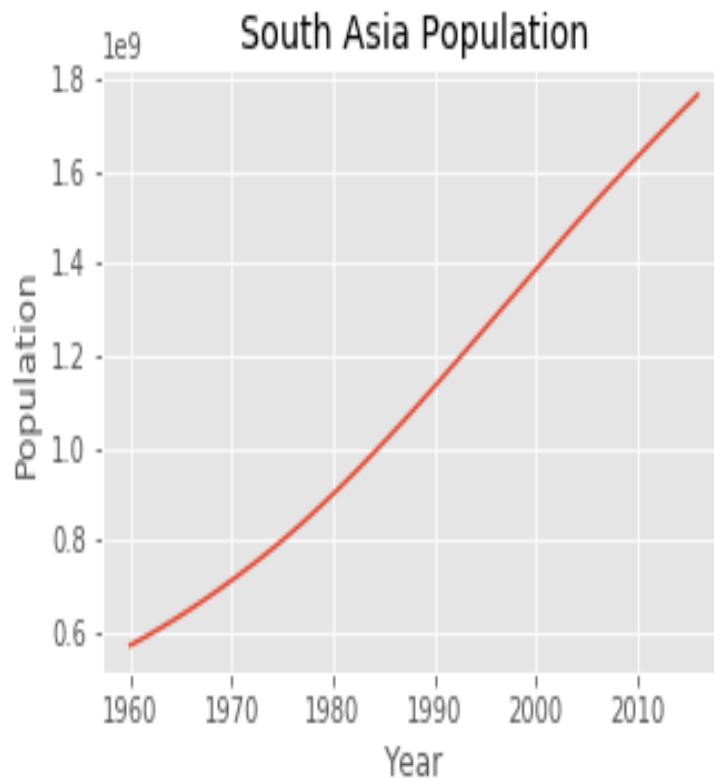


South Asia



South Asia or Southern Asia (also known as Indian subcontinent) is a term used to represent the southern region of the Asian continent, which comprises the sub-Himalayan SAARC countries and, for some authorities, adjoining countries to the west and east. Topographically, it is dominated by the Indian Plate, which rises above sea level as Nepal and northern parts of India situated south of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. South Asia is bounded on the south by the Indian Ocean and on land (clockwise, from west) by West Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. The current territories of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka form South Asia. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic cooperation organisation in the region which was established in 1985 and includes all eight nations comprising South Asia. South Asia covers about 5.2 million km² (2 million mi²), which is 11.71% of the Asian continent or 3.5% of the world's land surface area. The population of South Asia is about 1.749 billion or about one fourth of the world's population, making it both the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world. Overall, it accounts for about 39.49% of Asia's population, over 24% of the world's population, and is home to a vast array of peoples. In 2010, South Asia had the world's largest population of Hindus, Jains and Sikhs. It also has the largest population of Muslims in Asia-Pacific region, as well as over 35 million Christians and 25 million Buddhists. == Definitions == The total area of South Asia and its geographical extent is not clear cut as systemic and foreign policy orientations of its constituents are quite asymmetrical. Aside from the central region of South Asia, formerly part of the British Empire, there is a high degree of variation as to which other countries are included in South Asia. Modern definitions of South Asia are consistent in including Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives as the constituent countries. Myanmar is included by some scholars in South Asia, but in Southeast Asia by others. Some do not include Afghanistan, others question whether Afghanistan should be considered a part of South Asia or the Middle East. The current territories of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, which were the core of the British Empire prior to 1947, form the central region of South Asia, in addition to Afghanistan,

