under joint control. One is jointly controlled by Oman and Ajman, the other by Fujairah and Sharjah.

There is an Omani enclave surrounded by UAE territory, known as Wadi Madha. It is located halfway between the Musandam peninsula and the rest of Oman, on the Dubai- Hatta road in the Emirate of Sharjah. It covers approximately 75 square kilometres (29 sq mi) and the boundary was settled in 1589. The north-east corner of Madha is closest to the Khor Fakkan- Fujairah road, barely 10 metres (33 ft) away. Within the enclave is a UAE exclave called Nahwa, also



Major cities of the United Arab Emirates

belonging to the Emirate of Sharjah. It is about 8 kilometres (5 mi) on a dirt track west of the town of New Madha. It consists of about forty houses with its own clinic and telephone exchange.

## Politics

The Presidency and Premiership of the United Arab Emirates is de facto hereditary to the Al Nahyan clan of Abu Dhabi and the Al Maktoum clan of Dubai. The Supreme Council, consisting of the rulers of the seven emirates, also elects the Council of Ministers, while an appointed forty-member Federal National Council, drawn from all the emirates, reviews proposed laws. There is a federal court system; all emirates except Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah have joined the federal system; all emirates have both secular and Islamic law for civil, criminal, and high courts. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan was the union's president from the nation's founding until his death on 2 November 2004. The Federal Supreme Council elected his son, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president the next day. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan is the heir apparent.



UAE Infantry Fighting Vehicle offloading

## Demographics

The UAE population has an unnatural sex distribution consisting of more than twice the number of males than females. The 15-65 age group has a male(s)/female sex ratio of 2.743. UAE's gender imbalance is the highest among any nation in the world followed by Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia - all of which together comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC states are also what most South and Southeast Asians refer to as the Persian Gulf especially in context of emigration.

UAE has one of the most diverse populations in the Middle East. 19 % of the population is Emirati, and 23 % is other Arabs and Iranians . An estimated 85 percent of the population is comprised of non-citizens, one of the world's highest percentages of foreign-born in any nation. In addition, since the mid-1980s, people from all across South Asia have settled in the UAE. The high living standards and economic opportunities in the UAE are better than almost anywhere else in the Middle East and South Asia. This makes the nation an attractive destination for Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis along with a few thousand Sri Lankans. In 2006, there were approximately 2.15 million Indian nationals, Philippines Nationals— OFW, Bangladeshi nationals, and Pakistani nationals in the UAE, making them the largest expatriate community in the oil-rich nation. Persons from over twenty Arab nationalities, including thousands of Palestinians who came as either political refugees or migrant workers, also live in the United Arab Emirates. There is also a sizable number of Emiratis from other Arab League nations who have come before the formation of the Emirates such as Egyptians, Somalis, Sudanese and other Gulf Arab states, who have adopted the native culture and customs. Further, Somali immigration also continued in the 1990s as a result of the Somali civil war.

There are also residents from other parts of the Middle East, Baluchistan region of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, Africa, Europe, Post-Soviet states, and North America. The UAE has attracted a small number of very affluent expatriates (Americans, British, Canadians, Japanese, Chinese and Australians) from developed countries who are attracted to a very warm climate, scenic views (beaches, golf courses, man-made islands and lucrative housing tracts in Abu Dhabi and Dubai), the nation's comparably low cost of living (but in 2006, thousands of real estate properties are valued over millions of dollars) and tax-free incentives for their business or residency in the UAE. They make up under 5 percent of the UAE population; mainly English-speaking. Expatriates adhere to the law and customs of the UAE, their adopted country.

The most populated city is Dubai, with approximately 1.6 million people. Other major cities include Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Sharjah, and Fujairah. About 88% of the population of the United Arab Emirates is urban. The remaining inhabitants live in tiny towns scattered throughout the country or in one of the many desert oilfield camps in the nation.

## Culture and religion

*See also: Islam in the United Arab Emirates, Roman Catholicism in the United Arab Emirates, Bahá'í Faith in the United Arab Emirates, Music of the United Arab Emirates, Cinema of the United Arab Emirates, UAE Public Library and Cultural Centre, and Yowla*

Rooted in Islamic culture, the UAE has strong ties with the rest of the Arab and Islamic world. The government is committed to preserving traditional forms of art and culture, primarily through the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation. The first known manuscript produced in the UAE was *Al jawaher wal la'li*, a text which discusses the emirates of the nation.

Nearly all citizens are Muslims, approximately 85 percent of whom are Sunni and the remaining 15 percent are Shi'a. According to official ministry documents, 76 percent of the total population is Muslim, 9% is Christian, and 15 percent is other. Other unofficial sources claim that 15 percent is Hindu, 5 percent is Buddhist, and the remaining 5 percent is other (mainly including Parsi, Bahá'í, and Sikh).

Dubai is the only emirate of the UAE with both a Hindu Temple and a Sikh Gurdwara. Christian church buildings are also present in the country. There are a variety of Asian-influenced schools, restaurants and cultural centers.

## Economy



A woman shopping at Dubai Duty Free

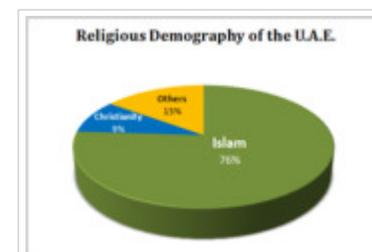


Chart showing the distribution of Islam, Christianity and other religions in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is one of the most developed in the world, based on various socioeconomic indicators such as GDP per capita, energy consumption per capita, and the Human Development Index.

