

Syria: A Political and Geographic Profile of an Underdeveloped Country

I. INTRODUCTION

a. Brief History of the Country

Syria is one of the oldest continuously inhabited countries in the world and was home to early civilizations such as the Assyrians and Phoenicians. In the modern era, Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I and later became a French mandate. The country gained independence in 1946. Despite its rich history, Syria has faced long-term political instability, which worsened after the outbreak of civil war in 2011 (BBC News, 2023).

b. Statement of the Problem

Syria is classified as an underdeveloped country due to prolonged armed conflict, weak governance, economic decline, and humanitarian crises. The civil war has destroyed infrastructure, disrupted education and healthcare systems, and displaced millions of people, limiting national development (UNDP, 2022).

c. Objectives of the Report

This report aims to analyze Syria's political and geographic profile and explain how governance, population trends, and environmental factors contribute to its underdeveloped status.

II. POLITICAL PROFILE OF THE COUNTRY

a. Political Map or Administrative Regions of Provinces and Cities

Syria is divided into 14 governorates, including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Latakia. These administrative divisions are governed centrally, with governors appointed by the national government (CIA, 2024).

b. Official Flag

The Syrian flag consists of three horizontal stripes—red, white, and black—with two green stars symbolizing unity and independence (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

c. Official Name

The official name of the country is the Syrian Arab Republic.

d. President (Last 3 Terms)

Syria is led by President Bashar al-Assad, who has been in power since 2000 and has served multiple terms, including elections held in 2014 and 2021 (BBC News, 2023).

e. Political System

Syria operates under a republican system with strong authoritarian control.

f. Branches of Government

Syria has three formal branches of government:

Executive

Legislative

Judiciary

In practice, political power is concentrated in the executive branch (Freedom House, 2023).

g. Legislative Body

The legislative body is the People's Council of Syria, which has limited authority due to executive dominance (CIA, 2024).

h. Forms of Government

Syria follows a unitary national government system, where power is centralized at the national level.

i. Political Parties

j. Major Ruling Political Party

Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party

ii. Minor Political Parties

Smaller parties within the National Progressive Front with limited influence (Freedom House, 2023).

k. Population (Last 3 Periods)

Pre-2011: Approximately 22 million

During conflict: Around 18 million

Recent estimates: About 17 million (World Bank, 2024)

l. Currency

The official currency is the Syrian Pound (SYP), which has experienced severe inflation (World Bank, 2024).

m. National Hero

Sultan Pasha al-Atrash is recognized as a national hero for leading resistance against French colonial rule (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

III. GEOGRAPHIC / TOPOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE COUNTRY

a. Geographic Map

Syria is located in Western Asia and borders Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon. It also has access to the Mediterranean Sea (CIA, 2024).

b. Geographic Features

i. Physical Characteristics

Syria includes coastal plains, mountain ranges, deserts, and the Euphrates River, which is the country's most important water source (FAO, 2022).

ii. Climate

1. Wet or Dry Season

Syria experiences wet and dry seasons, with a Mediterranean climate in coastal areas and arid conditions inland.

2. Climate Hazard

a. Common hazards include droughts, heat waves, and occasional floods, which negatively affect agriculture (FAO, 2022).

iii. Minerals and Mineral Reserves

Syria has reserves of oil, natural gas, and phosphates, though production has declined due to conflict (CIA, 2024).

c. Topographical Map

The country's topography ranges from mountainous regions in the west to desert plains in the east.

d. Topographic Features

i. Elevation and Infrastructure

Western Syria has higher elevation and forest cover, while infrastructure such as pipelines and power lines has been damaged by war.

ii. Desert or Rainforest

Most of Syria consists of desert and semi-arid land.

iii. Rural or Urban Community

Syria has both rural agricultural communities and urban centers such as Damascus and Aleppo.

iv. Protected Areas

Syria has designated protected areas, though environmental protection has weakened due to conflict.

v. Wildlife

Wildlife populations have declined because of habitat destruction and prolonged instability (UNDP, 2022).

