**Syria**

**Full name:** The Syrian Arab Republic  
**Government:** republic under an authoritarian, military-dominated regime

**Location:** Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey  
**Capital:** Damascus  
**Area:** 185,180 sq km (71,498 sq miles); slightly larger than North Dakota  

**Climate:** mostly desert; hot, dry, sunny summers (June to August) and mild, rainy winters (December to February) along coast; cold weather with snow or sleet periodically in Damascus  
**Terrain:** primarily semiarid and desert plateau; narrow coastal plain; mountains in west  
**Natural Hazards:** dust storms, sandstorms

**Population:** 18 million (UN, 2006)  
**Ethnicity:** Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%  
**Major Language:** Arabic  
**Religion:** Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (includes Alawite, Druze) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo)  
**Life expectancy:** 71 years (men), 75 years (women) (UN)  

**Currency:** 1 Syrian pound = 100 piastres