The GDP per capita is currently the 16th in the world and 3rd in the Middle East after Qatar and Kuwait as measured by the CIA World Factbook, or the 17th in the world as measured by the International Monetary Fund; while at \$168 billion in 2006, with a small population of 4 million, the GDP of the UAE ranks second in the CCASG (after Saudi Arabia), third in the Middle East — North Africa ( MENA) region (after Saudi Arabia and Iran), and 38th in the world (ahead of Malaysia).

There are various deviating estimates regarding the actual growth rate of the nation's GDP. However, all available statistics indicate that the UAE currently has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. According to a recent report by the Ministry of Finance and Industry, real GDP rose by 35 percent in 2006 to \$175 billion, compared with \$130 billion in 2005. These figures would suggest that the UAE had the fastest growing real GDP in the world, between 2005 and 2006.

Although the United Arab Emirates is becoming less dependent on natural resources as a source of revenue, petroleum and natural gas exports still play an important role in the economy, especially in Abu Dhabi. A massive construction boom, an expanding manufacturing base, and a thriving services sector are helping the UAE diversify its economy. Nationwide, there is currently \$350 billion worth of active construction projects. Such projects include the Burj Dubai, which is slated to become the world's tallest building, Dubai World Central International Airport which, when completed, will be the most expensive airport ever built, and the three Palm Islands, the largest artificial islands in the world. Other projects include the Dubai Mall which will become the world's largest shopping mall when completed, and a man-made archipelago called The World which seeks to increase Dubai's rapidly growing tourism industry. Also in the entertainment sector is the construction of Dubailand, which is expected to be twice the size of Disney World, and of Dubai Sports City which will not only provide homes for local sports teams but may be part of future Olympic bids.

The currency of the United Arab Emirates is the Emirati Dirham, exchanging at a rate of about 3.67 per US dollar.

## Education



Abu Dhabi



Deira, Dubai



The American University of Sharjah

The education system up to the secondary level is monitored by the Ministry of Education. It consists of primary schools, middle schools and secondary schools. The public schools are government-funded and the curriculum is created to match the United Arab Emirates development's goals and values. The medium of instruction in the public school is Arabic with emphasis on English as a second language. There are also many private schools which are internationally accredited. Public schools in the country are free for citizens of the UAE, while the fees for private schools vary.

The higher education system is monitored by the Ministry of Higher Education to serve and protect children's education. The Ministry also is responsible for admitting students to its undergraduate institutions, including the five largest centers of higher education: United Arab Emirates University, Zayed University, Gulf Medical College, University of Sharjah and Higher Colleges of Technology. There are also many other private universities and colleges in the country, including the American University of Sharjah, Institute of Management Technology Dubai, S.P Jain Centre of Management in Dubai, Al Ain University of Science and Technology, the American University of Dubai, Abu Dhabi University and Ras Al Khaimah

University for medical and health sciences. Finally, other universities based in foreign countries have established campuses in the United Arab Emirates. For instance, there is a Paris-Sorbonne campus in Abu Dhabi.

The UAE has shown a strong recent interest in improving education and research. Recent enterprises include the establishment of the CERT Research Centers and the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology.

## Human rights

Although the UAE government has made some advances in the protection of human rights, the U.S. Department of State notes in its annual report on human rights practices that numerous fundamentalist practices and policies exist to the contrary.

Guest workers are brought in from South Asia, and a common objection is that they are grossly underpaid as their passports are held by their employers. There have been many reports of unskilled workers getting underpaid, and complaints of segregation abound.

The form of Sharia exercised prohibits 'sodomy', effectually outlawing any homosexual relationships.

The UAE also does not allow individuals past retirement age to stay within the country without a job. Upon retirement, residents must return to their country of origin.

Discrimination in the workplace is common, prospective employers will specify religion, nationality (and even regional origin in some cases) and also specify the sex of required candidates within job advertisements. It is very common to have different pay scales depending on nationality and sex. Policies are in place in certain instances where state employers are required to fill in vacancies with UAE nationals, a process called Emiratisation. This seems to be in line with similar policies by the EU, for example, where employers, public and private, are encouraged to fill in job vacancies with EU nationals.

## Transportation

Dubai has a public transport system called the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA). This authority is responsible for the bus network currently in operation. Recently, the RTA purchased 300 buses from Germany's MAN AG in an effort to reduce the city's growing traffic problem. RTA is also developing the Dubai Metro system. The first line (Red Line) is expected to complete by September 2009. The yellow lines, currently in development will go through the man-made Palm Islands.

Lately, Emirate of Dubai has created new electronic toll collection system in July 2007, which emphasizes the system's congestion management objectives as well as the choice of technology for the toll system. The new system, which is called Salik (meaning clear and smooth in Arabic) utilizes the latest technology to achieve free flow operation with no toll booths, no toll collectors, and no impact to traffic flow, allowing vehicles to move freely through the toll point at highway speeds. Each time one passes through a Salik toll point, the toll of AED 4 (1.09 USD) will be deducted from his or her prepaid toll account using advanced Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. The new system was introduced and executed by Roads and Transport Authority of Dubai.



Inside the Dubai International airport terminal

## Airline history

The national airline of Abu Dhabi was formerly Gulf Air, operated jointly with Bahrain and Oman. On September 13, 2005, Abu Dhabi announced that it was withdrawing from Gulf Air to concentrate on Etihad Airways, designated as the new national carrier of the UAE, established in November 2003.

