

Fact Sheet:

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



GENERAL INFORMATION

Capital City	Kabul
Population:	31.8 million (2014), estimated to increase to 82 million by 2050.
Area:	251,827 sq miles

Archeological findings provide evidence of human habitation in Afghanistan dating back to the 4th century BC, and the country's strategic location along the Silk Road connected it to the cultures of the Middle East and other parts of Asia. However, the country has a long history of conflict and foreign intervention. Modern-day Afghanistan was founded in 1747 under Ahmad Shah Durrani, the first king of the country. During the 19th century, the Russian and British empires battled for control of Afghanistan. In 1919 the British Empire gave up its interests in Afghanistan, making it a fully independent state. Afghanistan enjoyed a long period of stable rule until the mid-1970s, when a pro-Soviet coup resulted in a Soviet invasion from 1979 to 1989. The 10-year war with the Soviet Union resulted in the deaths of over 1 million Afghans, mostly civilians, and the creation of almost 6 million refugees who fled Afghanistan, mainly to Pakistan and Iran. Before withdrawing, the Soviets planted an extraordinary number of land mines throughout Afghan farmlands, making them unsuitable for production and a threat to the population to this day.

In 1990, an extremist Islamic group called the Taliban came to power, and they ruled Afghanistan until 2001. Under Taliban rule, women were banned from work and activities outside the home. Women were forced to be fully covered with traditional Islamic clothing or endure severe punishment. State schools were shut down, and girls were no longer given an education.



Under the Taliban, another Islamic-extremist group, al-Qaeda, found safe haven. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacked the United States. The US war in Afghanistan (America's longest war) officially started in order to remove the Taliban regime from power and establish a stable government. The war ended on December 28, 2014; however, thousands of US-led NATO troops have remained in the country to train and advise Afghan government forces.



THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN *continued*

Afghan society, especially women, suffered greatly under the Taliban’s extremely conservative views and laws. While women are regaining some basic rights (for example, the Afghan Constitution reserves several seats for women in the National Assembly), their freedoms are still severely limited, especially in rural areas. And owing to years of conflict and war, the country has limited infrastructure, including an insufficient school system.

Afghanistan is a land-locked country slightly smaller than Texas, and is bordered by Pakistan in the south and east; Iran in the west; Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north; and China in the far northeast. It is an arid country, with the Hindu Kush mountain range reaching roughly east to west centrally, with peak elevations up to 24,000 feet.

GOVERNMENT

Afghanistan is an Islamic Republic consisting of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The country’s central government is made up of a president, first vice president, and second vice president, all elected by the people. The country’s National Assembly consists of the House of Elders, elected by the president and provincial councils, and the House of People, directly elected by the people. Afghanistan’s constitution was ratified in 2004. The country’s legal system uses a mix of civil, customary, and Islamic law as its foundation.

The current president of Afghanistan is Ashraf Ghani. Abdul Rashid Dostum and Sarwar Danish serve as vice presidents. The Supreme Court is led by Chief Justice Abdul Salam Azimi. The current court is seen as more moderate and led by more technocrats than the previous

court, which was dominated by fundamentalist religious figures such as Chief Justice Faisal Ahmad Shinwari, who issued several controversial rulings, including seeking to place limits on the rights of women.

According to Transparency International’s 2010 corruption perceptions index results, Afghanistan was ranked as the third most corrupt country in the world. A January 2010 report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed that bribery consumed approximately 23% of the GDP of the nation. Although Afghanistan’s institutions are newly formed and steps have been taken to arrest some corrupt officials, the United States warned that aid to Afghanistan would be greatly reduced if the corruption were allowed to continue.

PEOPLE

Education

Percent of the population considered literate—citizens over the age of 15 who are able to read and write

Males	43.1% (2000)
Females	12.6% (2000)

Ethnic Group Distribution

Pashtun	42%
Tajik	27%
Hazara	9%
Uzbek	8%
Aimaq (Aimak)	4%
Turkmen	3%
Baloch	2%
Other	4%

**THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN** continued**Religious Group Distribution**

Islam	99% (Sunni Muslim 80-85%, Shia Muslim 15-19%)
Other	1%

Languages

Dari (Afghan Persian)	50%
Pashto	35%
Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen)	11%
30 minor languages	4%

Rural vs. Urban Populations (2010)

Rural	75.1%
Urban	24.9%

Infant Mortality Rate

Number of deaths (per 1,000 live births) of children under the age of one. Note that due to differences in reporting, these numbers may not be comparable across countries. While the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation is that all children who show signs of life should be recorded as live births, in many countries this standard is not followed, artificially lowering their infant mortality rates relative to countries that follow those standards.

- 70 deaths per 1,000 live births (2013)

Life Expectancy and Poverty

- Life expectancy at birth was 58 years for males, 61 years for females. Afghanistan is ranked 166 of 194 countries for life expectancy (2013).
- About 36% of the population lives below the national poverty line (2012).

THE ECONOMY

Afghanistan is one of the world's least developed countries. After decades of conflict, Afghanistan's economy is beginning to improve, but as a nation the country faces numerous challenges. The country is highly dependent on

foreign aid and continues to struggle with deficiencies in housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, education, and physical infrastructure, as well as the inability to institute rules of law consistently throughout the country.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) in US\$: 34 billion (2014)**IMPORTS AND EXPORTS**

- Afghanistan imported US\$8.2 billion in machinery and other capital goods, food, textiles, and petroleum products (2008).
- Afghanistan exported US\$603 million in opium, fruits and nuts, handwoven carpets, wool, cotton, hides and pelts, and precious and semiprecious gems (2008).

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chromite, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, and precious and semiprecious stones



THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN *continued*

SOURCES

- CIA World Factbook
- Khan Academy
- The World Bank
- Wikipedia.com
- United Nations
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Population Division
- United Nations (International) Children's (Emergency) Fund (UNICEF)
- Population Reference Bureau
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- Rural Poverty Portal
- TradingEconomics.com
- Economywatch.com

All data was reported in 2012 unless otherwise noted.