which was a British protectorate until 1919, after the Afghans lost to the British in the Second Anglo-Afghan war. The mountain countries of Nepal and Bhutan, and the island countries of Sri Lanka and Maldives are generally included as well. Myanmar (formerly Burma) is often added, and by various deviating definitions based on often substantially different reasons, the British Indian Ocean Territory and the Tibet Autonomous Region are included as well. The common concept of South Asia is largely inherited from the administrative boundaries of the British Raj, with several exceptions. The Aden Colony, British Somaliland and Singapore, though administered at various times under the Raj, have not been proposed as any part of South Asia. Additionally Burma was administered as part of the Raj until 1937, but is now considered a part of Southeast Asia and is a member state of ASEAN. The 562 princely states that were protected by but not directly ruled by the Raj became administrative parts of South Asia upon joining Union of India or Dominion of Pakistan. Geopolitically, it had formed the whole territory of Greater India, The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a contiguous block of countries, started in 1985 with seven countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – and added Afghanistan as an eighth member in 2007. China and Myanmar have also applied for the status of full members of SAARC. This bloc of countries include two independent countries that were not part of the British Raj – Nepal, and Bhutan. Afghanistan was a British protectorate from 1878 until 1919, after the Afghans lost to the British in the Second Anglo-Afghan war. The World Factbook, based on geo-politics, people, and economy defines South Asia as comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, British Indian Ocean Territory, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The South Asia Free Trade Agreement incorporated Afghanistan in 2011, and the World Bank grouping of countries in the region also includes all eight members comprising South Asia and SAARC as well, and the same goes for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The United Nations Statistics Division's scheme of sub-regions include all eight members of the SAARC as part of Southern Asia, along with Iran only for statistical purposes. Population Information Network (POPIN) includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as part of South Asia. Maldives, in view of its characteristics, was admitted as a member Pacific POPIN subregional network only in principle. The Hirschman–Herfindahl index of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for the region includes only the original seven signatories of SAARC. The British Indian Ocean Territory is connected to the region by a publication of Jane's for security considerations. The region may also include the disputed territory of Aksai Chin, which was part of the British Indian princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, but is now administered as part of the Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang. The inclusion of Myanmar in South Asia is without consensus, with many considering it a part of Southeast Asia and others including it within South Asia. Afghanistan was of importance to the British colonial empire, especially after the Second Anglo-Afghan War over 1878–1880. Afghanistan remained a British protectorate until 1919, when a treaty with Vladimir Lenin included the granting of independence to Afghanistan. Following India's partition, Afghanistan has generally been included in South Asia, with some considering it a part of Southwest Asia. During the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1989) American foreign policy considered Pakistan and Afghanistan in Southwest Asia, while others included it as a part of South Asia. There is no universal agreement among scholars on which countries should be included within South Asia. In the past, a lack of a coherent definition for South Asia resulted in not only a lack of academic studies, but also in a lack interest for such studies. The confusion existed also because of the lack of a clear boundary – geographically, geopolitical, socio-culturally, economically or historically – between South Asia and other parts of Asia, especially the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Identification with a South Asian identity was also found to be significantly low among respondents in an older two-year survey across Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. However, modern definitions of South Asia are very consistent in including Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives as the constituent countries. === Indian subcontinent === According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term "subcontinent" signifies a "subdivision of a continent which has a distinct geographical, political, or cultural identity" and also a "large land mass somewhat smaller than a continent". Historians Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot state that the term "Indian subcontinent" describes a natural physical landmass in South Asia that has been relatively isolated from the rest of Eurasia. The Indian subcontinent is also a geological term referring to the land mass that drifted northeastwards from ancient Gondwana, colliding with the Eurasian plate nearly 55 million years ago, towards the end of Palaeocene. This geological region largely includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The use of the term Indian subcontinent began in the British Empire, and has been a term particularly common in its successors. This region has also

been labelled as "India" (in its classical and pre-modern sense), "Greater India", or as South Asia. According to anthropologist John R. Lukacs, "the Indian Subcontinent occupies the major landmass of South Asia", while the political science professor Tatu Vanhanen states, "the seven countries of South Asia constitute geographically a compact region around the Indian Subcontinent". According to Chris Brewster, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan constitute the Indian subcontinent; with Afghanistan and Maldives included it is more commonly referred to as South Asia. The geopolitical boundaries of Indian subcontinent, according to Dhavendra Kumar, include "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and other small islands of the Indian Ocean". Maldives, the country consisting of a small archipelago southwest of the peninsula, is considered part of the Indian subcontinent. The terms "Indian subcontinent" and "South Asia" are sometimes used interchangeably. The South Asia term is particularly common when scholars or officials seek to differentiate this region from East Asia. According to historians Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, the Indian subcontinent has come to be known as South Asia "in more recent and neutral parlance." This "neutral" notion refers to the concerns of Pakistan and Bangladesh, particularly given the recurring conflicts between India and Pakistan, wherein the dominant placement of "India" as a prefix before the subcontinent might offend some political sentiments. There is no globally accepted definition on which countries are a part of South Asia or Indian subcontinent. While Afghanistan is not considered as a part of the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan is often included in South Asia. Similarly, Myanmar is included by some scholars in South Asia but not in Indian subcontinent.