In 1985, Dubai established its airline Emirates, which, as of 2007, is one of the fastest growing airlines in the world.

Air Arabia, a leading discount airline in the Persian Gulf region, is based in the Emirate of Sharjah.

RAK Airways is the fourth national airways of the United Arab Emirates, was established in February 2006, is based in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

## Ports and harbours

The United Arab Emirates has several major ports, including one of the world's largest, Jebel Ali Port. Other important ports in the UAE include Port Zayed, Khalifa Port, Port Rashid, Port Khalid, Hamriyah Port, Port of Ajman, Saqr Port, Um Al Quwain, Khor Fhakan and Fujairah Port.

## Sports

New sports are becoming popular alongside traditional camel racing. Examples of these new sports include golf, with two European Tour events in the country (the Dubai Desert Classic and the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship) and the world's richest horse race, the Dubai World Cup, held annually in March.

Aside from the international circuit events, the UAE has a healthy indigenous sporting environment with the local community participating in a wide variety of clubs and establishments. The seven emirates regularly compete in national leagues and cups in a multiplicity of sports that are controlled by specialized governing bodies.

The country itself is a prime location for sporting events. The high quality sporting venues (both indoor and outdoor), in addition to the climate, ensure the continuation of activities throughout the winter season. Construction of Dubai Sports City is underway to take advantage of these benefits, and to establish the country as a hub for sports throughout the world.

## Football (soccer)

The UAE has a huge interest in football. The United Arab Emirates Football Association was first established in 1971 and since then has dedicated its time and effort to promoting the game, organising youth programmes and improving the abilities of not only its players, but of the officials and coaches involved with its regional teams. The U.A.E. football team qualified for the World Cup in 1990 - with Egypt it was the third consecutive World Cup with two Arab nations qualifying after Kuwait and Algeria in 1982 and Iraq and Algeria again in 1986.

The UAE National Team won the 2005 Kirin Cup, sharing the cup with Peru after a 1-0 victory over host country Japan.

The UAE team played a four-team friendly in Switzerland in July 2005, in which they beat both Qatar and Kuwait but lost 5-4 on penalties in the final against Egypt.

In 2003 the UAE was the host nation of the FIFA U-20 World Cup between November and December 2003.

In April, Dubai Holding agreed to provide the national team with Dh20 million (US\$5.45 million) sponsorship money over the next four years. The fund will also go towards developing the sport.

The UAE also recently won the Gulf Cup soccer championship held in Abu Dhabi January 2007.

The UAE are currently ranked ninety-seventh in the world according to the FIFA World Rankings.

## Tennis



Stadium at Al Ain



A tennis match during the Dubai Tennis Championships.

The Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships (part of the ATP International Series Gold at the Aviation Club, Dubai) was bigger than ever in 2000 with no less than six of the top-seeded women's players taking centre court, a first time appearance by tennis' golden boy, Andre Agassi, and the return of the celebrated Roger Federer, who was seeking his third title crown, resulting in some dramatic court action. In an unprecedented move, Dubai Duty Free, organisers of the championship, decided to switch the men's tournament to the first week of the competition so that it ran from 21 to 27 February and the women's was played from 28 February to 5 March.

## Cricket

Cricket is one of the most popular sports in the UAE. Sharjah Cricket Association Stadium in Sharjah has hosted 5 international Test matches so far. Sheikh Zayed Stadium and Al Jazira Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi also hosts international cricket. Dubai also has two cricket stadiums (Dubai Cricket Ground No.1 and No.2) with a third, 'S3' currently under construction as part of Dubai Sports City. Dubai is also home to the International Cricket Council.

The United Arab Emirates national cricket team qualified for the 1996 Cricket World Cup and narrowly missed out on qualification for the 2007 Cricket World Cup.

## Camel racing

The inhabitants of the Persian Gulf states have enjoyed camel racing for many years as it is considered a traditional sport. Formalizing camel racing was one way of maintaining its central role in UAE life. In the past, UAE had a reputation for exploiting South Asian children as jockeys. However, Robot jockeys are now used after strict government regulations were passed prohibiting underage jockeys from racing.

The UAE now has no fewer than 15 race tracks across the seven emirates. Nad Al Sheba Racecourse, 10 kilometers outside of Dubai, Al Wathba, 30 kilometers south-east of Abu Dhabi, and Al Ain track, which is 20 kilometers west of Al Ain, are all large, well-equipped camel tracks with high-tech facilities. Two smaller tracks are located in Sharjah, one in Ra's al-Khaimah and one in Umm al-Qaiwain. Others are spread throughout the desert areas.

## F1

In February 2007 it was announced that Bernie Ecclestone had signed a seven year deal with Abu Dhabi, to host a Formula 1 race there from the 2009 season. The 5.6 km circuit is to be set on Yas Island and it will include street and marina sections similar to Monaco's course.

## Rugby Sevens

U.A.E. hosts Dubai Sevens round of the IRB Sevens World Series at Dubai Exiles Rugby Ground.

## Falconry

The U.A.E. is well-known for its falconry as it is also considered a traditional sport. Many of UAE's rulers were enthusiasts in falconry as the nation imports falcons from all across the globe.