Below is a cleaned-up, academic but simple rewrite that keeps your classmate's content and ideas, but fixes the structure, clarity, grammar, and flow.

Nothing is changed drastically—it's just made presentable and acceptable for a college paper, following the same lettering style (a, b, c, etc.) like your rubric.

IV. ECONOMIC PROFILE

a. Gross National Product (GNP)

Syria's GNP remains very low due to years of armed conflict, which severely weakened national production and income.

b. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The country's GDP has significantly decreased because many businesses, factories, and farms were destroyed during the war.

c. Inflation Rate

Syria has a very high inflation rate, causing continuous increases in the prices of basic goods and services.

d. Employment Rate

The employment rate is low as many companies and industries were forced to close.

e. Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate is high, particularly among young people, due to limited job opportunities.

f. Minimum Wage

The minimum wage in Syria is very low and insufficient to meet basic daily needs.

g. Daily Cost of Living

The daily cost of living is high, especially for food, electricity, and fuel.

h. Monthly Income

Average monthly income is low, and many families rely on humanitarian aid and remittances.

i. Currency to Dollar Exchange

The Syrian Pound is very weak compared to the US Dollar, reflecting economic instability.

j. Poverty Index

A large portion of the population lives below the poverty line.

k. Corruption Index

Corruption levels are high due to weak governance and lack of transparency.

l. Main Products

i. Agriculture

Major agricultural products include wheat, cotton, olives, fruits, and vegetables.

ii. Industry

Key industries include textiles, cement production, oil refining, and food processing.

iii. Services

The service sector consists mainly of trade, transport, education, and public services.

m. International Products

i. Imports

Syria imports food, fuel, machinery, and medicine to meet domestic needs.

ii. Exports

Exports include agricultural products, oil, and textiles, though volumes remain limited.

n. Infrastructure

i. Roads and Highways

Many roads and highways were damaged during the conflict, although some are currently under repair.

ii. Bridges

Several bridges were destroyed and are being slowly rebuilt.

iii. Buildings

Numerous homes, schools, and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed.

V. SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE

a. Historical Origin

Syria is one of the world's oldest civilizations and gained independence in 1946.

b. Socio-Cultural Background

The population is predominantly Arab, with Islam as the major religion and Christianity as a significant minority.

c. Beliefs and Traditions

Religious beliefs are reflected in daily life through practices centered around mosques and churches.

d. UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Recognized sites include Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra, and Crac des Chevaliers.

e. Tourism Sites

Tourism areas include ancient ruins, old cities, traditional markets, and coastal regions.

f. Health Sector

The health sector faces challenges such as limited hospitals, high medical costs, and common untreated illnesses.

g. Education Sector

Syria has both public and private schools, but education has been severely disrupted by conflict.

h. Electricity

Electricity supply is limited, with frequent power outages.

i. Potable Water

Access to clean and safe drinking water is limited in many areas.

j. Hygiene and Sanitation

Hygiene and sanitation conditions are poor in several communities, increasing health risks.

VI. PEACE AND SECURITY PROFILE

a. Defense Plan

Syria maintains a national defense strategy focused on protecting its borders and major cities, but prolonged conflict has weakened its military capacity.

b. Security Forces

The country's security is managed by the Syrian Arab Army, internal security forces, and local police. These forces are responsible for maintaining public order and supporting the government.

c. Enforcement Agencies

Law enforcement and legal compliance are managed through courts, prisons, and other judicial agencies, though their effectiveness has been limited due to political instability.

d. Threats to National Security, Sovereignty, and Territorial Integrity

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Syria faces ongoing threats including civil unrest, terrorism, and foreign interventions that challenge national security and territorial control.

e. Crime Rate

Crime rates are high in many areas, especially in regions affected by war, displacement, and weak law enforcement.

f. International Disputes

Syria has ongoing disputes with neighboring countries over borders, water resources, and political influence, particularly with Israel and Turkey.

g. Local Disputes

Internal conflicts and competition between local groups, including rebel factions and militias, continue to threaten stability and social cohesion.