== History ==

=== Ancient era ===

The history of core South Asia begins with evidence of human activity of Homo sapiens, as long as 75,000 years ago, or with earlier hominids including Homo erectus from about 500,000 years ago. The Indus Valley Civilization, which spread and flourished in the northwestern part of South Asia from c. 3300 to 1300 BCE in present-day Northern India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, was the first major civilization in South Asia. A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture developed in the Mature Harappan period, from 2600 to 1900 BCE. The earliest prehistoric culture have roots in the mesolithic sites as evidenced by the rock paintings of Bhimbetka rock shelters dating to a period of 30,000 BCE or older, as well as neolithic times. According to anthropologist Possehl, the Indus Valley Civilization provides a logical, if somewhat arbitrary, starting point for South Asian religions, but these links from the Indus religion to later-day South Asian traditions are subject to scholarly dispute. The Vedic period, named after the Vedic religion of the Indo-Aryans, lasted from c. 1900 to 500 BCE. The Indo-Aryans were pastoralists who migrated into north-western India after the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization, Linguistic and archaeological data show a cultural change after 1500 BCE, with the linguistic and religious data clearly showing links with Indo-European languages and religion. By about 1200 BCE, the Vedic culture and agrarian lifestyle was established in the northwest and northern Gangetic plain of South Asia. Rudimentary state-forms appeared, of which the Kuru-Pañcāla union was the most influential. The first recorded state-level society in South Asia existed around 1000 BCE. In this period, states Samuel, emerged the Brahmana and Aranyaka layers of Vedic texts, which merged into the earliest Upanishads. These texts began to ask the meaning of a ritual, adding increasing levels of philosophical and metaphysical speculation, or "Hindu synthesis". Increasing urbanisation of India between 800 and 400 BCE, and possibly the spread of urban diseases, contributed to the rise of ascetic movements and of new ideas which challenged the orthodox Brahmanism. These ideas led to Sramana movements, of which Mahavira (c. 549–477 BCE), proponent of Jainism, and Buddha (c. 563–483), founder of Buddhism, were the most prominent icons. The Greek army led by Alexander the Great stayed in the Hindu Kush region of South Asia for several years and then later moved into the Indus valley region. Later, the Maurya Empire extended over much of South Asia in the 3rd century BCE. Buddhism spread beyond the Indian subcontinent, through northwest into Central Asia. The Bamiyan Buddhas of Afghanistan and the edicts of Ashoka suggest that the Buddhist monks spread Buddhism (Dharma) in eastern provinces of the Seleucid Empire, and possibly even farther into West Asia. The Theravada school spread south from India in the 3rd century BCE, to Sri Lanka, later to Southeast Asia. Buddhism, by the last centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, was prominent in the Himalayan region, Gandhara, Hindu Kush region and Bactria. From about 500 BCE through about 300 CE, the Vedic-Brahmanic synthesis or "Hindu synthesis" continued. Classical Hindu and Sramanic (particularly Buddhist) ideas spread within Indian subcontinent, as well outside South Asia. The Gupta Empire ruled over a large part of the subcontinent between 4th and 7th centuries, a period that saw the construction of major temples, monasteries and universities such as the Nalanda. During this era, and through the 10th century, numerous cave monasteries and temples such as the Ajanta Caves, Badami cave temples and Ellora Caves were built in South Asia.