## Holidays

Date	English	Arabic	
1 January	New Year's Day		رأس السنة الميلادية
variable	Day of the Sacrifice	<i>Eid ul-Adha</i>	عيد الأضحى
variable	Islamic New Year	<i>Ra's as-Sana al-Hijria</i>	رأس السنة الهجرية
variable	The Night Journey	<i>Al-Isra'a wal-Mi'raj</i>	الإسراء والمعراج
2 December	National Day	<i>Al-Eid al-Watani</i>	العيد الوطني
variable	End of Ramadan	<i>Eid ul-Fitr</i>	عيد الفطر

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# Yemen

## 2008/9 Schools Wikipedia Selection. Related subjects: Middle Eastern Countries

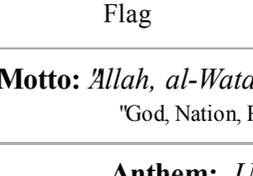
**Yemen** (Arabic: اليَمَن al-Yaman), officially the **Republic of Yemen** (Arabic: الجمهورية اليمنية al-Jumhūriyya al-Yamaniyya) is a Middle Eastern country located on the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia. With a population of more than 20 million people, Yemen is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the North, the Red Sea to the West, the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to the South, and Oman to the east. Yemen's territory includes over 200 islands, the largest of which is Socotra, about 415 kilometres (259 miles) to the south of Yemen, off the coast of Somalia. Yemen is the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula.

## History

The land of Yemen is one of the oldest centers of civilization in the world. Between 2300 BC and the sixth century AD, it was part of the Sabaean, Awsanian, Minaean, Qatabanian, Hadhramawtian, Himyarite, and some other kingdoms, which controlled the lucrative spice trade. It was known to the ancient Romans as *Arabia Felix* ("Happy Arabia") because of the riches its trade generated. Augustus Caesar attempted to annex it, but the expedition failed. The Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum annexed it by around 520, and it was subsequently taken by the Sassanid Persians around 570.

In the 3rd century and again in the late sixth and early seventh century, many Sabaean and Himyarite people migrated out of the land of Yemen following the destructions of the Ma'rib Dam (*sadd Ma'rib*) and migrated to North Africa and the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. In the 7th century, Islamic caliphs began to exert control over the area. After the caliphate broke up, the former North Yemen came under the control of imams of various dynasties usually of the Zaidi sect, who established a theocratic political structure that survived until modern times. Egyptian Sunni caliphs occupied much of North Yemen throughout the eleventh century. By the sixteenth century and again in the nineteenth century, north Yemen was part of the Ottoman Empire, and during several periods its imams exerted control over south Yemen.

In 1839, the British occupied the port of Aden and established it as a colony in September of that year. They also set up a zone of loose alliances (known as protectorates) around Aden to act as a protective

<p>الجمهورية اليمنية <i>Al-Jumhūriyyah al-Yamaniyyah</i> Republic of Yemen</p>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
<p><b>Motto:</b> <i>Allah, al-Watan, at-Thawra, al-Wehda</i> "God, Nation, Revolution, Unity"</p>	
<p><b>Anthem:</b> <i>United Republic</i></p>	
	
<b>Capital</b> (and largest city)	San'a'
<b>Official languages</b>	Arabic
<b>Demonym</b>	Yemeni, Yemenite

buffer. North Yemen became independent of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and became a republic in 1962. In 1967, the British withdrew and gave back Aden to Yemen due to the extreme pressure of battles with the North and its Egyptian allies. After the British withdrawal, this area became known as South Yemen. The two countries were formally united as the Republic of Yemen on May 22, 1990.

## Politics



President Ali Abdullah Saleh with Vice President of the United States Dick Cheney.

Yemen is a republic with a bicameral legislature. Under the constitution, an elected president, an elected 301-seat House of Representatives, and an appointed 111-member Shura Council share power. The president is head of state, and the prime minister is head of government. The constitution provides that the president be elected by popular vote from at least two candidates endorsed by at least fifteen members of the Parliament. The prime minister, in turn, is appointed by the president and must be approved by two thirds of the Parliament. The presidential term of office is seven years, and the parliamentary term of elected office is six years. Suffrage is universal for people age 18 and older.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh became the first elected President in reunified Yemen in 1999 (though he had been President of unified Yemen since 1990 and President of North Yemen since 1978). After an initial reluctance to run once more, he was re-elected to office in September of 2006. Saleh's victory was marked by an election that international observers judged to be generally "free and fair". Popular demonstrations and editorials of support in major papers helped change his mind to run again. In April 2003, parliamentary elections were held, and the General People's Congress (GPC) maintained an absolute majority. There was a marked decrease from previous years in election-related violence. However, there were some problems with underage voting, confiscation of ballot boxes, voter intimidation, and election-related violence.

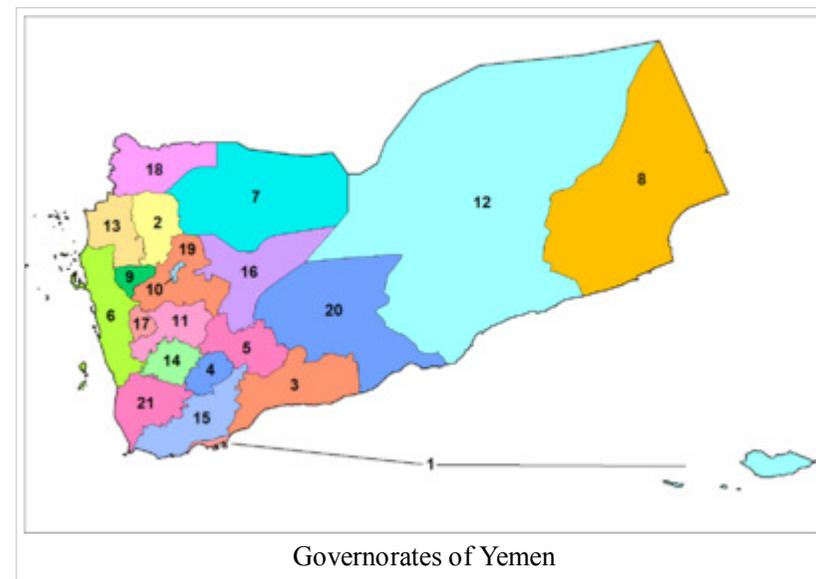
The constitution calls for an independent judiciary. The former northern and southern legal codes have been unified. The legal system includes separate commercial courts and a Supreme Court based in Sana'a. Since the country is an Islamic state, the Islamic Law (Sharia) is the main source for laws. Indeed, many court cases are debated by the religious basis of the laws. For this reason, many judges are religious scholars as well as legal authorities. Unlike Saudi Arabia and other Islamic states, however, the consumption of alcohol by non-Muslims is tolerated, and the mild stimulant qat is chewed by Yemenis of all strata of society, despite being banned or frowned upon by other Muslim countries and groups.