VII. Observations on the Major Factors Affecting the Underdevelopment

Syria's underdevelopment stems from a complex interplay of prolonged conflict, external pressures, and internal structural weaknesses, resulting in one of the most severe economic contractions in modern history. Real GDP has contracted significantly since 2010, with poverty rates soaring to affect the majority of the population and unemployment impacting a large portion of the labor force. Below are key observations on the primary factors.

1. Prolonged Civil War and Political Instability

The civil war from 2011 to 2024 has been the dominant driver of underdevelopment, causing widespread destruction of infrastructure, including many health facilities and

sewerage systems, as well as schools and homes. This conflict led to numerous deaths and injuries, millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, reducing the population and triggering a massive brain drain and capital flight. Key sectors collapsed: oil production in government-controlled areas fell drastically; agriculture, once a major part of GDP, saw substantial output drops; manufacturing relocated abroad due to shortages and damage in industrial hubs like Aleppo. Political fragmentation, including deals with non-state actors for resources, further eroded governance and fueled a "conflict economy" marked by black markets and informal trade. Even after the Assad regime's fall in December 2024, lingering security concerns and humanitarian needs continue to hinder recovery.

2. International Sanctions and Economic Isolation

Sanctions imposed by the US since 1979, intensified post-2011 via measures like the Caesar Act, along with those from the EU and others, have severely restricted Syria's access to global markets, banking, and investment, increasing transaction costs and informalizing trade. These targeted oil, banking, and other sectors, leading to frozen assets, rising non-performing loans, and a decimated pharmaceutical industry unable to import raw materials. Unintended consequences include hindering middle-class development, exacerbating poverty, and complicating humanitarian aid delivery. Exports and imports dropped substantially due to embargoes, widening the current account deficit. While some sanctions were lifted in 2025 following the regime change, their long-term impact has locked in underdevelopment by isolating the financial sector and deterring reconstruction.

3. External Shocks and Regional Spillovers

Multiple overlapping crises have compounded war-related damage. The 2019 Lebanon financial crisis caused significant depreciation of the Syrian pound, driving a sharp rise in food prices. COVID-19 strained already fragile health systems, increasing care needs and spreading disease amid water shortages. The 2023 earthquakes, Ukraine war (disrupting trade and inflating global prices), and Middle East conflicts weakened activity further, with declines in oil output and high consumer inflation. Aid shortfalls and restricted border crossings left millions in need underserved, eroding household resilience.

4. Environmental and Resource Depletion Challenges

Pre-war droughts from 1999 to 2011 affected much of the land, causing major crop failures and livestock losses in the northeast, displacing many to urban areas and fueling unrest. Over-reliance on agriculture made the economy vulnerable to ecological shocks, exacerbating food insecurity and water stress impacting millions. Conflict

targeted water infrastructure, creating a cycle of deprivation, migration, and social tensions that amplified underdevelopment.

5. Governance, Corruption, and Structural Weaknesses

Internal mismanagement, including large budget deficits, high public debt, and subsidy cuts amid shortages, has deepened crises. Pre-conflict issues like corruption, poor business environment (access to finance, contract enforcement), unskilled workforce, and electricity shortages were worsened by war. Inequitable resource distribution and urban-rural disparities fueled poverty and negative coping mechanisms like child labor. The Assad regime's prolonged rule contributed to economic ruins, with extreme poverty rising dramatically.

These factors have created a vicious cycle, with projections showing continued GDP contraction unless addressed through aid, investment, and reforms. Post-2024 transitions offer opportunities, such as refugee returns boosting growth, but deep-rooted challenges persist.