=== Medieval era ===

Islam came as a

political power in the fringe of South Asia in 8th century CE when the Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh and Multan in southern Punjab in modern-day Pakistan. By 962 CE, Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms in South Asia were under a wave of raids from Muslim armies from Central Asia. Among them was Mahmud of Ghazni, who raided and plundered kingdoms in north India from east of the Indus river to west of Yamuna river seventeen times between 997 and 1030. Mahmud of Ghazni raided the treasuries but retracted each time, only extending Islamic rule into western Punjab. The wave of raids on north Indian and western Indian kingdoms by Muslim warlords continued after Mahmud of Ghazni, plundering and looting these kingdoms. The raids did not establish or extend permanent boundaries of their Islamic kingdoms. The Ghurid Sultan Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad began a systematic war of expansion into north India in 1173. He sought to carve out a principality for himself by expanding the Islamic world. Mu'izz sought a Sunni Islamic kingdom of his own extending east of the Indus river, and he thus laid the foundation for the Muslim kingdom that became the Delhi Sultanate. Some historians chronicle the Delhi Sultanate from 1192 due to the presence and geographical claims of Mu'izz al-Din in South Asia by that time. The Delhi Sultanate covered varying parts of South Asia, and was ruled by a series of dynasties, called Mamluk, Khalji, Tughlaq, Sayyid and Lodi dynasties. Muhammad bin Tughlaq came to power in 1325, launched a war of expansion and the Delhi Sultanate reached its largest geographical reach over the Indian subcontinent during his 26-year rule. A Sunni Sultan, Muhammad bin Tughlaq persecuted non-Muslims such as Hindus, as well as non-Sunni Muslims such as Shia and Mahdi sects. Revolts against the Delhi Sultanate sprang up in many parts of South Asia during the 14th century. After the death of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Bengal Sultanate came to power in 1352 CE, as the Delhi Sultanate began disintegrating. The Bengal Sultanate remained in power through the early 16th century. It was reconquered by the armies of the Mughal Empire. The state religion of the Bengal Sultanate was Islam, and the region under its rule, a region that ultimately emerged as the modern nation of Bangladesh, saw a growth of a syncretic form of Islam. In the Deccan region, the Hindu kingdom Vijayanagara Empire came to power in 1336 and remained in power through the 16th century, after which it too was reconquered and absorbed into the Mughal Empire. About 1526, the Punjab governor Dawlat Khan Lodhi reached out to the Mughal Babur and invited him to attack Delhi Sultanate. Babur defeated and killed Ibrahim Lodi in the Battle of Panipat in 1526. The death of Ibrahim Lodi ended the Delhi Sultanate, and the Mughal Empire replaced it. === Modern era === The modern history period of South Asia, that is 16th-century onwards, witnessed the start of the Central Asian dynasty named the Mughals, with Turkish-Mongol roots and Sunni Islam theology. The first ruler was Babur, whose empire extended the northwest and Indo-Gangetic Plain regions of South Asia. The Deccan and northeastern region of the South Asia was largely under Hindu kings such as those of Vijayanagara Empire and Ahom kingdom, with some regions such as parts of modern Telangana and Andhra Pradesh under local Sultanates such as the Shia Islamic rulers of Golconda Sultanate. The Mughal Empire continued its wars of expansion after Babur's death. With the fall of Rajput kingdoms and Vijayanagara, its boundaries reached all of west, as well as the Marathi and Kannada speaking regions of the Deccan peninsula. The Mughal Empire was marked by a period of artistic exchanges and a Central Asian and South Asian architecture synthesis, with remarkable buildings such as the Taj Mahal. It also marked an extended period of religious persecution. Two of the religious leaders of Sikhism, Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur were arrested under orders of the Mughal emperors, asked to convert to Islam, and executed when they refused. Religious taxes on non-Muslims called jizya were imposed. Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh temples were desecrated. However, not all Muslim rulers persecuted non-Muslims. Akbar, a Mughal ruler for example, sought religious tolerance and abolished jizya. After his death, the persecution of non-Muslims in South Asia returned. The persecution and religious violence in South Asia peaked during Aurangzeb era, with him issuing orders in 1669, to all his governors of provinces to "destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels, and that they were strictly enjoined to put an entire stop to the teaching and practice of idolatrous forms of worship". In Aurangzeb's time, almost all of South Asia was claimed by the Mughal Empire. However, this claim was violently challenged in various regions of South Asia, particularly by the Sikh Guru Gobind Singh in the northwest, and by Shivaji in the Deccan regions. Maritime trading between South Asia and European merchants began after the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama returned to Europe. After the death of Aurangzeb and the collapse of the Mughal Empire, the region came under the rule of many small Islamic sultanates and Hindu kingdoms. British, French, Portuguese colonial interests struck treaties with these rulers, and established their trading ports. In the northwest South Asia, a large region was consolidated into the Sikh Empire by Ranjit Singh. After his death, the British Empire expanded their interests till the Hindu Kush region. In the east, the Bengal region was