<b>Government</b>	Republic
- President	Ali Abdullah Saleh
- Prime Minister	Ali Mohammed Mujur
<b>Establishment</b>	
- Unification	May 22, 1990
<b>Area</b>	
- Total	527,968 km <sup>2</sup> ( 49th) 203,849 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
<b>Population</b>	
- July 2008 estimate	23,013,376 ( 51st)
- July 2007 census	22,230,531
- Density	42/km <sup>2</sup> ( 160th) 109/sq mi
<b>GDP ( PPP)</b>	2007 estimate
- Total	\$52.61 billion ( 81st)
- Per capita	\$2,400 (2007 est.) ( 132nd)
<b>HDI (2007)</b>	▲ 0.508 (medium) ( 153rd)
<b>Currency</b>	Yemeni rial \$1 = 198.13 Rials ( YER)
<b>Time zone</b>	( UTC+3)
<b>Internet TLD</b>	.ye
<b>Calling code</b>	+967

## Governorates and districts

As of February 2004, Yemen is divided into twenty governorates (*muhafazah*) and one municipality. The population of each governorate is listed in the table below.

Division	Capital City	Pop (2004)	Key
'Adan	Aden	589,419	1
'Amran	'Amran	877,786	2
Abyan	Zinjibar	433,819	3
Ad Dali		470,564	4
Al Bayda'	Al Bayda	577,369	5
Al Hudaydah	Al Hudaydah	2,157,552	6
Al Jawf	Al Jawf	443,797	7
Al Mahrah	Al Ghaydah	88,594	8
Al Mahwit	Al Mahwit	494,557	9
Amanat Al Asimah	Sanaa	1,747,834	10
Dhamar	Dhamar	1,330,108	11
Hadramaut	Al Mukalla	1,028,556	12
Hajjah	Hajjah	1,479,568	13
Ibb	Ibb	2,131,861	14
Lahij	Lahij	722,694	15
Ma'rib	Ma'rib	238,522	16
Raymah		394,448	17
Sa'dah	Sa`dah	695,033	18
Sana'a	San`a'	919,215	19



<b>Shabwah</b>	`Ataq	470,440	20
<b>Ta'izz</b>	Ta'izz	2,393,425	21

The governorates are subdivided into 333 districts (*muderiya*), which are subdivided into 2,210 sub-districts, and then into 38,284 villages (as of 2001).

Before 1990, Yemen existed as two separate entities. For more information, see Historic Governorates of Yemen.

## Geography

Yemen is in the Middle East, in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea, west of Oman and south of Saudi Arabia.

A number of Red Sea islands, including the Hanish Islands, Kamaran and Perim, as well as Socotra in the Arabian Sea belong to Yemen. Many of the islands are volcanic; for example Jabal al-Tair had a volcanic eruption in 2007 and before that in 1883.

At 527,970 km<sup>2</sup> (203,837 sq mi), Yemen is the world's 49th-largest country (after France). It is comparable in size to Thailand, and somewhat larger than the U.S. state of California. Yemen is situated at .

Until recently, Yemen's northern border was undefined because the Arabian Desert prevented any human habitation there.

The country can be divided geographically into four main regions: the coastal plains in the west, the western highlands, the eastern highlands, and the Rub al Khali in the east.

The Tihamah ("hot lands") form a very arid and flat coastal plain. Despite the aridity, the presence of many lagoons makes this region very marshy and a suitable breeding ground for malarial mosquitoes. There are also extensive crescent-shaped sand dunes. The evaporation in the Tihama is so great that streams from the highlands never reach the sea, but they do contribute to extensive groundwater reserves. Today, these are heavily exploited for agricultural use.



Map of Yemen



The town of Hajarin

The Tihamah ends abruptly at the escarpment of the western highlands. This area, now heavily terraced to meet the demand for food, receives the highest rainfall in Arabia, rapidly increasing from 100 mm (4 inches) per year to about 760 mm (30 inches) in Ta'izz and over 1,000 mm (40 inches) in Ibb. Agriculture here is very diverse, with such crops as sorghum dominating. Cotton and many fruit trees are also grown, with mangoes being the most valuable. Temperatures are hot in the day but fall dramatically at night. There are perennial streams in the highlands but these never reach the sea because of high evaporation in the Tihama.

The central highlands are an extensive high plateau over 2,000 metres (6,560 feet) in elevation. This area is drier than the western highlands because of rain-shadow influences, but still receives sufficient rain in wet years for extensive cropping. Diurnal temperature ranges are among the highest in the world: ranges from 30 °C (86 °F) in the day to 0 °C (32 °F) at night are normal. Water storage allows for irrigation and the growing of wheat and barley. Sana'a is located in this region. The highest point in Yemen is Jabal an Nabi Shu'ayb, at 3,666 meters (12,028 ft).