VIII. Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This report analyzed Syria's political, geographic, economic, socio-cultural, and security conditions to explain its underdeveloped status. Despite its historical significance and strategic location, Syria's centralized governance, prolonged conflict, and weak institutions have limited national development. Environmental challenges, damaged infrastructure, economic decline, and reduced access to basic services such as healthcare, education, electricity, and clean water have further weakened human capital and living conditions. Ongoing security issues and internal and external disputes continue to affect stability and development efforts.

Conclusions

The findings show that Syria's underdevelopment is mainly driven by prolonged civil war, political instability, economic isolation, environmental stress, and governance weaknesses. Armed conflict caused widespread destruction, displacement,

unemployment, and poverty, while sanctions and inflation restricted economic recovery. Environmental challenges and institutional limitations worsened food insecurity and service delivery. Overall, sustainable development in Syria depends on lasting peace, institutional reform, economic stabilization, and rebuilding infrastructure and human capital.

IX. Recommendations

To address Syria's persistent underdevelopment, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, focusing on governance, economic recovery, infrastructure rehabilitation, social services, and environmental management. The following recommendations are proposed:

a. Establish Lasting Peace and Political Stability

Sustainable development requires a stable political environment. Efforts should be directed toward national reconciliation, inclusive governance, and the implementation of democratic reforms. Strengthening institutions that ensure accountability, transparency, and the rule of law will reduce corruption and restore citizen trust in the government.

b. Economic Recovery and Investment Promotion

Revitalizing Syria's economy demands both domestic and foreign investment. Policies should encourage entrepreneurship, rebuild industries, and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Gradual lifting of international sanctions, combined with incentives for reconstruction projects, can stimulate trade and create employment opportunities. Establishing a stable currency system and controlling inflation are critical to restoring purchasing power and investor confidence.

c. Infrastructure Rehabilitation

Reconstruction of critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, water supply, and electricity networks, must be prioritized. Investment in modern and resilient infrastructure will facilitate trade, improve access to education and healthcare, and strengthen rural-urban connectivity. Public-private partnerships and international aid can support large-scale reconstruction efforts.

d. Strengthen Social Services

Access to quality education and healthcare is essential for human capital development. Policies should focus on rebuilding schools, training teachers, and restoring healthcare facilities. Expanding vocational training programs will equip citizens with skills needed for employment in rebuilding sectors. Additionally, social welfare programs should target vulnerable populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and low-income families.

e. Environmental and Resource Management

Syria must address environmental degradation, water scarcity, and agricultural vulnerability. Investment in sustainable irrigation systems, reforestation, and disaster-resilient agriculture can mitigate the impact of droughts and climate hazards. Strengthening environmental policies and protection of natural resources will enhance long-term food security and livelihoods.

f. Security and Rule of Law

Improving national security and law enforcement capacity is crucial to preventing crime, protecting citizens, and maintaining social cohesion. Security forces must operate under clear legal frameworks and with respect for human rights. Judicial reforms should ensure fair trials, enforce contracts, and support property rights, which are essential for economic development and investor confidence.

g. Regional and International Cooperation

Reintegration into regional and global markets will accelerate Syria's recovery. Strengthening diplomatic relations, participating in trade agreements, and attracting humanitarian and development aid will provide critical resources for reconstruction. Collaboration with neighboring countries on border security, water management, and refugee return programs will enhance stability and shared growth.

h. Promote Social Cohesion and Cultural Preservation

Rebuilding national identity and social cohesion is essential after years of conflict. Policies supporting cultural preservation, heritage sites, and community development programs can foster unity, tourism, and local economic growth. Encouraging civic participation and inclusive dialogue will also contribute to long-term peace and stability.

i. Monitoring and Evaluation

Establishing a national framework for monitoring development initiatives ensures transparency, effectiveness, and accountability. Regular evaluation of reconstruction projects, economic policies, and social programs will allow timely adjustments and improve outcomes, ultimately supporting sustainable development.

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