split into Muslim East Bengal and Hindu West Bengal, by the colonial British empire, in early 1900s, a split that was reversed. However, after the World War II, at the eve of India's independence, the region was split again into East Pakistan and West Bengal. East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971. == Geography == According to Saul Cohen, early colonial era strategists treated South Asia with East Asia, but in reality the South Asia region excluding Afghanistan is a distinct geopolitical region separated from other nearby geostrategic realms, one that is geographically diverse. The region is home to a variety of geographical features, such as glaciers, rainforests, valleys, deserts, and grasslands that are typical of much larger continents. It is surrounded by three water bodies – the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea – and has acutely varied climate zones. The tip of the Indian Peninsula had the highest quality pearls. === Boundary === The boundaries of South Asia vary based on how the region is defined. South Asia's northern, eastern, and western boundaries vary based on definitions used, while the Indian Ocean is the southern periphery. Most of this region rests on the Indian Plate and is isolated from the rest of Asia by mountain barriers. Much of the region consists of a peninsula in south-central Asia, rather resembling a diamond which is delineated by the Himalayas on the north, the Hindu Kush in the west, and the Arakanese in the east, and which extends southward into the Indian Ocean with the Arabian Sea to the southwest and the Bay of Bengal to the southeast. According to Robert M. Cutler – a scholar of Political Science at Carleton University, the terms South Asia, Southwest Asia and Central Asia are distinct, but the confusion and disagreements have arisen due to the geopolitical movement to enlarge these regions into Greater South Asia, Greater Southwest Asia and Greater Central Asia. The frontier of Greater South Asia, states Cutler, between 2001–2006 has been geopolitically extended to eastern Iran and western Afghanistan in the west, and in the north to northeastern Iran, northern Afghanistan, and southern Uzbekistan. === Indian plate === Most of this region is a subcontinent resting on the Indian Plate, the northerly portion of the Indo-Australian Plate, separated from the rest of the Eurasian Plate. The Indian Plate includes most of South Asia, forming a land mass which extends from the Himalayas into a portion of the basin under the Indian Ocean, including parts of South China and Eastern Indonesia, as well as Kunlun and Karakoram ranges, and extending up to but not including Ladakh, Kohistan, the Hindu Kush range and Balochistan. It may be noted that geophysically the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet is situated at the outside of the border of the Subcontinental structure, while the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan are situated inside that border. It was once a small continent before colliding with the Eurasian Plate about 50–55 million years ago and giving birth to the Himalayan range and the Tibetan plateau. It is the peninsular region south of the Himalayas and Kuen Lun mountain ranges and east of the Indus River and the Iranian Plateau, extending southward into the Indian Ocean between the Arabian Sea (to the southwest) and the Bay of Bengal (to the southeast). === Climate === The climate of this vast region varies considerably from area to area from tropical monsoon in the south to temperate in the north. The variety is influenced by not only the altitude, but also by factors such as proximity to the sea coast and the seasonal impact of the monsoons. Southern parts are mostly hot in summers and receive rain during monsoon periods. The northern belt of Indo-Gangetic plains also is hot in summer, but cooler in winter. The mountainous north is colder and receives snowfall at higher altitudes of Himalayan ranges. As the Himalayas block the north-Asian bitter cold winds, the temperatures are considerably moderate in the plains down below. For most part, the climate of the region is called the Monsoon climate, which keeps the region humid during summer and dry during winter, and favours the cultivation of jute, tea, rice, and various vegetables in this region. South Asia is largely divided into four broad climate zones: The northern Indian edge and northern Pakistani uplands have a dry subtropical continental climate The far south of India and southwest Sri Lanka have a equatorial climate Most of the peninsula have a tropical climate with variations: Hot subtropical climate in northwest India Cool winter hot tropical climate in Bangladesh Tropical semi-arid climate in the center The Himalayas have an Alpine climate Maximum relative humidity of over 80% has been recorded in Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Sri Lanka, while the area adjustment to Pakistan and western India records lower than 20%–30%. Climate of South Asia is largely characterized by monsoons. South Asia depends critically on monsoon rainfall. Two monsoon systems exist in the region: The summer monsoon: Wind blows from southwest to most of parts of the region. It accounts for 70%–90% of the annual precipitation. The winter monsoon: Wind blows from northeast. Dominant in Sri Lanka and Maldives. The warmest period of the year precedes the monsoon season (March to mid June). In the summer the low pressures are centered over the Indus-Gangetic Plain and high wind from the Indian Ocean blows towards the center. The monsoons are second coolest season of the year because of high humidity and cloud covering. But, at the beginning of June the jetstreams vanish above the Tibetan Plateau, low pressure over the Indus Valley