The Rub al Khali in the east is much lower, generally below 1,000 metres, and receives almost no rain. It is populated only by Bedouin herders of camels.

## Economy

Remittances from Yemenis working abroad and foreign aid paid for perennial trade deficits. Reports average annual growth in the range of 3-4% from 2000 through 2007. Its economic fortunes depend mostly on declining oil resources, but the country is trying to diversify its earnings. In 2006 Yemen began an economic reform program designed to bolster non-oil sectors of the economy and foreign investment. As a result of the program, international donors pledged about \$5 billion for development projects. In addition, Yemen has made some progress on reforms over the last year that will likely encourage foreign investment. Oil revenues probably increased in 2007 as a result of higher prices. Substantial Yemeni communities exist in many countries of the world, including Yemen's immediate neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula, Indonesia, India, East Africa, and also the United Kingdom, Israel, and the United States, especially in the area around Detroit, Michigan and in Lackawanna, New York. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union and China provided large-scale assistance. For example, the Chinese are currently involved with the expansion of the International Airport in Sanaa.

In the south, pre-independence economic activity was overwhelmingly concentrated in the port city of Aden. The seaborne transit trade, which the port relied upon, collapsed with the closure of the Suez Canal and Britain's withdrawal from Aden in 1967.

Since unification, the government has worked to integrate two relatively disparate economic systems. However, severe shocks, including the return in 1990 of approximately 850,000 Yemenis from the Gulf states, a subsequent major reduction of aid flows, and internal political disputes culminating in the 1994 civil war hampered economic growth. Yemen, the fastest growing democracy in the Middle East, is attempting to climb into the middle human development region through ongoing political and economic reform.

Since the conclusion of the war, the government entered into agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to implement a structural adjustment program. Phase one of the IMF program included major financial and monetary reforms, including floating the currency, reducing the budget deficit, and cutting

subsidies. Phase two will address structural issues such as civil service reform.

In early 1995, the government of Yemen launched an economic, financial and administrative reform program (EFARP) with the support of the World Bank and the IMF, as well international donors. The First Five-Year Plan (FFYP) for the years 1996 to 2000 was introduced in 1996. The World Bank has focused on public sector management, including civil service reform, budget reform and privatization. In addition, attracting diversified private investment, water management and poverty-oriented social sector improvements has been made a priority for the implementation of the programs in Yemen. These programs had a positive impact on Yemen's economy and led to the reduction of the budget deficit to less than 3% of GDP during the period 1995-99 and the correction of macro-financial imbalances.

In 1997, IMF and the government began medium-term economic reform programs under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) and Extended Fund Facility (EFF). This reform program was aimed at reducing dependence on the oil sector and establishing a market environment for real non-oil GDP growth and investment in the non-oil sector. Increasing the growth rate in the non-oil sector was one of the most important problems to be tackled by the government. These programs included reducing unemployment, strengthening the social safety net and increasing financial stability. To achieve these reforms, the government and IMF implemented containment of government wages, improvements in revenue collection with the introduction of reforms in tax administration, and a sharp reduction in subsidies bills by increasing prices on subsidized goods. As a result, the fiscal cash deficit was reduced from 16 percent of GDP to 0.9 percent from 1994 to 1997. This was supported by aid from oil export countries despite the wide-ranging fluctuations in world oil prices. The real growth rate in the non-oil sector rose by 5.6 percent during 1995-97.

The World Bank is active in Yemen, with twenty-two active projects in 2004, including projects to improve governance in the public sector, water, and education. In 1996 and 1997, Yemen lowered its debt burden through Paris Club agreements and restructuring U.S. foreign debt. In 2003, government reserves reached \$50 billion. The government has recently done a number of regulatory reforms and Yemen now ranks 13 on the World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business" index.

## Foreign relations

The geography and ruling Imams of North Yemen kept the country isolated from foreign influence before 1962. The country's relations with Saudi Arabia were defined by the Taif Agreement of 1934, which delineated the northernmost part of the border between the two kingdoms and set the framework for commercial and other intercourse. The Taif Agreement has been renewed periodically in 20-year increments, and its validity was reaffirmed in 1995. Relations with the British colonial authorities in Aden and the south were usually tense.

The Soviet and Chinese Aid Missions established in 1958 and 1959 were the first important non-Muslim presence in North Yemen. Following the September 1962 revolution, the Yemen Arab Republic became closely allied with and heavily dependent upon Egypt. Saudi Arabia aided the royalists in their attempt to defeat the Republicans and did not recognize the Yemen Arab Republic until 1970. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia provided Yemen substantial budgetary and project support. At the same time, Saudi Arabia maintained direct contact with Yemeni tribes, which sometimes strained its official relations with the Yemeni Government. Hundreds of thousands of Yemenis found employment in Saudi Arabia during the late 1970s and 1980s.

In February 1989, North Yemen joined Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt in forming the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), an organization created partly in response to the founding of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and intended to foster closer economic cooperation and integration among its members. After unification, the Republic of Yemen was accepted as a member of the ACC in place of its YAR predecessor. In the wake of the Gulf crisis, the ACC has remained inactive. Yemen is not a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

British authorities left southern Yemen in November 1967 in the wake of an intense rebellion. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the successor to British colonial rule, had diplomatic relations with many nations, but its major links were with the Soviet Union and other Marxist countries. Relations between it and the conservative Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula were strained. There were military clashes with Saudi Arabia in 1969 and 1973, and the PDRY provided active support for the Dhofar rebellion against the Sultanate of Oman. The PDRY was the only Arab state to vote against admitting new Arab states from the Persian Gulf area to the United Nations and the Arab League. The PDRY provided sanctuary and material support to various insurgent groups around the Middle East.

