

# YEMEN

## Snapshot

### History

Home to ancient civilizations, Yemen's strategic location on major trade routes made its ports thrive (especially during the lucrative spice trade). Once part of the Ottoman Empire, North Yemen became independent after the Ottoman defeat in WWI. The British, who had set up a protectorate around the southern port of Aden, made Aden a crown colony and ruled the region around Aden until it gained its independence in 1967. A decisive factor in British withdrawal from Yemen was the fighting among rival nationalist groups to control the country. In recent years, fighting has broken out between southern separatists, northern rebels, and al-Qaeda militants.

### People

Yemen is a tribal society, with an estimated 85 percent of the population belonging to tribes. Religious strife and tribal differences, combined with high poverty levels, chronic hunger, high unemployment, and government corruption, heighten tensions in Yemen. Oil and water resources are also drying up, creating serious challenges for government leaders.

**Population:** 25 million (est. 2011)

**Major cities:** SANAA (pop. est. 2 million) and Aden (pop. est. 565,000)

**Language:** Arabic

**Religion:** Islam including Sunni Shaf'i sect found in the south and southeastern parts of the country, the Shi'a Zaydi sect found in north and northeastern parts of the country, and a small but growing number of Salafi (Sunni). Additionally, there are a small number of Jews, Christians, and Hindus.

**Ethnic groups:** Predominantly Arab.

### Government

The modern Republic of Yemen formed in 1990 when North Yemen and South Yemen merged after years of border wars and skirmishes. **Ali Abdallah Saleh** became president of the new republic created by this merger in 1990, although he had led the northern part of modern-day Yemen since 1978 when he came to power in a military coup. The peace that had been forged by the north and south broke down in 1994 and a short civil war ended in defeat for southern separatists. Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world. Demonstrations calling for President Saleh's resignation grew stronger after the success of the 2011 protests in Tunisia and Egypt that toppled their authoritarian leaders. Although President Saleh promised to step down when his term ended in 2013, he had not kept similar promises in the past. Support from tribal leaders and the army, strong advocates in the past, appears to be weakening. President Saleh's government has cooperated with the US in its war on terror amidst growing concern about the strength and effectiveness of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that operates in Yemen. Mr. Saleh flew to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment after suffering burns and other injuries from a rocket attack on his palace in June 2011. He returned to Yemen in September 2011.

Sources: "Yemen." *U.S. Department of State*. 20 May 2011. Web.

"Yemen." *CIA World Factbook*. 27 September 2011. Web.

"BBC News - Yemen Country Profile." *BBC News - Home*. 7 June 2011. Web.