deepens and the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) moves in. The change is violent. Moderately vigorous monsoon depressions form in the Bay of Bengal and make landfall from June to September.

== Statistical data ==

== Past and Future Population == List of countries by past and future population provide 1950, 2000 and 2050 population while List of countries by future population (United Nations, medium fertility variant) provide 2100 population.

== Land and Water Area == This list includes dependent territories within their sovereign states (including uninhabited territories), but does not include claims on Antarctica. EEZ+TIA is exclusive economic zone (EEZ) plus total internal area (TIA) which includes land and internal waters.

== Regional groups of countries ==

== Demographics == The population of South Asia is about 1.749 billion which makes it the most populated region in the world. It is socially very mixed, consisting of many language groups and religions, and social practices in one region that are vastly different from those in another.

=== Largest urban areas === South Asia is home to some of the most populated cities in the world. Delhi, Karachi, Mumbai, and Dhaka are four of the world's largest megacities.

=== Languages === There are numerous languages in South Asia. The spoken languages of the region are largely based on geography and shared across religious boundaries, but the written script is sharply divided by religious boundaries. In particular, Muslims of South Asia such as in Afghanistan and Pakistan use the Arabic alphabet and Persian Nastaliq. Till 1971, Muslim Bangladesh (then known as East Pakistan) too mandated only the Nastaliq script, but thereafter has adopted regional scripts and particularly Bengali. Non-Muslims of South Asia, and some Muslims in India, on the other hand use their traditional ancient heritage scripts such as those derived from Brahmi script for Indo-European languages and non-Brahmi scripts for Dravidian languages and others. The Nagari script has been the primus inter pares of the traditional South Asian scripts. The Devanagari script is used for over 120 South Asian languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Nepali, Pali, Konkani, Bodo, Sindhi and Maithili among other languages and dialects, making it one of the most used and adopted writing systems in the world. The Devanagari script is also used for classical Sanskrit texts. The largest spoken language in this region is Hindi, followed by Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati and Punjabi. In the modern era, new syncretic languages developed in the region such as Urdu that is used by Muslim community of northern Indian subcontinent (particularly Pakistan and northern states of India). The Punjabi language spans three religions: Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. The spoken language is similar, but it is written in three scripts. The Sikh use Gurmukhi alphabet, Muslim Punjabis in Pakistan use the Nastaliq script, while Hindu Punjabis in India use the Gurmukhi or Nāgarī script. The Gurmukhi and Nagari scripts are distinct but close in their structure, but the Persian Nastaliq script is very different. English, with British spelling, is commonly used in urban areas and is a major economic lingua franca of South Asia.