Yemen is a member of the United Nations, the Arab League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and also participates in the nonaligned movement. The Republic of Yemen accepted responsibility for all treaties and debts of its predecessors, the YAR and the PDRY. Yemen has acceded to the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. The Gulf crisis dramatically affected Yemen's foreign relations. As a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 1990 and 1991, Yemen abstained on a number of UNSC resolutions concerning Iraq and Kuwait and voted against the "use of force resolution." Western and Gulf Arab states reacted by curtailing or canceling aid programs and diplomatic contacts. At least 850,000 Yemenis returned from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Subsequent to the liberation of Kuwait, Yemen continued to maintain high-level contacts with Iraq. This hampered its efforts to rejoin the Arab mainstream and to mend fences with its immediate neighbors. In 1993, Yemen launched an unsuccessful diplomatic offensive to restore relations with its Persian Gulf neighbors. Some of its aggrieved neighbors actively aided the south during the 1994 civil war. Since the end of that conflict, tangible progress has been made on the diplomatic front in restoring normal relations with Yemen's neighbors. The Omani-Yemeni border has been officially demarcated. In the summer of 2000, Yemen and Saudi Arabia signed an International Border Treaty settling a 50 year old dispute over the location of the border between the two countries. Yemen settled its dispute with Eritrea over the Hanish Islands in 1998.

After the departure from the Gulf states, as many as 15,000 Yemenis migrated to the U.S. Many Yemenis can be found in the south end of Dearborn, Michigan. In the early 90s, Yemenis came in search of manufacturing jobs. They continue to work in the U.S. and routinely send money back to their families.

Kidnapping of foreign tourists by tribes was an ongoing problem in Yemen as late as early 2006. In many instances, the kidnappers attempted to use hostage taking to gain leverage in negotiations with the government. One victim of kidnapping was former German Secretary of State Jürgen Chrobog, a man who himself had conducted negotiations with kidnappers while in office.

Yemen has historically enjoyed good relations with Somalia, its neighbour to the south and fellow Arab League member. Following the civil war in Somalia, Yemen has maintained a vast network of refugee camps where it accepts thousands of asylum seekers, in addition to up to a million Somali nationals already living and working in Yemen. Ethnic Somalis for the most part blend in well with Yemeni society, as they share centuries of close Islamic, migratory and Arab origin. Non-ethnic Somalis such as the Bantus face the greatest hardship, as they are shunned by both Yemeni and Somali society. The *World Refugee Survey 2008*, published by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, estimates that 110,600 Somali refugees and asylum seekers lived in Yemen in 2007.

Yemen also maintains good relations with Djibouti, its other Somali neighbour to the west across the Red Sea. With a rapidly expanding economy, a stable government, huge investments from fellow Arab nations in the Persian Gulf, and a strategic maritime location in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti stands as an important ally. While Djibouti is largely inhabited by Somalis, it is separate from the Somali Republic and holds its own seat in the United Nations and the League of Arab States. On February 22, 2008, it was revealed that a company owned by Tarek bin Laden was planning to build a bridge across the Bab el Mandeb, linking Yemen with Djibouti.

## Demographics

Yemen has one of the world's highest birth rates; the average Yemeni woman bears seven children. Although this is similar to the rate in Somalia to the south, it is roughly twice as high as that of Saudi Arabia and nearly three times as high as those in the more modernized Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Yemenis are mainly of Arab origin. Arabic is the official language, although English is increasingly understood by citizens in major cities. In the Mahra area (the extreme east) and the island Soqatra, several ancient south-Arabic Semitic languages are spoken. When the former states of north and south Yemen were established, most resident minority groups departed.

Yemenite Jews once formed a sizable Jewish minority in Yemen with a distinct culture. They also occupied key industries including silversmiths and their influence on Yemeni culture is still discussed within the souks. However, most of them immigrated to Israel in the mid 20th century, following the Jewish exodus from Arab lands and Operation Magic Carpet (Yemen). In the early 20th century, they had numbered about 50,000; they currently number only a few hundred individuals and reside largely in Sada.

Arab traders have long operated in Southeast Asia, trading in spices, timber and textiles. Most of the prominent Indonesians, Malaysians and Singaporeans of Arab descent have their origins in southern Yemen in the Hadramawt coastal region. As many as 4 million Indonesians are of Hadrami descent and today there are almost 10,000 Hadramis in Singapore. Fifty years ago, there were Hadramis who emigrated from Yemen to Somalia but this emigration has stopped now due to political and civil unrest.

Religion in Yemen consists primarily of two principal Islamic religious groups. 55% of the population are Sunni and 42% are Shi'a. Sunnis are primarily Shafi'i, but also include significant groups of Malikis, Salafis and Hanbalis. About 35% of Yemenis are Shafi'i Sunnis, 5% are Maliki Sunnis, 15% are Salafis.

Shi'is are primarily Zaidis, and also have significant minorities of Twelver Shias and Musta'ali Western Isma'ili Shias. About 32-38% of Yemenis are Zaidi Shias, 4% are Jaffaris Shias and 6% are Musta'ali Ismaili Shias.

The Sunnis are predominantly in the south and southeast. The Zaidis are predominantly in the north and northwest whilst the Jafaris and Ismailis are in the main centers such as Sana'a and Ma'rib. There are mixed communities in the larger cities. Less than 1% of Yemenis are



View from Hajjah Citadel



High-rise architecture at Shibam, Wadi Hadramawt

non-Muslim, adhering to Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism.

According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Yemen hosted a population of refugees and asylum seekers numbering approximately 124,600 in 2007. Refugees and asylum seekers living in Yemen were predominately from Somalia (110,600), Iraq (11,000) and Ethiopia (2,000).

## Human rights

The human rights situation in Yemen is poor. The government and its security forces, often considered to suffer from rampant corruption, have been responsible for torture, inhumane treatment and even extra judicial executions. There are arbitrary arrests of citizens, especially in the south, as well as arbitrary searches of homes. Prolonged pretrial detention is a serious problem, and judicial corruption, inefficiency, and executive interference undermine due process. Freedom of speech, the press and religion are all restricted.

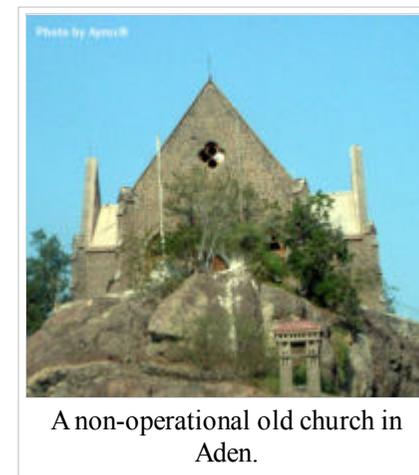
Human Rights Watch reported on discrimination and violence against women as well as on the abolition of the minimum marriage age of the age of fifteen for woman. The onset of puberty (interpreted by conservatives to be at the age of nine) was set as a requirement for marriage instead. Reports of other forms of hostile prejudice directed towards disabled people, and ethnic and religious minorities were also reported. Censorship is actively practiced and in 2005 legislation was passed requiring journalists to reveal their sources under certain circumstances, and the government has raised the start-up costs for newspapers and websites significantly. In violation of the Yemeni constitution, the security forces often monitor telephone, postal, and Internet communications. Journalists who tend to be critical of the government are often harassed and threatened by the police.

Since the start of the Sa'dah insurgency many people accused of supporting Al-Houthi, have been arrested and held without charge or trial. According to the US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2007, "Some Zaydis reported harassment and discrimination by the Government because they were suspected of sympathizing with the al-Houthis. However, it appears the Government's actions against the group were probably politically, not religiously, motivated".

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants reported several violations of refugee and asylum seekers' rights in the organization's 2008 *World Refugee Survey*. Yemeni authorities reportedly deported numerous foreigners without giving them access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, despite the UN's repeated requests. Refugees further reported violence directed against them by Yemeni authorities while living in refugee camps. Yemeni officials reportedly raped, beat and robbed camp-based refugees with impunity in 2007.

## Languages

While the national language is Arabic (spoken in several regional dialects), Yemen is one of the main homelands of the South Semitic family of languages, which includes the non-Arabic language of the ancient Sabaeen Kingdom. Its modern Yemeni descendants are closely related to the modern Semitic languages of



Eritrea and Ethiopia. However, only a small remnant of those languages exists in modern Yemen, notably on the island of Socotra and in the back hills of the Hadhramaut coastal region. Modern South Arabian languages spoken in Yemen include Mehri, with 70,643 speakers, Soqotri, with an estimated 43,000 speakers in the Socotra archipelago (2004 census) and 67,000 worldwide, and Bathari (with an estimated total of only 200 speakers).

Foreign language in public schools is taught from grade seven on, though the quality of public school instruction is low. Private schools using a British or American system teach English and produce proficient speakers, but Arabic is the dominant language of communication. The number of English speakers in Yemen is small compared to other Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Private schools have also started to teach French alongside Arabic and English.

## Culture

### Entertainment

Entertainment industries in Yemen are in constant growth and expansion. Now Yemen has more than one satellite channel to export its culture, music, and videos to the world. Yemen still has a long way in returning to being the Felix of Arabia (Al-Yemen Al-sa3eedah). The increased digital multimedia content of Yemeni entertainment is resulting in the improvement of the tourism industry in Yemen.

### Qat

Qat, also known as Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a large, slow growing, evergreen shrub, reaching a height of between 1 and 6 meters, in equatorial regions it may reach a height of 10 meters. This plant is widely cultivated in Yemen and is generally used for chewing. When Khat juice is swallowed, its leaf juice has a caffeine-like effect. It is deeply rooted in Yemeni culture, which it has exported to its neighbours across the Gulf of Aden, Somalia, Djibouti and, to a lesser degree, Eritrea (where it is mainly consumed by ethnic Arabs of Yemeni and Rashaida origins). Khat is chewed by men and women. The cost of Khat is significant to the Yemeni economy for it both consumes a significant amount of water to grow and is seen by many to reduce the productivity of the people.

### Cinema

The cinema of Yemen is very small, there being only one Yemeni film as of 2007. Released in 2005, *A New Day in Old Sana'a* deals with a young man struggling between whether to go ahead with a traditional marriage or go with the woman he loves.

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Holidays	
Date	English Name
January 1	New Year's Day
May 1	Labor Day
May 22	Day of National Unity
September 26	Revolution Day
October 14	Revolution Day/ National Day
November 30	Independence Day