=== Religions === In 2010, South Asia had the world's largest population of Hindus, Jains and Sikhs, about 510 million Muslims, as well as over 25 million Buddhists and 35 million Christians. Hindus make up about 68 percent or about 1 billion and Muslims at 31 percent or 510 million of the overall South Asia population, while Buddhists, Jains, Christians and Sikhs constitute most of the rest. The Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and Christians are concentrated in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, while the Muslims are concentrated in Afghanistan (99%), Bangladesh (90%), Pakistan (96%) and Maldives (100%). Indian religions are the religions that originated in the Indian subcontinent; namely Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The Indian religions are distinct yet share terminology, concepts, goals and ideas, and from the Indian subcontinent spread into East Asia and southeast Asia. Early Christianity and Islam were introduced into coastal regions of South Asia by merchants who settled among the local populations. Later Sindh, Balochistan, and parts of the Punjab region saw conquest by the Arab caliphates along with an influx of Muslims from Persia and Central Asia, which resulted in spread of both Shia and Sunni Islam in parts of northwestern region of South Asia. Subsequently, under the influence of Muslim rulers of the Islamic sultanates and the Mughal Empire, Islam spread in South Asia.

== Economy == India is the largest and fastest growing economy in the region (US\$2.180 trillion) and makes up almost 82% of the South Asian economy; it is the world's 7th largest in nominal terms and 3rd largest by purchasing power adjusted exchange rates (US\$8.020 trillion). India is the only member of powerful G-20 major economies and BRICS from the region. It is the fastest growing major economy in the world and one of the world's fastest registering a growth of 7.3% in FY 2014–15. Pakistan has the next largest economy (\$304.3 billion) and the 5th highest GDP per capita in the region, followed by Bangladesh and then by Sri Lanka which has the 2nd highest per capita and is the 4th largest economy in the region. According to a World Bank report in 2015, driven by a strong expansion in India, coupled with favorable oil prices, from the last quarter of 2014 South Asia become the fastest-growing region in the world. The Major Market stock exchanges in the region are Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) with market Capitalization of \$1.68 trillion

(11th largest in the world), National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) with market capitalization of \$1.64 trillion (12th largest in the world), and Karachi Stock Exchange with market capitalization of \$60 billion. Economic data is sourced from the International Monetary Fund, current as of April 2017, and is given in US dollars. == Health and nutrition == According to WHO, South Asia is home to two out of the three countries in the world still affected by polio, Pakistan and Afghanistan, with 306 & 28 polio cases registered in 2014 respectively. Attempts to eradicate polio have been badly hit by opposition from militants in both countries, who say the program is cover to spy on their operations. Their attacks on immunization teams have claimed 78 lives since December 2012. According to the World Bank's 2011 report, based on 2005 ICP PPP, about 24.6% of the South Asian population falls below the international poverty line of \$1.25/day. Afghanistan and Bangladesh rank the highest, with 30.6% and 43.3% of their respective populations below the poverty line. Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka have the lowest number of people below the poverty line, with 2.4%, 1.5% and 4.1% respectively. India has lifted the most people in the region above the poverty line between 2008 and 2011, around 140 million. As of 2011, 21.9% of India's population lives below the poverty line, compared to 41.6% in 2005. The World Bank estimates that India is one of the highest ranking countries in the world for the number of children suffering from malnutrition. The prevalence of underweight children in India is among the highest in the world, and is nearly double that of Sub Saharan Africa with dire consequences for mobility, mortality, productivity and economic growth. According to the World Bank, 70% of the South Asian population and about 75% of South Asia's poor live in rural areas and most rely on agriculture for their livelihood according to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation. In 2015, approximately 281 million people in the region were malnourished. The report says that Nepal reached both the WFS target as well as MDG and is moving towards bringing down the number of undernourished people to less than 5% of the population. Bangladesh reached the MDG target with the National Food Policy framework – with only 16.5% of the population undernourished. In India, the malnourished comprise just over 15 percent of the population. While the number of malnourished people in neighborhood has shown a decline over the last 25 years, the number of under-nourished in Pakistan displays an upward trend. There were 28.7 million hungry in Pakistan in the 1990s – a number that has steadily increased to 41.3 million in 2015 with 22% of the population malnourished. Approximately 194.6 million people are undernourished in India, which accounts for the highest number of people suffering from hunger in any single country. The 2006 report stated "the low status of women in South Asian countries and their lack of nutritional knowledge are important determinants of high prevalence of underweight children in the region". Corruption and the lack of initiative on the part of the government has been one of the major problems associated with nutrition in India. Illiteracy in villages has been found to be one of the major issues that need more government attention. The report mentioned that although there has been a reduction in malnutrition due to the Green Revolution in South Asia, there is concern that South Asia has "inadequate feeding and caring practices for young children". == Governance == == Countries and territories from extended definitions == India and Pakistan are the dominant political powers in the region. India is by far the largest country in the area covering around three-fourths the land area of the subcontinent. India has the largest population of around three times the combined population of the 6 other countries in the subcontinent. India is also the world's largest democracy India's annual defence budget for 2013–14 is \$39.2 Billion which is equal to the whole Pakistan's Federal budget of \$39.3 billion for 2014–15. Bangladesh is a unitary state and parliamentary democracy. Bangladesh also stands out as one of the few Muslim-majority democracies. "It is a moderate and generally secular and tolerant — though sometimes this is getting stretched at the moment — alternative to violent extremism in a very troubled part of the world", said Dan Mozena, the U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh's legal code is secular, more citizens are embracing a conservative version of Islam, with some pushing for sharia law, analysts say. Experts say that the rise in conservatism reflects the influence of foreign-financed Islamic charities and the more austere version of Islam brought home by migrant workers in Persian Gulf countries. Diplomacy among the countries of South Asia has been mainly driven by populist politics, with the centre-stage taken by India-Pakistan conflict ever since their independence in 1947, and then the creation of Bangladesh under tense circumstances in 1971. During the height of Cold war, the elite political leaders of Pakistan aligned with the US, while India played crucial role in forming the Non-Aligned Movement and while maintaining goodwill relations with the USSR. Pakistan's governance is one of the most conflicted in the region. The military rule and the unstable government in Pakistan has become a concern for the South Asian region. In Nepal, the governance has struggled to come in the side of democracy and it only showed signs in the recent past, basically in the 21st century, to support the democratic system. The political situation in Sri Lanka

has been dominated by an increasingly assertive Sinhalese nationalism, and the emergence of a Tamil separatist movement under LTTE, which was suppressed in May 2009. Myanmar's politics is dominated by a military Junta, which has sidelined the democratic forces led by Aung San Suu Kyi. == See also == Genetics and archaeogenetics of South Asia Indian subcontinent List of tallest buildings and structures in South Asia South Asia Disaster Report South Asian cuisine == Notes == == References == == Citations == == Sources == Anthony, David W. (2007), *The Horse The Wheel And Language. How Bronze-Age Riders From the Eurasian Steppes Shaped The Modern World*, Princeton University Press Beckwith, Christopher I. (2009), *Empires of the Silk Road*, Princeton University Press Doniger, Wendy (2010), *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 9780199593347 Flood, Gavin D. (1996), *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press Gombrich, Richard F. (2006), in Williams, Paul, ed., *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, 8 volumes, London: Routledge Hiltebeitel, Alf (2007), "Hinduism", in Joseph Kitagawa, *The Religious Traditions of Asia: Religion, History, and Culture* (Digital printing), Routledge, ISBN 9781136875908 Jones, Constance; Ryan, James D. (2006), *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Infobase Publishing, ISBN 9780816075645 Michaels, Axel (2004), *Hinduism. Past and present*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press Michell, George (1977), *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms*, University of Chicago Press, ISBN 9780226532301 Possehl, Gregory L. (11 November 2002), "Indus religion", *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, Rowman Altamira, pp. 141–156, ISBN 978-0-7591-1642-9 Ramstedt, Martin (2004). *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: A Minority Religion Between Local, National, and Global Interests*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0700715336. Samuel, Geoffrey (2010), *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra. Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press Stein, Burton (2010), *A History of India*, Second Edition (PDF), Wiley-Blackwell, archived from the original (PDF) on 14 January 2014 Trainor, Kevin (2004), *Buddhism: The Illustrated Guide*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-517398-7 Witzel, Michael (1995), "Early Sanskritization: Origin and Development of the Kuru state" (PDF), *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, Praeger, 1 (4), archived from the original (PDF) on 11 June 2007 == External links == South Asia, The World Bank Digital South Asia Library, University of Chicago South Asian and Himalayan Arts, Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian South Asia, Brookings Institution South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation, Asia Development Bank